

Noise Exports: Finnish Hardcore Punk, its Travels and Permutations

by

Lasse Ullvén

Supervisor: Professor Saviour Catania

Co-supervisors: Professor Jean-Paul Baldacchino,

Senior Research Fellow Dr Kimi Kärki

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Declaration

This dissertation is a presentation of my original research work. Whenever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature or other research material.

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Abstract

Finnish hardcore punk has been circulating globally since the early 1980s and has developed a small but dedicated following. This research asks how this marginal music from a marginal scene has managed to spread globally, and what kind of responses it has generated in different global contexts? The main approach is through ethnography, which in this case is multi-sited, with examples from both the centre and the periphery. In addition to interactive interviews conducted with members of the global punk community in the field as well as online, participant observation is used to evaluate the circumstances in which Finnish hardcore punk is consumed. Furthermore, as the research is conducted by an active member of the punk subculture it also has an autoethnographic dimension. In addition to analysing primary source materials such as punk zines and records, the hybrid nature of the work is informed by subcultural theory, aesthetics, musicology and the study of globalisation as it attempts to understand the cultural history of a semi-peripheral (O'Connor, 2004) punk scene that has sustained its underground popularity amongst punks of different eras and cultures.

Apart from the efforts of the musicians, the research traces the crucial importance of independent zines and record labels in disseminating Finnish hardcore punk abroad. The positive contribution of imperfection – which in this case is called ‘crumminess’ – is given particular focus when the aesthetics of Finnish hardcore are addressed. The imperfections communicate innocence and vulnerability, almost a childlike playfulness, as well as spontaneity and joviality, all of which produce sympathy in some listeners. Another aspect that is understood by foreign audiences despite the language barrier is the anger and frustration in the voice of the Finnish singers. In addition, the Finnish language, usually a hindrance for international success for other styles of music, has contributed to Finnish hardcore’s appeal through its obscurity and apparent suitability to the style. In fact, instead of merely consuming the music, many foreign enthusiasts with no connections to Finland outside of punk culture have decided to perform in the Finnish language. These individuals have formed groups that permutate Finnish hardcore, demonstrating the resilience of underground punk in the face of globalisation and showing how punk culture continues to carve out unexpected trajectories decades after its inception. Even if the pastiche nature of these groups suggests a certain nostalgia, these Finnish hardcore punk fanatics across the world are living punk in the here and now, creating a resonance of the Finnish sound.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Memories, dreams, reflections	1
2	Noise not music!	19
3	War against apathy!	37
4	War – never again!	55
4.1	Rising tensions	58
4.2	Testimonies from the front.....	68
4.3	Putting Finland on the map	76
5	Finnish hardcore and the aesthetics of imperfection.....	88
5.1	Dancing to Disorder	88
5.2	‘Stupendous to some’	98
5.3	The (geo)politics of crumminess.....	105
6	Spreading the dis-ease.....	119
6.1	‘You want this, it’s fucking choice’	121
6.2	The epidemic expands.....	131
6.3	Hardcore invaders	140
6.3.1	Rattus infestations	142
6.3.2	Bastards on trains	147
6.3.3	Kaaos and Riistetyt – too drunk to tour?.....	149
6.3.4	‘There are no drums in New York!?’ Kohu-63 in America.....	153
7	Ni Originaux, Ni Copies	157
7.1	France: ‘Juominen ystävien kanssa’ (‘The drinking with friends’)	161
7.2	Sweden: ‘Historia kusessa’ (‘History in piss’).	170
7.3	Greece: ‘Musically trained weird punks’	175

7.4	Brazil: Ihmisen Helveti ('Human Hell')	186
7.5	Japan: 'Raw is better'	196
7.6	Malaysia and Singapore: 'Maailman tuskaa' ('Weltschmerz')	210
7.7	Australia: 'Toivoton huutaa' ('The hopeless is screaming')	215
7.8	The United States: 'Kuluttava kone' ('A consuming machine')	218
7.9	Future nostalgia	229
8	The primal scream of Finnish hardcore	236

List of images:

- Figure 1:* Detail from ‘Arise’ music video by Brazilian group Sepultura (p. 14)
- Figure 2:* Discharge artwork from the early 1980s (p. 27)
- Figure 3:* Detail from Ripley’s ‘Believe it or not’ (p. 42)
- Figure 4:* The cover of the Finnish zine *Hilse* #6 (p. 49)
- Figure 5:* Extract from the UK zine *Radical Hedgehog* #4 (p. 63)
- Figure 6:* A photo of Terveet Kädet from the 1980s (p. 72)
- Figure 7:* Extract from the US zine *Maximumrocknroll* #6 (p. 79)
- Figure 8:* Extract from the Finnish zine *Ulo* #14 (p. 79)
- Figure 9:* Extract from the Finnish zine *Kärsä* #5 (p. 81)
- Figure 10:* Extract from the Finnish zine *Ulo* #15 (p. 84)
- Figure 11:* Cover art of *Sotaa* EP by Tampere SS (p. 91)
- Figure 12:* Extract from the US zine *Flipside* #36 (p. 123)
- Figure 13:* Extract from the US zine *Ripper* #8 (p. 124)
- Figure 14:* Extract from the US zine *Maximumrocknroll* #8 (p. 138)
- Figure 15:* A photo of Rattus in Ljubljana (p. 145)
- Figure 16:* Poster of a Rattus and Bastards show in Denmark (p. 147)
- Figure 17:* A photo of members of Rapt posing in front of Kaaos graffiti (p. 162)
- Figure 18:* A photo of a Kaaos tattoo (p. 163)
- Figure 19:* Cover art of Dissipated’s debut *Tampere 1985* (p. 166)
- Figure 20:* Caricature of punk rivalry between Finland and Sweden (p. 170)
- Figure 21:* Front cover of the debut album of Konepistooli (p. 181)
- Figure 22:* Back cover of the debut album of Konepistooli (p. 182)
- Figure 23:* Cover art of the Hyvää Yötä demo (p. 194)
- Figure 24:* Cover art of Shiro’s *Cryptic Life Reality* (p. 196)
- Figure 25:* Insert of Shiro’s *Cryptic Life Reality* (p. 197)
- Figure 26:* Cover art of the self-titled EP by Poikkeus (p. 199)
- Figure 27:* Cover art of *Skitsofrenia* by Riistetyt (p. 200)
- Figure 28:* An image showing the leather jacket of the singer of Haava (p. 203)
- Figure 29:* Cover art of *Härdcore Religion* by Appäratu (p. 210)
- Figure 30:* Tour poster of Tuhoon Tuomitut (p. 212)
- Figure 31:* A photo showing Max Cavalera’s Riistetyt patch (p. 243)
- Figure 32:* A photo of the circled ‘A’ seen in several band logos (p. 249)

1 Memories, dreams, reflections

‘Once the music was on, they got carried away—as if they were in another world completely’

- John Christopher Lydon (quoted in Lydon, 1994, p. 41)

According to his father, this is how Johnny Rotten and his brother reacted to music when they were little. Although the story of Sex Pistols has already been dealt with ad nauseam, unfortunately, this is not the last time I am going to be referring to them. Even though the form of punk discussed in this work, namely Finnish hardcore, differs greatly from what punk was initially conceived to be, the Pistols and other dinosaurs have of course been indispensable for the rise of punk culture in Finland. The above quote also has everything to do with both, as well as with music in general (of course, the music that had enchanted the Lydon brothers was not punk). While this transportive quality of music is evident to most listeners, the transformative power of punk is something that does not appeal to just about any music lover. Furthermore, not even all punks find the exceedingly rough sounds of hardcore appealing – this music speaks to a specific kind of listener. However, the style has found admirers across cultures and to those that hardcore punk does speak to, it possesses the potential to rewire their brain and to restructure their conceptions, as if the music was on all the time, as if you were perpetually being thrust into another world. I know this because it has happened to me, and therefore, in addition to research, this work is a collection of impressions and reflections on punk from the last twenty plus years of active involvement. Even the research question has been moulded over the years, and during this chapter I will attempt to explain what has led me to inquire: why is Finnish hardcore punk popular outside of Finland, how did it spread globally, what kind of responses has it inspired, and what all this can tell us about the cultural flows of punk?

I was born in 1980, and ever since I can recall, when they had spare time, my father would play mandolin (entirely self-taught), and my mother would focus on her textile art – a legitimate outsider artist (although she would not have known what that entails). However, being self-employed bag-makers, their artistic inclinations were suppressed by long days at the workshop, and in hindsight, witnessing their toil was already pushing me towards becoming a punk rocker. Meanwhile, I remember messing about with my father's mandolin, and after I went to school and the teachers saw I could sing they recommended that I take piano classes. I liked singing, but music lessons sounded like more school to me. Perhaps I had intuited something similar to Weber's (2015) statement about how musical training and education institutions 'cannot be seen as "neutral" grounds of teaching and rehearsal. Rather, they perform important functions in terms of the production and reproduction of aesthetic regimes, value systems and class bound forms of cultural capital' (p. 256). Many strategies were tried to lure me in but I held my ground – no music lessons.

The urge to play did not hit me until I was a teenager and saw my friend from the neighbouring 'big city' (of 10 000 inhabitants) beating his drum set in an animalistic style. Was it really that easy? Since those days I play the guitar, and I still don't know even the E-minor scale! Punk saved me from all that. I probably could have learned to play properly, but it might be all for the better that I did not. After learning not to be embarrassed of my limitations, today I feel free from the constraints of musical conventions. Even if poor technique restricts my musical horizons, it also keeps my goals simple. Was I 'forced' to play punk because of my inability or unwillingness to learn? Or did punk rather open up the possibilities of creating something different from the forms of expression acquired through conventional music pedagogy? Without wanting to discredit the hard work of 'real' musicians or claim that classical music does not express emotions, it feels as if in the world of 'high' musical art, technique and convention often smother expression and feeling,

whereas within punk the disregard for skill and finesse leaves room for expressing intense emotions through other means. Punk has given me, and to others like me, a different musical life: one that is within my grasp and reflects my everyday experiences. In this sense, punk can be seen as pure expression, accessible to everyone, released from the constraints of a 'right' way of making music, and more akin to a musical version of art brut.

I may be romanticising punk with the above comments, and of course such definitions are also too limiting to describe what punk encompasses as a whole. I've listened to the music in many different forms for more than 25 years. I've witnessed easily a four-digit number of punk bands play live and played guitar, bass or 'sung' altogether in hundreds of shows in over thirty countries, composed punk songs, written punk lyrics and participated in recordings that have been published in different formats: 7" & 12" vinyl records, CDs and cassettes. In the spirit of do-it-yourself, most of these have been self-published, and in addition I've organised shows, screen printed shirts and patches, cooked breakfast for touring bands waking up on my floor, and woken up on the floors and sofas of like-minded punks, in squats, bars and vans. I've also been a 'roadie' on several DIY punk tours: carrying the backline, selling records and t-shirts and driving, filming and photographing. All of this just for friendship and for kicks, the money from the shows was usually more or less enough to cover the cost of gasoline in order to arrive to the next town (perhaps even for some potato crisps to soak in the hangover). Now, as I am again faced with the question 'what is punk?' in general and 'what is Finnish hardcore?' in particular, I remember how complicated it is to adequately outline such a complex and contradictory phenomenon. One of the interviewees of my MA dissertation, Otto (b. 1974), had an interesting comment that to me rings true – punk and people's conceptions of it are in a constant state of flux: 'I've answered the question "what is punk?" many times and most likely I've given a different answer each time. Now, when I heard the question, the first

thing that came to mind was: “I don’t remember”” (Ullvén, 2016, p. 23).¹ One thing is for sure, my conceptions of punk have also changed over the years. What else then can I remember?

Although I already had bought the *Never Again* (1984) compilation LP by Discharge on one of my music hunting trips to Tampere, I didn’t yet understand fully what it entailed. I was still in high school and wasn’t a ‘real’ punk, although I liked some of the music. I didn’t look like a punk (although my ‘against Nazis’ t-shirt would cause slight consternation at school) and I still liked (and still like) other styles of music. In addition, the local hardcore punk, or the little of it that I had heard, sounded musically too sloppy and lyrically too naïve. It triggered my defences. My ears needed to adjust to the sound, but even more importantly my persona, up to this point sheltered by the ennui of the countryside, needed to make acquaintance with the world (of punk). Madden (2010, p. 46) has stated that ‘*home is ambivalence*’ (italics in the original), both a place he needed to leave and a place where he needs to return to, and this is a very apt description also of my experience of home. Having mostly lived abroad after the turn of the century (save for about six years) I can now see Finland in a different light, but even so, the ambivalence is felt particularly strong now that I have taken up the task of returning home as a researcher. Moving from the *gemeinschaftlich* environment of the Finnish countryside to a dense urban environment abroad was not without difficulties, and going back, even for a while, has its own challenges. Finland now feels even less like home because during this process the global punk scene has become a ‘home away from home’, a ‘subcultural home’ where I recovered a sense of community.

Madden (2010) sees home also as ‘*familiar*’, ‘*parochial*’, ‘*discrete*’, ‘*habitual*’ and ‘*permanent*’, as well as being both ‘*birth*’ and ‘*death*’ (pp. 45-46, italics in the original),

¹ All translations from Finnish to English by the author unless stated otherwise.

and if one thinks of these senses of home in connection with the punk scene, they become all the more meaningful. Punk has become *familiar* – I’ve come to know many different punk scenes, their places, their people, their songs. Some by just passing through and others more thoroughly.² Punk is certainly *parochial* in both senses of sectarian as well as inward-looking, and acknowledging this will help me escape some of the biases I am bound to have created over the years. Punk is also very *discrete* in the sense that it strongly differentiates itself from the rest, and although the boundaries where punk starts and where it ends are vague, as it is my ‘subcultural home’ territory I should be able to, at least approximately, draw these lines of demarcation. Punk is *habitual* to the degree that many of its values, customs, habits of speech, mannerisms and attitudes are also maintained outside this ill-defined home. Punk is *permanent*, not only in the sense that regardless of how it supposedly ‘died’ it refuses to go away, but also by now, after entering my 40s, it feels like I have passed the point of no return. Punk has also considerably moulded my adult personality, therefore being a *birth* into a new subcultural identity. But it can also mean *death* since many punks that should have been interviewed for the purposes of this research have already departed at an unduly young age due to self-destructive aspects of the life-style.

Doing research at home and therefore being too close to the subjects (or even considering yourself one of them) is of course something that needs to be addressed before attempting to move any further. Fortunately, ethnography today considers such connections normal, and transparency and subjectivity are encouraged and even expected. Alsup (2004) has noted that already Geertz and the Chicago School agreed that ‘qualitative, empirical research offers advantages over more quantitative, experimental and quasiexperimental studies when the research subjects are people and the research foci are primarily human

² The scenes I’ve had the chance of examining closest are those of Tampere, Finland (about six years) and Porto Alegre, Brazil, (about five), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where I once spent about six months, and of course, the minuscule Maltese scene during the last 10 years.

behaviours and interactions' (p. 219). Indeed, self-reflexivity has long been considered an asset rather than a hindrance, even though there are lingering concerns of whether self-disclosure actually works in favour of the researcher, or if it might rather distract them from their true goals, or even place them in an unfavourable situation by their exposed positionality. There is also debate about the extent to which personal narrative is a resource and where it begins to sway into navel-gazing, certainly a legitimate concern in a world where narcissism is becoming increasingly common (Griffin and Griffin 2019). To avoid the negative effects of author-saturation, it is important to recognise the personal as personal and to this effect, Alsup (2004) quotes Gallop's observation about the concern not being scholarship 'that seems narrowly personal but rather scholarship where the personal does not recognize itself as such and thus passes for the universal' (p. 221). To address this issue, the method of autoethnography developed to assist researchers in dealing with issues raising from the use of personal experience as research material.

Even if in this research the autoethnographic narratives are not a major component, the researcher's experience will be present in agreement with Ellis (Gariglio 2018) who sees that good autoethnography is ethnographic and good ethnography autoethnographic. As a punk musician writing about punk music, being upfront about my position is imperative to give the reader the possibility to better evaluate what has been written. However, the dangers involved in this method are not limited to navel-gazing, and one risk of the 'confessional' style of research is that the readers can pass judgement also on the persona of the researcher. In addition, although including personal reflexions has become commonplace and even expected, it should not be considered a rule that punk, or anything else, can only be studied through 'insider' experience. Alsup (2004) addresses this dilemma by referencing Foucault, noting that unequal power relations would make societal compulsion for confession problematic. Still, when used correctly and voluntarily, the

author's experience can be invaluable. On the other hand, the opposite can also be true – Alsup states that qualitative research as a whole has been identified with marginalised groups and as a result personal reflexion is sometimes seen as less rigorous and intellectually valuable. In addition, she points out that one's position within academia also affects the way their personal narratives will be seen and the authority they have, with graduate students at the bottom of the hierarchy still on their way to earning the right to produce reliable subjective accounts.

Bourdieu (2003) encourages the use of a device he calls 'participant objectivation' through which he means the '*objectivation of the subject of objectivation*' that is aimed at 'objectivizing the subjective relation to the object' (p. 282, italics in the original). By this Bourdieu means objectivising 'the social world that has made the anthropologist', not the 'diary disease' which has emerged as a result of positivist repression (p. 283). Bourdieu maintains that this social world consists not only of the social origins, in this case the researcher's background as white, Christian, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied, left-leaning graduate student from a welfare state, but also, and *most* importantly, their 'particular position within the microcosm of anthropologists' (p. 283). According to Bourdieu, the reflexivity of participant objectivation is meant to:

grasp everything that the thinking of the anthropologist (or sociologist) may owe to the fact that she (or he) is inserted in a national scientific field, with its traditions, habits of thought, problematics, shared commonplaces, and so on, and to the fact that she occupies in it a particular position [...] with interests of a particular kind which unconsciously orientate her scientific choices. (p. 284)

Therefore, a further confessional seems to be in order so that the position of the researcher can inform the reader about possible biases and forces that affect the study at hand. Until my early thirties I was an unemployed underachiever and the initial motivation to begin studying at the University of Malta was the possibility of spending another winter far from Finland. Student benefits and loans made my escape possible and after getting used to the

rhythm of island life and finishing a BA in theology and Spanish, the choice was either to face another dark winter or face another course (the ‘get a job’ option still felt like a too much of a compromise). Luckily, the MA course in ‘Literary Tradition and Popular Culture’ was calling for students from all backgrounds, and when the time came to choose a topic for my dissertation I received important advice: to write about something I love. Immediately I knew that I wanted to write about punk, and specifically, about a phenomenon I had experienced first-hand. The resulting MA dissertation entitled *The Curious Cultural Exchanges between Finnish and Brazilian Punks: ‘A contribuição milionária de todos os erros’* examines the double movement of punk culture between Finland and Brazil. Despite lacking training in anthropology, I had decided to use ethnography in combination with insights from subcultural theory as my research methods, and this research continues along the same lines, trespassing also on the territories of aesthetics, musicology and the study of globalisation. In fact, as Shepherd and Devine (2015) note, there is a tendency towards interdisciplinarity in the relationship between music and sociological imagination since the 1980s, and the lines of demarcation ‘between sociology, social anthropology, ethnomusicology, cultural studies, feminism and, indeed, some forms of musicology became less and less clear as the major task seemed that of constituting a critical, cultural musicology rather than working within established disciplinary boundaries’ (p. 6). In addition, the research includes historical aspects in chapters three and four in order to provide an overview of Finnish punk for the non-Finnish reader, as well as in chapter six, which depicts the expanse of Finnish hardcore outside of Finland in the context of early 1980s. Furthermore, as punk has been studied since the late 1970s onwards, and in recent years has received increasing amounts of scholarly attention (much due to the creation of *Punk and Post Punk* journal and the *Punk Scholars Network*), it could be said that the main contribution of this work is more specifically towards punk

studies. Finally, to address Bourdieu's suggestion more directly, the biases that unconsciously orientate my scientific choices are not those of an anthropologist inserted in a given national field laden with academic vested interests, but those of a graduate student with no academic prospects.

In my MA dissertation, a well-travelled interviewee Jukkeli (b. 1973) commented about Finnish punk fanatics: 'Every town seems to have at least one, no matter how small the town is' (Ullvén, 2016, p. 51). The impression is familiar from my own experience, and after finishing the work, I still felt like the story of the reception of Finnish hardcore outside of Finland needed to be documented further, in fact, this has been the most important motivation for the study. I believe that there is a similar motivation behind a large part of punk music: it demands to come out, almost as if it were a natural occurrence. Beethoven described the sentiment in the following terms: 'I have never thought of writing for reputation and honour. What I have in my heart must come out; that is the reason why I compose' (quoted in Bartleet and Ellis, 2009, p. 64). A more complete description of the sentiment has been provided by Rilke (2011):

This above all: ask yourself in your night's quietest hour: *must* I write? Dig down into yourself for a deep answer. And if it should be affirmative, if it is given to you to respond to this serious question with a loud and simple 'I *must*', then construct your life according to this necessity; your life right into its most inconsequential and slightest hour must become a sign and witness to this urge. [...] Then assume this fate and bear it, its burden and its greatness, without ever asking after the rewards that may come from outside. For he who creates must be a world of his own and find everything within himself and in the natural world that he has elected to follow. (p. 4, italics in the original)

Although I cannot claim to have the inspiration of Beethoven or Rilke, also this research simply *must* come out. In this regard it is similar to the musical projects with which I have been involved, and like punk, it compensates potential shortcomings with enthusiasm in the spirit of 'anyone can do it'. Rilke's entry about writing also translates to being punk –

the authentic punk (if such a person exists) feels that this is what they *must* do – even if the vision again is a romantic one.

Contrary to Rilke, who sees that everything comes from within, ethnography must also be a collaborative effort between the researcher and the subjects. This research is collaborative in two senses, namely, it uses participant observation to understand more fully the situations in which Finnish hardcore is consumed, and more importantly, it includes the position of the subjects. A total of 36 punks (33 men and 3 women, for the most part musicians, but also zine writers, punk publishers, and fans) were interviewed, and although not all of the interviews are cited, even those that were left out still contributed to the research. In addition, in the background there is also the corpus of interviews summed together with those from the MA dissertation for which a further 17 people had been interviewed. The interview context was an interactive, collaborative attempt at understanding the subculture and its music allowing for data collection and analysis to proceed simultaneously. The opinions and experiences of the participants become important not only to bring different (and sometimes differing) voices to the fore, but also to validate the voice of the ethnographer.

According to Brown (2004) the postmodern critique of ethnography ‘has demonstrated that claims of scientific objectivity in the knowledge-making industry were as mythical as they were unethical’, however, at the same time the critique placed the ethnographer in a double bind, having to ‘acknowledge their own presence without further marginalizing participant voices’ (p. 302). Brown states that the response of ethnography has been to reinvent itself, and that as a result ‘the ethnographer is more reflexive, the process more dialogic, and the outcomes more political’ (p. 302). Brown concludes that the new ethnographic self ‘is in fact not one but many selves, not a unified, fixed, autonomous Self, but a multiple, nomadic, dialogic Subject whose inquiries [...] are dispersed across a

broad spectrum of field sites' (p. 303). Therefore, not only was the self of the ethnographer and that of their subjects seen in a new light, but the concept of the field also needed to be revised.

Marcus (1995) has been credited for coining the term multi-sited ethnography, which he sees as a more adequate way to 'follow' the unexpected trajectories of people and things in a globalised world system. Marcus sees that multi-sited ethnography moves out from 'the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space' (p. 96). While responding also to the ideas of postmodernism, more importantly, multi-sited ethnography is the result of empirical changes and 'transformed locations of cultural production' (p. 97). According to Marcus, many of the most striking examples of multi-sited ethnography stem from anthropology's participation in different interdisciplinary arenas such as, for example, various strands of cultural studies. In turn, Marcus expresses concerns about the method as testing the limits of ethnography, as well as the potential loss of focus on subaltern realities, something this current research need not worry about, punk being one of the most subaltern forms of (popular) music. However, another concern raised by Marcus, the preoccupation with the practicality of multi-sited ethnography, is legitimate also for this research project. For example, as Muggleton (2000) has noted, doing ethnography is costlier than doing theory, and the difficulties in obtaining funding (and later, the Covid-19 pandemic) have resulted in some planned research trips transforming themselves into interviews online. A further concern is the different languages that ideally the ethnographer would be able to understand in order to guarantee the integrity of the fieldwork. While for example knowledge of Japanese would have undoubtedly improved the quality of this study, it was still important to try to somehow include this site, despite not knowing the language, or even having the possibility to visit the field. On the other

hand, the research is also multi-lingual, since apart from English, also Finnish and Portuguese were used to conduct interviews. Still, the fieldwork of this study cannot compare to the 'real fieldwork' done at the top of the hierarchy of field sites described by Gupta and Ferguson (1997). At the same time, it must be kept in mind that this work is conducted under the framework of popular culture studies, and as such does not make claims of being fully anthropological, but rather encroaching on anthropological territory. Even the field sites are 'less pure' and 'less fully anthropological' in the sense that they are not necessarily situated in regions considered 'distant, exotic, and strange' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 13), although to the outsiders, the punk scene can be seen to have these qualities despite being located in the midst of familiar settings. Furthermore, while to Marcus, as well as to Gupta and Ferguson, the multi-sitedness of anthropological locations was something that still needed to be defended, Madden (2010) sees that currently the idea of neatly-bound sites, especially when investigating the human condition, has been thoroughly overthrown and the concept of the field is now seen as a combination of geographical, social and mental aspects. In addition, a further 'site' that has become important for the punk scene is the virtual one (Bennett and Peterson, 2004), and the research will also be relying on internet sources, despite Facebook not being one of them.

As hinted above, the goals of ethnography have changed over the process of moving away from the positivist paradigm, and as a result, ethnography has come to share some points of contact with punk, making it all the more appropriate for its study. Although the politics of punk are not easy to define, the one thing that can be extended to practically all punks is that they want to address grievances, with the aim of bringing about change. Brown (2004) sees that the goals of ethnography have shifted from the career-oriented pursuit of knowledge about the Other to the political empowerment of its subjects and liberatory redistribution of power, in favour of cultural change. Brown concludes that the

‘intervention in the uneven and undemocratic distribution of power’ has become the ethical imperative of ethnography (p. 307), and the power of ethnography to work towards systematic change should be extended beyond the researcher and the subjects to include those who read it.

In order to not push away potential readers, an attempt will be made to use a writing style that is adapted to the subject matter as much as the confines of the academia allow. On the other hand, to meet with the demands of academic validity the text needs to find a balance between science and art. Madden (2010) sees that the two need not necessarily be at odds; style and creativity do not as a rule come at the cost of substance. In fact, Madden states that validity in ethnography is a two-way process, where ethnography that is not informed by systematic data collection, analysis and presentation is more like fiction, and on the other hand, ethnography that is not informed by prose writing, rhetoric and narrative is more like mere data. Madden states that whatever their strategy, the ethnographer must find a way to connect to its audience, and to this end mystifying academic jargon is avoided since its use would be a sure way to alienate a good portion of potential readers. In addition, the use of personal experience is partially treated as an attempt to bridge the gap between the work and its readers.

Perhaps the first occasion I raised the question, ‘what is it that foreigners find appealing about Finnish hardcore?’, was when in the mid-1990s in the wake of Sepultura’s international success I purchased the CD of their lead singer Max Cavalera’s side project Nailbomb. The album is called *Point Blank* and when I opened the accompanying booklet I was astounded to see Max wearing a Kaaos t-shirt in the pictures. Kaaos? Is that the Finnish Kaaos? It must be. But why, and how? Later, I spotted Max wearing the shirt also in the ‘Arise’ music video (figure one). Why was a Brazilian metal superstar fond of some insignificant Finnish punk band? Bottà (2020) has suggested that the motive would have

been to create a bond with the Brazilian hardcore punks, and to give a counterbalance of authenticity to the band after signing to a major label.



Figure 1: Max Cavalera paying homage to Finnish hardcore band Kaaos. (source: a screencap from Sepultura's 'Arise' [1991] music video)

Around the same time there was another occasion of similar bewilderment when I saw a 7" EP called *Hygiene* by a Finnish group Radiopuhelimet that was released by Jello Biafras's label Alternative Tentacles. Why was a famous foreign punk releasing and distributing Finnish sounds? As stated earlier, I was still in the process of gaining a fuller awareness of what punk meant in all of its strangely warped shapes, and advancing this understanding was only possible after moving to Tampere in the summer of 2000 at 19 years of age.

Gelder (2007), commenting on Park, sees that in cities eccentricity can flourish positively because there is a possibility of finding likeminded people and moral support, instead of the discipline and restraint of a smaller community. Although the Finnish countryside produced many eccentric hardcore bands, in my case, living in Tampere meant

that finally I was able to attend shows at will, and without knowing it at first, I was also living in the city that had been the centre of Finnish hardcore punk in the 1980s. Soon I gained new insights to punk through active participation, as well as new friends who understood the music and the culture better and became important tour guides into the local punk scene, which at first wasn't entirely welcoming towards a countryside kid who did not want to conform to wearing the punk uniform. However, once the world of punk opened up, the realisation of its global standing soon became clear, and as a result, to cut a long story that has already been told short, I found myself living in Brazil two years later.

In Brazil I began to realise how Finnish hardcore had managed to cross cultural boundaries in unexpected ways. Or perhaps only unexpected to me, since Regev (2015) has seen that 'cross-fertilization, mutual inspiration, multi-directional influences, transference of stylistic elements and simple copying or imitation have characterized the relations between musical cultures around the world for centuries, and certainly so since early modernity' (p. 201). Although on the other hand Regev sees that 'musical styles and genres [...] have functioned throughout modernity as signifiers of ethno-national cultural uniqueness', the process of globalisation has disrupted this function and punk today is but one example of the process where 'traditional musical idioms, stylistic elements and creative practices have been deterritorialized from their native habitats, and then localized and indigenized in various ways into the fabric of totally different cultural contexts' (p. 201). Regev sees that this process, in which local elements are added to the Anglo-American pop-rock (to him, a wide enough term to include punk), allows the listeners a sense of being at home while sharing common ground with others: 'Local urban musical environments thus become global electro soundscapes, places where one feels local and global at the very same time' (p. 206). Identifying with these sounds turns the listener into 'an aesthetic cosmopolitan body [...] that articulates its own local identity by incorporating

elements from alien cultures' (p. 207), and in this process, 'the mutual sense of otherness between different national or ethnic formations is reduced, shrunk to a minimum, while the proportion of shared aesthetic perceptions grows and expands' (p. 208). While on one hand punks often dream of abolishing borders, and to this end the 'pop-rockization' of the world seems to be suited, on the other, DeNora (2000) has seen that the permeation of pop-rock's sonic vocabularies has become a device of social ordering, something that punks should rightfully abhor. As Regev points out, this is especially evident in consumerist contexts, and therefore underground punks would perhaps deny making part of this process and rather see their existence as cultural resistance, although it is not entirely clear how punk's potential for resistance would outweigh the possible harm as a part of the pop-rockization process. Perhaps it could be explained in terms described by Drott (2015) who states that the resistance against a totalizing system may be only 'to secure a space of relative autonomy within its bounds' (p. 172). Furthermore, Drott sees cultural resistance offering 'coping mechanisms to palliate the daily humiliations of social, economic and/or political subordination' (p. 172). The cross-cultural language of Finnish hardcore punk has reached different people experiencing the same frustrations, despite intellectually speaking, the message is lost due to the language barrier. The listener is consoled by the realisation that they are not alone in their anger, that across the world there are people who share their feelings of fear and anxiety.

While punk has established itself as a global subculture, different views on its meanings in diverse global contexts have been offered. While it is easy to agree with Eyerman when in the introduction to Erik Hannerz's (2015) *Performing Punk* he writes that punk is 'one of those subcultures that travels successfully in a globalized world', it is harder to support his statement that Hannerz implicitly shows that there is 'no center/periphery divide in the punk scene' (p. ix). Although even in places like Indonesia,

from where the book derives many of its conclusions, punk has been happening for decades, still, Indonesian punk (although the scene is widely studied) is not as well-known or influential in the European or North American scenes as the other way around. O'Connor (2002) has seen that the notions of centre and periphery are still valid, and that the assumption of a global hybrid culture, put forward for example by Appadurai and Garcia Canclini, is not supported by examples from the global punk scene, using the disparate cultural flows between Spanish and Mexican punk scenes as an example (2004). While the discussion on the global spread of Finnish hardcore in chapters six and seven does not necessarily resolve this dilemma, it shows that even if popular culture moves predominantly centrifugally, there are examples to the contrary: the logics of globalisation may function differently when it comes to underground punk. Wallach (2014) has used the awkward-sounding but nevertheless fitting term 'indieglobalization' which describes the movements of Finnish hardcore more adequately:

Indieglobalization is the far-flung circulation of texts, artefacts, sounds and ideas outside formal channels of commodity exchange, instead making use of informal networks connecting localized nodes of exchange known as 'scenes.' The most crucial aspect of this separate and distinct mode of globalization is not its structural difference from the globalization strategies employed by corporations, but its difference in cultural sensibility and priorities. (p. 156)

The circulation of Finnish hardcore happened, and continues to happen, through the informal networks created around underground punk, far outside the formal channels of commodity exchange, and its priorities have certainly reflected this distance. Wallach (2014) also recognises that 'indieglobalization is often non-profit or even anti-profit' (p. 156), making it even more fitting by downplaying the economic processes invoked by the term. Although punk has spread across the globe, its marginal position emphasises the separation from mainstream culture, and underlines the fact that punk's appeal perhaps should not be called universal. Although Gilbert (2015) recognises that 'music's capacity

to cross cultural barriers which signifying media cannot is famous' and that music is 'central to post-national cultural formations', at the same time he does not see music's 'sonic-corporeal effectivity' as universal or transhistorical simply because 'what is musical for some cultural groups is merely "noise" for others' (p. 372).

2 Noise not music!

What is noise to the old order, is harmony to the new.

- Jacques Attali (1985, p. 35)

In evading or mocking the established conventions of music, noise expresses social disorder [...] By pushing the envelope and testing the boundaries of what is sonically agreeable or acceptable, noise is a form of innovation that dissolves the illusion of harmony and recurrence, allowing musicians to explore new possibilities beyond the established order.

- Ryan Moore (2010, p. 19)

Punk as a musical style challenged conventions about what can be considered aesthetically pleasing. Musical movements up to this point, with few exceptions, had been emphasising the skill and talent of performers and composers who were seeking to perfect their techniques. In mid 1970s Britain, the once-rebellious style of rock and roll had been alienated from its roots and was characterised by the pomposity of the mainstream forms of 'progressive' and 'heavy' rock, which had taken the genre towards the worship of technical virtuosity, and the aloofness of 'glam rock', which sought an escape to fantasy worlds filled with glitter and lip gloss. These genres lifted the artists on a pedestal, creating star cults and taking rock and roll away from the reach of its rightful owners, the youth.

The word 'punk' usually conjures a picture of a young and inexperienced person up to no good. The origins of the word go all the way back to Shakespeare who used it to signify a 'prostitute' and later on, this derogatory meaning was partially carried on in prison slang where it meant a passive male who becomes a stronger man's 'property'. In addition, meanings such as 'a worthless person' or 'criminal' and 'hoodlum' have been associated with the term. The new meaning given to punk in the 1970s came to signify both the loud, fast and aggressive musical style as well as its followers, who declared that they were young and worthless, and did not care.

Within academia, punk is commonly understood to be a subculture, although there have been debates about whether we should rather use terms such as post-subculture, counter-culture or neo-tribe instead (Jenks 2005, Bennett 1999, Muggleton 2000, Hesmondhalgh 2005). Without wanting to add to this discussion, which, as pointed out by Furness (2012) seems rather pointless, the punk community could just as well be considered as Becker's (1982) 'art world', an 'aesthetic cosmopolitan body' (Regev 2015), a 'taste culture' (Michelsen 2015) or a Bourdieuan 'cultural field'. However, the punks usually refer to their community simply as the 'punk scene', both locally and globally. Perhaps the most oft-quoted academic definition is Straw's (2005) description of scene as 'that cultural space, in which a range of musical practices co-exist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization' (p. 469). Although wide enough to be somewhat accurate even when it comes to punk, the description fails to account, for example, for the extra-musical aspects that also make up the punk scene. Regardless of whether we should treat punk as a subculture or a scene (let alone a neo-tribe), the field of subcultural studies can be helpful when attempting to understand punk culture.

Subcultures, as Gelder (2005) defines them, have been a part of the social makeup for a considerable time: 'Subcultures are groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it' (p. 1). Gelder traces the 'study' of subcultures to the emergence of 'rogue, vagabond and "cony-catcher"' genres in 16th century England, although admitting that medievalists might not agree. As Gelder goes on to explain, subcultural studies investigate 'what binds groups of people together in non-normative ways, but [...] as an argument against standardization and anomie, or "normlessness", simultaneously. (Subcultures may be non-normative but they are not

“normless”)’ (p. 6). This description catches something of the spirit of punk outside the realm of music, and it can be argued that even if the term ‘subculture’ might be dated and as such not suitable for describing other non-normative groups that may be better understood as ‘neo-tribes’ or ‘post-subcultures’ (Maffesoli, 1996; Muggleton and Weinzierl, 2003), when it comes to punk, the term is still fitting (not least because of the reference to something ‘below’ or ‘subordinate’).

Punk first appeared as a subject of academic discourse within the body of work on subcultures by the Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies at Birmingham University. Under the guidance of Hoggart and Hall, the CCCS researchers set out to analyse youth culture and its relationship with the dominant culture within a Marxist framework. In *Subculture*, Hebdige’s (1979) analysis is largely based on semiotic readings of punk fashion, and argues that the way punks dressed was equal to swearing: ‘Clothed in chaos, they produced Noise in the calmly orchestrated Crisis of everyday life’ (p. 114). Hebdige also correctly observed punk’s co-optation by the culture industry, providing an early view of the punk explosion as well as the establishment’s reaction to it. What Hebdige could not foresee were the changes happening in the punk underbelly, and his reading, despite its incredible longevity in academic circles, was already slightly dated by the time it was out. Later on, Hebdige, together with other CCCS theorists, have been heavily criticised for example for their excessive focus on class and semiotic symbolism at the expense of empirical material (Laing, 1985; Clarke, 2005; Muggleton, 2000). Despite criticisms Hebdige continues to be discussed (Gildart et al., 2020), however, although his seminal analysis has its merits, for the purposes of this research empirical data is more important. However, before moving on to deal with Finnish punk, a short discussion about punk in general and some of the academic approaches used to discuss it is in order.

Horkheimer (2002) has described critical theory as ‘an essential element in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of men’ (pp. 245-246). He states that rather than mere accumulation of knowledge, its goal is practical: ‘emancipation from slavery’ (p. 246). Whether punk can be considered a part of the same historical effort is debatable, however, the intention of most punks to create a better world and advance the emancipation of all people from ‘slavery’, whatever they conceive it to be, make punk a ‘critical theory’ in a broad sense. Although punk does not have a uniform theory, but rather a plurality of theories and practices, the identification of grievances and systems of domination and decreasing their effects while increasing ‘freedom’ from them is one common goal that punks strive for in different ways. Critical theory is also often invoked by writers seeking to analyse punk. Laing (1985) refers to Walter Benjamin’s discussion about shock effects to illustrate what happens when you are listening to punk, and Moore (2010) also uses Benjamin, as well as Adorno, to discuss the crisis of authenticity and the withering of rock music’s ‘aura’ out of which punk was born. Moore speculates that Adorno’s ‘present day counter-part would have a taste for noise that expresses chaos and confusion, and that he would find more political substance in the way that bands destroy musical structure than in anything they might say in their lyrics’ (p. 213). According to Moore, Adorno saw popular music as standardised and pre-digested, created to produce a standard reaction as well as a pseudo-individuation through the halo of choice endowed to cultural mass production. Although many certainly find punk hard to digest, and the style often mocks the standardised pseudo-individuation, attempting to situate punk in Adorno’s category of ‘serious music’ would surely prove to be problematic. Hamilton (2007) quotes Paddison to argue that Adorno’s split should have rather been between:

music which accepts its character as commodity, thus becoming identical with the machinations of the culture industry itself and [...] self-reflective music which critically opposes its fate as commodity and thus ends up alienating itself from present society by becoming unacceptable to it. (pp. 172-73)

According to Hamilton, Adorno believed that ‘modernism’s admission of the ugly and dissonant shows art’s increasing capacity for self-interrogation’ (p.153), and although some might not agree with the notion of hardcore punk as art, the ‘admission of the ugly and dissonant’ is nevertheless one of its fundamental principles. Also ‘self-reflective music’ would describe punk adequately since the subculture, although constantly questioning the world around it, is at the same time alienated from and unacceptable to present society, often turning inward. In the foreword to Robb’s (2012) oral history, Bracewell states that debating its own definition was one of punk’s first roles – implying that internal dissent is an integral part of its identity. This internal dissent is often seen in terms of politics, and what is perhaps taken for granted is how radically punk, through its varied sonic debates, challenged the musical code. If punk never managed to bring down the ‘system’, the class divide, or even the music industry, in the battle for liberty of musical expression it has achieved important victories. However, my intention is not to provide an in-depth musicological analysis of punk, something which, when attempted, has failed to capture what is important in it or even portray the style in an unflattering light (Dale, 2012; Easley, 1999; Rapport, 2014). Although there are examples of talented musicians ambitiously attempting to fine-tune even punk, there is also value in its errors and imperfections, however, these aspects which within other styles of music are considered shortcomings are difficult to see as merits in musicological terms. Nevertheless, coming to terms with the crude aesthetics of hardcore punk is essential to fully understand punk culture.

In her discussion on everyday aesthetics, Saito (2017) stresses the importance of imperfection, which often can be preferable to the aesthetics of perfection that govern so many aspects of our everyday life, ‘ranging from green lawns and perfectly-shaped fruits and vegetables to fast fashion and the sculpted human body’ (section 1). She notes that discussion about aesthetic judgements is important since they unavoidably affect our

quality of life, the social and political climate and, as a result, the state of the world. Saito (2017) sees that denying the aesthetic quality of imperfection also ‘considerably limits one’s aesthetic palette’ and ‘impoverishes our aesthetic lives’:

In short, if beauty consists only of a perfectly maintained Palladian architecture, an unhindered view of the moon, and the monoculture of the green lawn, it makes for a rather impoverished aesthetic life. Aesthetically appreciating imperfection, incompleteness, and defect may be more challenging and taxing. However, developing such aesthetic capacity encourages open-mindedness and receptivity in appreciating something on its own terms while enhancing the power of imagination. Rather than imposing a predetermined idea of what beauty has to be, we are letting the object in various forms speak to us, even if at first it may defy our usual expectations of beauty. Thus, strictly from the aesthetic point of view, imperfectionism is beneficial. (section 2.2)

Furthermore, as Saito goes on to explain, appreciating imperfectionism is not only beneficial to our aesthetic lives, but it also has a moral dimension. The open-mindedness underlying imperfectionism and the capacity to appreciate different kinds of beauty instead of imposing our ideas on others requires the same kind of humility and respect as our moral life. Saito argues that the aesthetics of perfection also reflect badly on our environment, resulting in resource depletion and environmental degradation as well as human rights violations, and furthermore, many people suffer from diverse forms of discrimination based upon their physical appearance. The punks have voiced many of the same concerns about the oppressive sides of perfectionism (although often unconsciously), as well confronted them directly with ‘ugly’ aesthetics, and this discussion on imperfections will be picked up again in chapter five.

The same line of thinking can be extended to include the beauty patterns of recorded music and how punk challenges them. According to Attali (1985) music has become a tool of power through three strategic usages – making people ‘*forget* the general violence’, making them ‘*believe* in the harmony of the world’ and silencing them ‘by mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises’ (p. 19). In Attali’s view, the establishment has succeeded in muffling human noises and hiding

human errors by sanitising them through technology and repeating the sanitised sound, void of spontaneity. In 1977 when Attali's book was first published in French, across the English Channel the punk movement was prophesying a return of (the repressed) representation through noise and error. Noise to Attali (1985) represents 'dirt' and 'disorder' (both important 1980s British punk bands), 'a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by a receiver' (p. 27). Attali sees noise also as something that 'destroys orders to structure a new order' (p. 27), echoing Bakunin's famous formulation 'the urge to destroy is also a creative urge' (quoted in Farr, 2010, p. 20). Punk in this sense is 'anti-music' because it wants to revert the process of codification of noises into music that silences, interfere when it is used as a tool of oppressive power, and situate it again closer to the realm of noise. Attali sees noise as vital to enhancing the imagination and to the creation of new meanings:

The very absence of meaning in pure noise [...] frees the listener's imagination. The absence of meaning is in this case the presence of all meanings, absolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning. The presence of noise makes sense, makes meaning. (p. 33)

Although punk music as a whole cannot be qualified as 'pure noise', the hardcore punk aesthetic took important steps towards rougher and noisier terrains, sometimes approaching abstraction. It created pathways leading to more noisome ways of expression, inspiring exploration of musical possibilities beyond what had been deemed acceptable.

According to Hamilton (2007), an acoustic characterisation between music and noise considers music to consist of 'regular, stable, periodic vibrations' whereas noise is made up of 'irregular, unstable, non-periodic vibrations' (p. 48). While traditional punk-rock still could classify as music under this definition, hardcore punk, at least in its more extreme forms, although often unintentionally, uses highly 'irregular' and 'non-periodic vibrations' and can be very unstable to the point where the question, 'Can you call this

music?’ arises. Hamilton notes that the same question also haunted Edgard Varèse, who offered a solution:

In the twenties when I was [...] giving concerts of modern music, I got sick of the stupid frase “Interesting, but is it music?” After all, what is music but organized sound – all music! So, I said my music was organized sound and that I was not a musician, but a worker in frequencies and intensities. (p. 42)

In the same spirit, some hardcore punks have stated that they are not musicians and actually they don’t even like music: the sound they produce and admire is ‘noise – not music’. Today, this approach is more directly related to the extreme forms of punk, however John Lydon (1994) has also seen himself as a creator of noise:

I’d never had any inclination to become a musician. I still don’t. I’m glad I’m not. I’m a noise structuralist. If I can remember how to make the same noise twice, then that is my music. I don’t think you need the rest of the fiddly nonsense unless you’re in a classical orchestra. (p. 50)

Even if Lydon, with the benefit of hindsight, sees himself as a ‘noise structuralist’, his noises were rather tame in comparison with what was about to follow. The band Discharge was formed in Stoke-on-Trent in the wake of Sex Pistols, and at first sounded a lot like them. However, by the end of the decade and after a line-up swap, they were starting to develop a distinct sound that was to become one of the cornerstones of what was not yet known as UK hardcore. In this process, described as ‘a startling musical metamorphosis’ by Glasper (2014), they took their earlier interpretation of traditional punk rock and speeded it up, ‘mangling it into something uniquely ferocious’ (p. 185). In figure 2, Rainy, the bass player of Discharge states: ‘We don’t play music’.



Figure 2: 'We make noise not music!!!' Discharge artwork from early 1980s. (source: <http://dragfepic.pw/discharge-rainy-hardcore-punks-t-Punk.html> [last accessed 02.01.2018])

Consisting of four songs which were recorded and mixed in mere three hours, Discharge's *Realities of War* EP (Clay Records, 1980) caught the zeitgeist – Glasper (2014) reports it spent forty-four weeks in the then important Independent Charts (p. 187). Although according to Blush (2010) hardcore punk started in California in the late 1970s and for example 'Out of Vogue' by Middle Class (Joke Records, 1978) is already faster than the first Discharge releases, there was a different, rawer, darker edge to Discharge in

comparison to their American counterparts.³ Their guitar player Bones has commented on the development of Discharge's sound to Glasper (2014):

It just happened really, nothing was planned, [...] we were all still at school then, and we didn't really sound like anybody. We just got faster and harder bit by bit; it wasn't an overnight thing, but once we wrote 'Realities of War', and found our style as it were – 'cos no one was really doing anything like it before then – the songs started pouring out. (pp. 185-86)

Discharge struck a balance between the idealism of anarcho-punk and the rudeness and sometimes reactionary attitude of Oi! by being political without being preachy, rough and menacing but directing their anger against the state. With EPs *Fight Back* (1980) and *Decontrol* (1980) Discharge continued to develop their style, and their first 12" effort *Why* from 1981 (described by Glasper as 'surely one of the gnarliest punk records ever committed to plastic') was a sonic explosion that resonated far and wide. Discharge's signature sound was created simply by focusing on the essential and avoiding over-production. Speaking of the process of producing Discharge recordings, Mike Stone of Clay Records reminisces:

We did most of those records in just one or two takes [...] We wanted to capture the spirit and energy of the performance, and that's why those early records have stood the test of time so well. I don't really consider myself a producer in the traditional sense of the word anyway. [...] Most studio engineers back then had very little time for punk bands; they didn't know how to handle them, so I was like a go-between for the band and the engineer, helping them work together properly. (quoted in Glasper, 2014, pp. 187-88)

In the liner notes of a 1998 repress of *Why*, Rainy is quoted in agreement: 'eight track studios is what we want. We don't want 16, or 32, the big production sound because that sound isn't true to Punk. When you start to over-produce you lose that Punk feeling'. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the feeling that Discharge managed to create was noted across the world and across generations, Finland being no exception.

³ The term 'hardcore' in reference to punk was allegedly coined by Canadian group D.O.A. with their EP *Hardcore '81* although arguably there are earlier examples of the style. In fact, even the term was already used by Italian punk group Mittageisen in 1979.

Discharge's singer Cal Morris brought a major contribution, not only through the raw output of his vocals and the striking lyrics, but also with the cover art which he provided for the band. With the cover of *Why*, consisting of black and white pictures of casualties of war backed with a picture of bombs falling from the sky, he created an iconic style influencing a visual trend that is still commonly used in punk art. Morris's lyrics reinforced the striking visuals:

Men women and children
Cry and scream in pain
Wounded by bomb splinters
Streets littered with maimed and slaughtered
In rigid pathetic heaps
(*'Maimed and Slaughtered'*, 1981)

This short and chaotic message of destruction, as if it was written in the midst of an air-raid, ushers in the power of brevity and urgency reminiscent of Wilfred Owen (also recently evoked by Rudimentary Peni):

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
(extract from *'Anthem for Doomed Youth'*, 1920)

In the midst of the Cold War and a general feeling of impending doom, Discharge's intention behind using violent imagery was to create an anti-war reaction in the listener, in fact, Glasper (2014) has stated that *Why* 'remains to this day one of the most potent anti-war records ever made' (p. 189). Discharge's amalgamation of a straightforward anti-state, anti-war stance with the unhinged aggression of their sound became a blueprint of sorts where the basic premises of European hardcore punk were first defined.

Even though it has been clear from the start that punk is much more than just a style of music, it was surprising to see that some interviewees did not mention music at all when describing punk. To some it is first and foremost a way of life, an attitude, a political statement, a mental state – and music to go with it. Moore (2010) claims that punk has been

at its most diverse and innovative in the periods in which it was defined rather as a method of production than a singular sound, and although he simultaneously attacks hardcore punk for stifling creativity with its insistence on minimalism and speed, he also credits it with an aura of authenticity achieved through the DIY ethic of commercial independence (p. 50).

Dunn (2016) understands punk to be a set of social practices – what made punks ‘punk’ was:

not so much how they sounded, but how they acted. Punks worked to imagine new ways of being. As they loudly proclaimed at the time, they were sick and tired of the crap that mainstream culture was shoving down their throats, whether it was music, art, literature, or fashion, and they decided to make their own cultural products. Punks did so by making their own music, being their own journalists and writers, making their own movies, designing their own clothes. It was a two-part process: a rejection of the status quo and an embrace of a do-it-yourself ethos. (p. 11)

While I agree that Dunn’s description is accurate, it wasn’t until anarcho- and hardcore punk emerged that the DIY ethos was taken as a serious stance. Although musically hardcore experimented with harsher sounds, and at times also entered in conflict with anarcho-punks over the excessive political correctness that to them appeared as self-righteousness, at the same time, the two styles also shared a great deal in terms of politics and methods of production. By the late 1970s the initial interest of the major record labels in punk had faded and in addition, the hardcore delivery was so extreme that finally there was a style of music that seemingly could not be taken advantage of by the culture industry. The labels interested in releasing hardcore punk were small independents that were usually created for the purpose, and the hardcore punks operated in their own sector outside of the influence of the record industry. Blush (2010) has stated the following on hardcore punk and DIY (while at the same time offering a sarcastic remark about academia’s obsession to label simple practices with erudite monikers):

Punk gave lip service to ‘do it yourself’ (DIY) and democratization of the rock scene, but hardcore transcended all commercial and corporate concerns. [...] Hardcore established a new definition of musical success: in non-economic terms. Sociologists would cite this as an example of ‘tribal syndicalism’ – unlike money-oriented economies, HC arose as

an objective-oriented, community-based culture, like a commune or an armed fortress. [...] Hardcore became one of the few musical forms on which major labels seemed unwilling or unable to capitalize. (pp. 319-320)

Although the terms ‘hardcore’ and ‘punk’ can often be interchangeable, this ability to inter-substitute the terms requires an in-depth knowledge of the subculture because it makes many assumptions that an ‘outsider’ will not pick up on. Since the 1980s, hardcore punk’s influence has created many offshoots as well as influenced other styles such as thrash metal, and today many would first associate ‘hardcore’ with a very distinct style of ‘metallic hardcore’ or ‘metalcore’. Academic writers have sometimes suffered from lack of clear definitions in this regard, for example, referring to ‘hardcore’ and leaving it to the reader to deduce that they must be writing about its modern adaptations which tend to have little or nothing to do with the punk roots of the style (Willis, 1993; Driver, 2011; Mueller, 2011). These difficulties can cause major misunderstandings and may be partially accounted for by the heterogeneous nature of the subculture, and in some cases, perhaps by superficial knowledge of punk music. *Hardcore punk*, the main subject of this study, even in its contemporary forms, maintains a more direct musical link to the early 1980s as well as to the DIY ethos.

Another shortcoming common in academic writing referring to punk is that it gives the impression that it is something from the past. This could not be further from the truth. Despite the elements of nostalgia, punk is something happening right now, a subculture with a colourful history as well as an ongoing evolution. Whether seeing punk as something of the past (or as something that has passed its prime) has resulted in this narrowness of view, or if this narrowness of view has resulted in the false notion of punk as nostalgia, the result is the same: a handful ‘canonical’ punk bands are analysed to a sickening degree while punk’s later developments have often been limited to curiosities reflecting academic trends. Not to say that these examples do not represent punk, however, for example the experiences of ‘cult’ figures of global punk will differ significantly from those of an

‘average’ punk-on-the-street. Meanwhile, instead of merely flipping a few sanctioned punk records over and over decade after decade, these ‘average’ punks all over the world have been making music in their own terms, producing an ocean of noise. Recently however there has been a new wave of punk studies that is paying more attention to the ‘lost tribes’ in less known scenes (Bestley, 2021), and in terms of academic attention, Finnish hardcore should be considered one of them. Furthermore, despite its global reach, hardcore punk in general can be regarded as a less often studied but no less important facet of punk that is still sometimes dismissed as three chord thrash (Whalley, 2012).⁴

Having stated that punk is very much alive today, always evolving and creating new forms of expression, on the other hand, in contemporary punk there is also an inclination to relive and even glorify the past. While discussing the connections between punk and retro culture, Moore (2010) asks: ‘what is the significance of the fact that there has been a shift in youth culture from forward-looking moderns to retro recyclers rummaging through the past?’ (p. 196). In Moore’s view, within youth culture there is a wider move towards nostalgia that can be seen as a critique of modernity:

both nostalgia and retro express an indirect critique of modernity and our faith in progress, suggesting that new and improved doesn’t deserve the hype, that things are actually getting worse, and that the best is to be found in the forgotten ways of yesteryear. (p. 164)

Via Baudrillard, Moore goes on to comment on the ‘implosion of meaning’ and the ‘loss of history’ in a society saturated with media simulations to which Baudrillard saw retro as a poor substitute. Similarly, Moore quotes Jameson’s observation about a waning of historical consciousness, which paradoxically coincides with ‘an omnipresent and indiscriminate appetite for dead styles and dead fashions’ amongst the postmodern cultural producers (p. 166). A further point of view to Moore’s analysis is provided by Bakhtin’s

⁴ BBC’s *Punk Britannia*, a three-part documentary on British punk up to 1981 failed to even mention Discharge, and gave a short dismissive treatment to both anarcho-punk and Oi!, arguably to give more coverage to bands such as Young Marble Giants, The Human League and Orange Juice.

notions of ‘dialogic’ nature of literature and language where every cultural producer ‘enters a dialogue that began long ago, and every cultural product contains traces of history that shape its meaning, even in ways that are beyond its author’s intentions’ (p. 167). This kind of two-way intertextuality where today’s cultural products are not only affected by the cultural dialogue of the past, but also have the power to affect the way we view canonical works in the light of current developments is also visible in punk. The tension between nostalgia and renewal is discussed in chapter seven.

This cultural dialogue that sometimes also manifests as a tendency for recycling is evident, for example, in the wave of Discharge-clones that emerged over the 1990s. These bands would borrow the Discharge formula of song-writing and their signature drum beat, the (non)production as well as their lyrical expression and cover art, to create their own ‘Dis’ groups. Dines, Gordon and Guerra (2019) have discussed how for example Japan’s Disclose created an even fiercer take on Discharge’s sonic assault and became a force to be reckoned with in their own right, in turn influencing more current takes on ‘raw punk’. Although rejecting the notion of mimesis as an oversimplification of this process, Dines, Gordon and Guerra state that the example of the Japanese interpretation of the Discharge sound shows how ‘punk culture is always a historical hybrid culture already’ (pp. 16-17). At the same time, the generic nature and laziness in terms of striving for originality of some of the ‘Dis’ groups has also invited scorn and ridicule to the style. As noted by Raposo (2016), Scottish group Oi Polloi even included a ‘Free patent Oi Polloi Dis-band “song” generator’ in one of their EPs: two cut-out-and-glue-together hexagonal spinners that included generic lyrical lines, to be used in creating ‘songs’ without wasting ‘those all-important whole two minutes of valuable drinking time you spent composing your “songs”’ (pp. 79-81). Dale (2012) ponders whether it would be more empowering for punks to be innovative, or would building a tradition in the end yield greater results:

Does bringing something markedly new to the tradition truly empower the punks in their various micro-scenes? Alternatively, could fidelity to tradition perhaps lead to a greater empowerment in which the punk scene could gain greater influence within the macro-scene of popular music as well as, perhaps, encouraging political change in wider macro-social terms? (p. 1)

While the wave of Discharge-clones did not lead to a global anti-war movement, and even created a ripple of cynicism within the scene, the fact that these groups are still being formed, and in turn influence new developments within the style, testifies to the continued relevance of Discharge's nuclear paranoia and their protest against state control. Chapter seven will expand the discussion on punk pastiche by examining groups that have in turn chosen to emulate Finnish hardcore.

Dunn (2008) has observed that, especially in the world peripheries, punk is being employed as a tool against repressive regimes and social structures and therefore, 'there is far more at stake in the expression of a punk subculture in the global periphery than there is at the core' (p. 206). Elsewhere, Dunn (2016) goes as far as stating that punk will not only change the world, but that it already has. According to his examples, this has less to do with the individual musical tastes of different punks, and more to do with their life-choices that resonate, not only on the individual, but also on a wider macro-social level:

punk has become a global force that constructs oppositional identities, empowers local communities, and challenges corporate-led processes of globalization. It provides individuals and communities around the world with resources and opportunities for self-empowerment and resistance for their personal needs, in response to uniquely local challenges, and against the broader pressures of global capitalism. (p. 225)

While this is true also in my experience, the issue whether punk can be a catalyst for change on a global scale is a complicated one. At all events, punk has proven to be an influence on a much larger scale than anyone could have anticipated. Punks have become not only mainstream rock stars but also, for example, writers, artists, TV-presenters, scientists and academics. On the other hand, we are still talking about a marginal subculture. After all, if anything becomes too popular it quickly ceases to be punk, and the elements of punk that

are, to use Hebdige's terminology, 'incorporated' by mass culture, are soon ridiculed by the punks who consider themselves more authentic. Therefore, if mainstream punk is but a superficial product marketed by the culture industry and only the DIY-model of punk is seen as truly subversive, then the real changes brought by punk are still relatively small. However, on the individual level, punk's influence can be very powerful, either in the positive, or in the destructive sense.

The individual testimonies of 'grassroots' punks also feature amongst the best literature written about the subculture. Dines (Bull and Dines, 2014) has stated in reference to academic writing on punk that: 'It almost feels as if the academic has to encroach on the everyday, not allowing these tales any autonomy; to not let them sit on their own, for what they are, without interpretation or analysis' (p. 9). *Tales from the Punkside* (Bull and Dines, 2014) does in fact successfully blur the lines between academic writing and the punk essay, bringing forth more personalised and localised experiences that evoke a sense of authenticity. The 'everyday' punk experience has also been successfully included in select ethnographic studies (Gordon, 2005; Donaghey, 2016). Some punk historians such as Glasper and Hurcalla, free from having to analyse and interpret the subject matter in academic terms, have also managed to maintain an authentic tone to their writing, facilitated by the inclusion of many individual declarations and oral histories.

However, perhaps the source through which one gets the most credible view of everyday punk writing, past and present, can be found in the many (fan)zines.⁵ These small independent publications have been an integral part of punk since the beginning, and the culture of the printed zine is still alive, although many have moved on to digital formats. The history of punk zines and their politics has been adequately traced by Duncombe

⁵ Fanzine (a blend of 'fan' and 'magazine') usually refers to a home-made unprofessional publication that is produced by an enthusiast of a given cultural phenomenon for the appreciation of other enthusiasts. In connection to punk the word 'fan' is usually omitted since the subculture as a whole has endeavoured to eliminate the boundary between the creator and the consumer.

(1997) and the value and strength of the punk zine culture has also been recognised by Muggleton (2000). He labels zines as ‘micro-media’ after Thornton’s definition, and considers them to be an ‘authentic grass-roots means of communication’ also agreeing with Lull who in turn has seen zines as ‘trusted sources of information’ (p. 137). To ground my research, I will be using a number of Finnish punk zines to trace the origins of punk and hardcore in Finland, as well as searching for traces of Finnish punk in international punk zines, with the hope that in this way, my research would also have a trace of ‘grassroots’ trustworthiness.⁶

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how noise challenges established notions of beauty. Does this counter-aesthetic of noise within punk then merely reject beauty, unapologetically embracing the non-beautiful, becoming an anti-aesthetic? Or does it rather offer an alternative meaning of beauty through its own unconventional aesthetic standards? Through ugly aesthetics and imperfection punk raises questions about what should be considered beautiful and why. To the hardcore punks, noise is vital. Appreciating it need not even mean a denial of beauty, and may even indicate a greater capacity for artistic appreciation, extended to areas that most would define as non-beautiful or even offensive to their notions of beauty. After a general discussion on the most relevant themes in this work, it is now possible to turn to the Finnish variety and take a closer look at what might be appealing about it to those who like it. The following two chapters introduce Finnish punk rock and discuss the transformation from punk rock into hardcore, pinpointing essential differences as well as looking at Finnish independent punk productions in the form of records and zines.

⁶ The zines are sourced, apart from my own collection, from the digital archive of Oranssi (<https://www.oranssi.net/pienlehdet/lehdet.html>), and archive.org.

3 War against apathy!

The year 1977 has been the liveliest time for rock in over a decade. It will be the first year in the entire seventies that will be remembered effortlessly in the history of rock. Now rock is happening, and the existence of this earth-shaking power cannot be dismissed whether you like it or not. Punk-rock is undeniably the epicentre of today's rock. [...] Punk-rock is music from today's youth to other today's youths. It depicts their anxiety and their feelings of insecurity in a society that does not seem to have much to offer to them. This nervousness is also present in the music, which dashes ahead at a speed unknown up to this point. The most important thing is the will to play and the energy, not technical mastery. [...] Youth unemployment in Finland is statistically as high as in England, but an injection that would mobilise the youth from apathy and passivity is still needed. (Montonen, Rockradio, 1977)

While British punk had been a hot topic throughout 1977 in the Finnish music press, the image portrayed was a confusing one. When attempting to translate 'punk-rock' into Finnish, some were suggesting the title 'renttu-rock', 'renttu' being a term for someone who is considered 'good-for-nothing'. As noted by Söderholm (1987) the image of punk was divided into two camps and the differing images offered a large contrast. The most popular youth magazines at the time were *Help!* And *Suosikki* and both had mimicked sensationalist articles from the British press centred on punk's shock value, the supposed violence and anarchy, accompanied with remarks on punk fashion with emphasis on safety-pin piercings and swastika adornments. On the other hand, *Soundi* provided a more realistic view treating the movement without hysteria, and most importantly, as a musical movement, not as a fashion trend. Still, when the Sex Pistols were invited to play in Helsinki, it was the sensationalism and hysteria that was accepted as the ultimate truth about the band and their style of music during the moral panic (Cohen, 1972) leading up to the show.

On 3rd of January 1978, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, published an ill-advised article about the Pistols entitled '*Parasta lapsille?*' ('Most suitable for the children?'). The piece was written by junior reporter Raija Forsström at the request of her supervisor, who had demanded that she condemns the group

(Saastamoinen 2007). Forsström's article, quoted here integrally, was almost entirely based on coverage about punk in tabloid and youth magazines:

Our youth is being taken for a ride, hard and fast. A punk rock group from England, Sex Pistols, also referred to as a foulmouthed band of creeps by the youth magazines, are coming to Finland to scream. They were recently denied visas for United States, effectively eliminating the four-piece group's hopes of a two-week American tour. All of the members of the group known for its violent behaviour and abnormality have a background of diverse drug- and assault charges. Like the embassy of the United States in London, many other instances have prevented the performance of the sex boys. In their home country England, the group has been rejected by many concert halls and supermarkets. The Sex Pistols intend to appeal directly to the authorities in Washington and if this doesn't succeed, the group will be smuggled in through Canada. This is the manager of the tough guys Malcom McLaren speaking. The tour is supposed to start tomorrow and end on 17.1. Already on the following day, the boys who pierce their cheeks with safety pins are supposed to howl on the stage of Työväentalo in Helsinki. The group's most important 'instrument' is a mechanical sound distorter, which summons a snotty, crackly sound. So many are the means by which our children's allowances are snatched – the snotty growling of a foulmouthed band of creeps is being offered in return. Who should be responsible for stopping them from entering the country, child protective services or environmental hygienists?

Although information about punk had been already available, especially to the readers of *Soundi* that has been seen to have favoured punk (Miettinen, 2021), it was the Pistols, or rather the article addressing them and the debate that followed, which provided the 'injection' needed to mobilize the youth.

The aftermath of Forsström's article has been documented by Söderholm (1987) who analyses 32 articles published in five major newspapers during January 1978. He remarks that the coverage was at first almost unanimously negative, and articles defending the band only began to appear in any significant scale after the group had already been banned. Söderholm notes how conspicuous the heterogeneity of the opposition was – the group was seen to insult fundamental values of society that went beyond party lines. While the defenders of the group saw them as ordinary young musicians performing energetic rock-music that mobilizes the youth to think, the opposition chose much more colourful language to make their point:

The most common image amongst those who held a negative stance against the concert and the group was their *criminality*. Other often repeated descriptions were *deviousness*, *toughness*, *sickness* and *money-hoarding*. Further adjectives associated with the group were *foulmouthedness*, *rebellion*, *artificiality*, *forced invention*, *commerciality*, *decadent entertainment*, *tastelessness*, *fashion phenomenon*, *rawness*, and *unmusicalnonsenseness*. (p. 93)

Further evidence about the misconceptions surrounding the group is provided by *Punk: Rokkishokki* (1978), a collection of articles by the reporters of *Soundi* which provides an epilogue to the scandal, defending the Pistols' rights for self-expression and analysing the unfair treatment they received within the public discussion.

Due to the scandalising nature of the dispute, even many private citizens who had read Forsström's article and followed the ensuing discussion had contacted the interior ministry with petitions to keep the musicians from entering the country. While the group's criminality was the main concern and some of the members were in fact genuine juvenile delinquents, in reality, their crimes had been exaggerated. In fact, Steve Jones has given evidence to the contrary about the band's effect on his life:

As a juvenile I had a criminal record—fourteen convictions. I went away to a proovy school for a year and a half, but I never actually went to prison. Most of the stuff I did up until the age of seventeen was as a juvenile. I got popped for stolen equipment. After eighteen you go to prison, and the Sex Pistols kept me out. After the band happened, I didn't steal that much afterward. It saved me. (quoted in Lydon, 1994, p. 88)

At all events, on January 12th 1978, interior minister Uusitalo revoked the Pistols' work permits and denied their entry to the country based on the behaviour of the members, their criminal background, as well as the appeals presented to the authorities of foreign affairs.

The same evening, the episode was discussed in the iconic current affairs TV-program *Ajankohtainen kakkonen* under the title '*Tuhoaako punk Suomen?*' ('Will punk destroy Finland?'). Reporter Heikkilä (1978) set the scenario:

Punk fashion is trickling to Finland, openly sowing anarchy and violence. Parents are horrified and apparently this is what the punk youth is after. Wearing fascist uniforms, with diverse trinkets and with safety pins pierced through their cheeks, punk youth is proclaiming their protest against the current state of affairs.

Markkula, one of the music reporters for *Soundi* was interviewed for the program to provide a different point of view: 'Punk-rock was born mainly to depict the current situation. The youth are frustrated with unemployment and they feel like they have no future, that society has betrayed them. Punk-rock depicts the frustration felt by the youth'. This comment however is immediately countered by another sweeping statement by Heikkilä, who once again does not fail to mention the safety-pins-through-cheeks nor the swastikas: 'As the fashion grows, abnormal and obnoxious modes of behaviour have increased and punk movement's original protest on behalf of youth has clearly remained on the backburner'. There seems to have been an unbridgeable gap between the two stances, one taking the hysteria as the ultimate truth, and the opposing view that sees punk as a style that uses both musical and extra-musical shock effects to convey a message of protest. Although Wallenius (1978) accused the channel of selective editing of the interview to deliberately convey a controversial view of punk, Markkula still uttered the most lucid comment in the program:

I doubt that denying work permits for Sex Pistols will prevent the punk-phenomenon from arriving in Finland. Our information channels (to England) are so remarkable that a mere cancellation of a Sex Pistols concert is a very poor way of preventing that. On the contrary, it might provoke unnecessary aggression.

In fact, classifying the Pistols as *persona non grata* may have had an even greater effect than mere provoking of aggression – many young people who already saw themselves as outcasts identified with them. Söderholm (1987) notes that as a result 1978 can be seen as Finnish punk-movement's ascent: 'the punk-youth had gotten a concrete proof that the "establishment" does not want punk, thus the youth could rightly conclude that they do not want the "establishment"' (p. 81).

Ironically, the Sex Pistols disbanded in January 1978 and would not have made it to Finland in any case, yet punk had already entered before them. The Ramones had performed in Helsinki and Tampere in the spring of 1977 without causing an outbreak of

violence and anarchy, despite the fact that the band had been described in *Suosikki* (6/1977) as ‘Yankee punk’s devil priests.’ Still, although many Finnish punk pioneers were present in the Ramones concerts (Miettinen, 2021), and for example the members of Eppu Normaali had gotten inspiration from the Ramones to take their band more seriously, in Saastamoinen’s (2007) book (entitled *Parasta Lapsille* after Forsström’s article) many punk musicians cite the cancellation of the Pistols show as motivation for getting into punk or for embracing the punk ideology firmer. Häkli from Vandaalit remembers the effect the episode had on him:

I even had a ticket. That really pissed me off. It distanced me even more from the world of the grown-ups that was so intolerant. The most powerful newspaper in Finland was the first to start flagging for the cancellation of the show and all kinds of political organisations joined the chorus. It was a total farce. (p. 204)

The echoes of the ban lingered and bands from the hardcore era also remember the ordeal. In *Parasta Lapsille* both Appendix and Rattus mention the incident, Pexi from Maho Neitsyt refers to the ban as being the first thing he remembers about punk, and Poko from Destructions (the misspelling of the name being supposedly intentional) remembers how the prohibition created even more mystique around the Pistols. Kräki from 013 remembers his father’s comments after seeing the Pistols on television: ‘Total crazies. Their kind should not be allowed to enter Finland’ (p. 391). As a result, Kräki obviously liked the band right away. Jimmy from Kansan Uutiset was left baffled:

Then the Pistols didn’t get the permission to play in Finland. That was something unbelievably stupid. It was inconceivable and impossible to explain through reason. You could not take it seriously – it missed that mark by far. It was so utopic that through punk we were probably trying to get in touch with reality when Sex Pistols and even Donald Duck were prohibited. (p. 407)

The reference to Donald Duck points to another polemic of the time when the decision to end the magazine’s subscription to Helsinki’s youth spaces caused an uproar. The decision was allegedly taken due to the magazine’s immoral aspects, such as the unstable

relationship between Donald and Daisy and the fact that the ducks were not wearing any pants! The issue was widely discussed in the media and, however comical, can perhaps help illustrate the uptight mood of the era in Finland. The affair became a news item and even abroad bewildered stories of the ‘prohibition’ of Donald Duck, example of which is seen in figure three, poked fun at the prudishness of the Finns. The official explanation for the ‘censorship’ was said to have been lack of resources as well as a preference for more informative material, and Holopainen, who had issued the cancellation, attempted to explain that he had been deliberately misinterpreted (Suonio, 2006). However, many who ridiculed the decision saw it in a political light and Donald Duck as the victim of Soviet-friendly ‘censorship’, which saw the cartoon as decadent western entertainment.



Figure 3: Ripley's *Believe It or Not!* featured the Donald Duck polemic. (source: <http://www.kvaak.fi/keskustelu/index.php?topic=4866.75> [last accessed 02.01.2019])

Meanwhile, Kekkonen who had been the (famously Soviet-friendly) Finnish president since 1956 had produced another re-election walkover. Although the early 1970s had shown signs of radicalisation in Finnish politics, by the mid-seventies Kekkonen had again managed to stabilise domestic politics and strengthen his position. By the end of the decade Kekkonen's power was absolute having won 82 percent of the vote in the election of 1978. When discussing post-WWII Finland, the influence of the Cold War and the proximity of the Soviet Union cannot be underestimated, and the political climate of the late 1970s can partially explain the unfriendliness that both Donald Duck and the Pistols were faced with. According to Roos, stagnation and disillusion of sorts which he refers to as the 'felt boot factory period'⁷ had set in and political radicalism had faded. A number of other cultural products that were seen as offensive by the Soviet Union were also repressed. For example, the Finnish translation of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* had to be printed in Stockholm, and Wrede's feature film adaptation of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was banned from being broadcast until 1994. Although by the late 1970s the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was fading from recent memory, good foreign policy was not merely about keeping the threat of invasion at bay. It was important also for economic reasons since Finland was one of the few countries outside the socialist realm that had bi-lateral trade with the Soviet Union.

From the point of view of West Germany, the Soviet influence on post-war Finland was so immense that the term 'Finnlandisierung' was coined in the late 1960s to describe the situation. 'Finlandization' – 'becoming like Finland' – is described by Salovaara-Moring (2009) as 'a political configuration where a small state is too weak to challenge or resist the influence of a more powerful neighbour and consequently has to give up portions of its sovereignty and neutrality' (p. 216). Salovaara-Moring goes on to quote Tarkka, a

⁷ 'Huopatosu', the 'felt boot', is a piece of traditional Finnish footwear and is considered a 'quiet' boot since it does not have a hard sole and therefore makes little noise.

renowned commentator on Finnish political culture, to illuminate the logic behind the Finnish politicians' experience of self-subordination: 'The essential nature of Finlandization was an emotional fancy, that by pleasing the superpower and overemphasizing one's humility, the superpower could be made to do something that it would not do on rational grounds' (p. 216). On the other hand, Finland also wanted to maintain a good relationship with the West, and to describe the complex political dynamic of the era, Jokisipilä (2007) aptly quotes political cartoonist Suomalainen who has seen Finlandization as 'the art of bowing to the east so carefully that it could not be considered as mooning to the West'.

In 1977, a controversial rock album *Takaisin Karjalaan* ('Back to Karelia') that mooned in all possible directions, and perhaps for this reason was labelled punk, had been released by Sleepy Sleepers. The album featured 'Anarkiaa Karjalassa' ('Anarchy in Karelia') that was clearly copying 'Anarchy in the UK' and, if possible, even more controversial, implying that the Karelian Finns (who fled from the path of war and lost their homes in the territories ceded to the Soviet Union) sodomise wild boars. Kolehmainen (2017) reports that Sleepy Sleepers was recognized as the first Finnish punk band in *Suosikki*:

In *Suosikki*, a humour-rock group from Lahti, Sleepy Sleepers, which amongst other things named their summer tour *PUNK SHOW 77*, was profiled as the first Finnish punk band. The tour was treated in *Suosikki* with much anticipation: 'We await enthusiastically what tricks these punk-rockers come up with'. August's edition featured an article series *PUNK IS RAGING IN HÄRMÄ!*, which featured an interview with Sleepy Sleepers. In the interview the band declares their punkness, exactly because of their indifference, roughness and shoddiness, which are qualities associated with the foreign groups. (p. 30)

However, the band members, always ready to cause controversy, denied being punk in a TV-interview for current affairs show A-Studio in September 1977 (Lindfors, 2007):

Mirja Pyykkö: It has been said that a real punk-rocker hates everything that comes by, that a punk-rocker hates their audience, that a punk-rocker advises the youth to fight against the prevailing order in society, and that in fact the singer in a group like this is more like a political speaker than a singer. Is this correct?

Mato Valtonen: Well, actually we don't know what has been said about punk-rockers and what punk-rockers do because we don't consider ourselves to be punk-rockers in the actual sense of the word. We have just been associated with this punk name, in fact we don't know what punk is.

The question of authenticity has been important within punk since its inception, however, what is authentically punk has never been articulated clearly because the movement lacked and rejected the idea of a centralised authority. Although initially the idea of punk was supposed to be complete freedom of expression and liberty from the constraints of strict definitions, the confusing debate about punk's true nature started early on, even though defining punk authenticity is not necessarily even desirable because it is precisely this unresolved debate that keeps punk on the edge and functions as a force of renewal, always redefining the meaning.

For those who claimed to know what punk really meant, Sleepy Sleepers did not really represent the style and in retrospect, the first Finnish punk single is commonly accepted to have been 'I Really Hate Ya / I Want Ya Back' by Helsinki group Briard, released in November 1977. However, Briard was singing in English and thus their sound – although undoubtedly punk – was not particularly Finnish. Therefore, others in the provinces like Eppu Normaali from Ylöjärvi, who were singing in the vernacular, were able to connect more directly with the Finnish youth. Although 'serious' is not the best adjective to describe the early stages of the band which lyric-wise relied heavily on puerile humour, Eppu Normaali turned out to be much more 'serious' than anyone at this point could have expected, and after turning to radio-friendly pop rock, by mid 1980s they were the best-selling group in Finland. However, their debut album *Aknepop* ('Acne-pop'), released in March 1978 on Poko Rekords, is considered to be the first full-length Finnish punk-album.

Aknepop also contains the track 'Rääväsuita ei haluta Suomeen' ('Loudmouths are not wanted in Finland'), inspired by the Pistols scandal.⁸

Although *Aknepop* was the first to be released, the eponymous debut album of Pelle Miljoona & N.U.S. had been recorded before it, around the turn of the year 1977-1978. Pelle Miljoona ('Clown Million') had got punk from the source on his trip to London in the summer of 1977, and wrote most of the material on the album on his way back to Finland (Miettinen, 2021). The topics of the songs range from pacifism of 'Ei oo järkee mennä armeijaan' ('Going to the army makes no sense') and 'Pikkuhitleri' ('Little Hitler') to social criticism, denouncing the hypocrisy and rottenness of the welfare state in songs such as 'Olen työtön' ('I'm unemployed'), 'Yhteiskunta haisee' ('Society stinks') and 'Hyvinvointikakarat' ('Kids of prosperity'). Even though Pelle also shifted to new wave, and eventually reggae, his influence on later Finnish punk and even hardcore is much more direct than Eppu Normaali's. In fact, the subject matter in Pelle's lyrics can also be seen to coincide largely with what the anarcho-punks were starting to put forward in England. In addition to punk lyrics Pelle also wrote poetry, and a reporter interviewing him in September 1980 had read his book *Pelkistettyä todellisuutta* ('Reality made plain'). She is reading back to him a list she calls 'curious' which includes the topics Pelle is for and against (Lindfors, 2006):

you stand for peace, for the oppressed, for love, for children, for truth, for youth, for the unemployed, for freedom, for honesty and righteousness, tenderness, for all these kinds of things. Then you are against war, against dishonesty, racism, fascism, against Americanisation, against deceit, against unemployment, apathy, numbness, against false accommodation, against stupidity, against pompousness, formulaicness, against bureaucracy, against corruption, against the false reality of television, against church and politicians.

⁸ Also Vaavi's self-titled EP (Johanna, 1980) includes a song about the incident, 'RARF' ('Rock Against Raija Forsström').

Although the topics in Pelle's poems are universal, at the same time his message was directed precisely at the local youth, addressing these issues from a local point of view. In the same way, Eppu Normaali had a specifically local feel to their music that went beyond the fact that they sang in Finnish. Saarinen, their bass player commented to Saastamoinen (2007) that there was a deliberate attempt to create a local brand of punk: 'The idea of punk was very regional since the beginning, like let's not start aping America or England, but make our own thing for the local conditions' (p. 37). With the advantage of hindsight (and speaking in past tense), Miettinen, the editor of *Hilse* ('Dandruff'), the first Finnish punk (fan)zine, reflected on Finnish punk in the TV program *Iltatähti* in 1982 (Gustafsson, 2016):

Finnish punk, whatever it was, it wasn't mimicking, in the sense that, of course it got its basic influence from England but in Finland there developed, quite soon, a typically Finnish style of punk, which reflected the local conditions. [...] I mean, they didn't merely sing in Finnish, well, for example, the topics of the songs weren't copied directly from England but they were adapted to the Finnish conditions. Of course, this country moulds bands to be entirely different than England does anyway, it's a small country, and everything needs to be done differently. In particular the things they were singing about were typically Finnish. Obviously, something like unemployment is a universal problem, but for example one thing that has been Finnish punk's basic thematic in the lyrics is conscientious objection.

Since its inception, punk has been pronouncedly anti-nationalistic and therefore it should not come as a surprise that also in Finland many punk lyrics expressed opinions against military service that was, and still is, compulsory. The anti-war thematic would become especially evident in the hardcore era, however, conscientious objection was still a rare show of defiance. In order to opt for civil service on ethical grounds, the conviction of the future civil serviceman needed to be determined by a board of examiners that included a judge, a military officer, a priest, a psychiatrist and a representative of the interior ministry. Therefore, civil service remained a marginal choice and only began to grow in popularity when determining the applicant's conviction was no longer necessary after 1987. Certainly not alone in dealing with post-WWII trauma, the fact that Finland had successfully

defended its independence against a far superior enemy demanded that heroism of the war veterans has been exalted, and rejection of military service scorned up until the present day.

Söderholm (1987), speaking from the Finnish point of view but referring to punk in general, has seen 1979 as the beginning of the phase of integration and commercialisation of punk. According to him this phase differs from what he calls the formative phase (1976-1978) in that the record industry reacted to punk through new wave, which commercialised it by removing its rough and macabre characteristics, and this softened version of original punk aesthetics was meant to reach as wide an audience as possible. Although Söderholm does not comment on the local connotations, Miettinen (2021) goes as far as speculating that punk's popularity in Finland exceeded its popularity in other countries, with the exception of the UK. The number of punk groups was growing fast and young punks all over the country were getting organised – according to Kolehmainen (2017) *Soundi* published a remarkable 36 reviews of domestic punk singles in 1979.

By the beginning of 1979, *Hilse* had reached its sixth number, and although the picture of The Clash on its cover (figure four) testifies to the status of UK punk, there is also a repertoire of new local bands with different takes on punk rock. In the same year, the zine published also an important compilation *HilseLP* featuring 18 young punk groups. Pointing to the importance of overseas models are the cover versions on *HilseLP*, such as 'Mongoloidi' by Sehr Schnell (orig. 'Mongoloid' by Devo), which is a more or less direct translation of the original and 'Ihohygieniaa' by Ratsia (orig. 'Breakdown' by the Buzzcocks) which, unlike the original, speaks of personal hygiene. Other Finnish bands of the era also recorded cover versions of 'canonical' British and American punk songs but added a local flavour with Finnish lyrics that gave them new meanings, such as in 'Syksy' by Kollaa Kestää, which transformed Magazine's 'Shot by Both Sides' into a chilling

portrait of autumn depression. The change in language was significant, and it also affected the way the music sounded as a whole – different from the music that had influenced it.

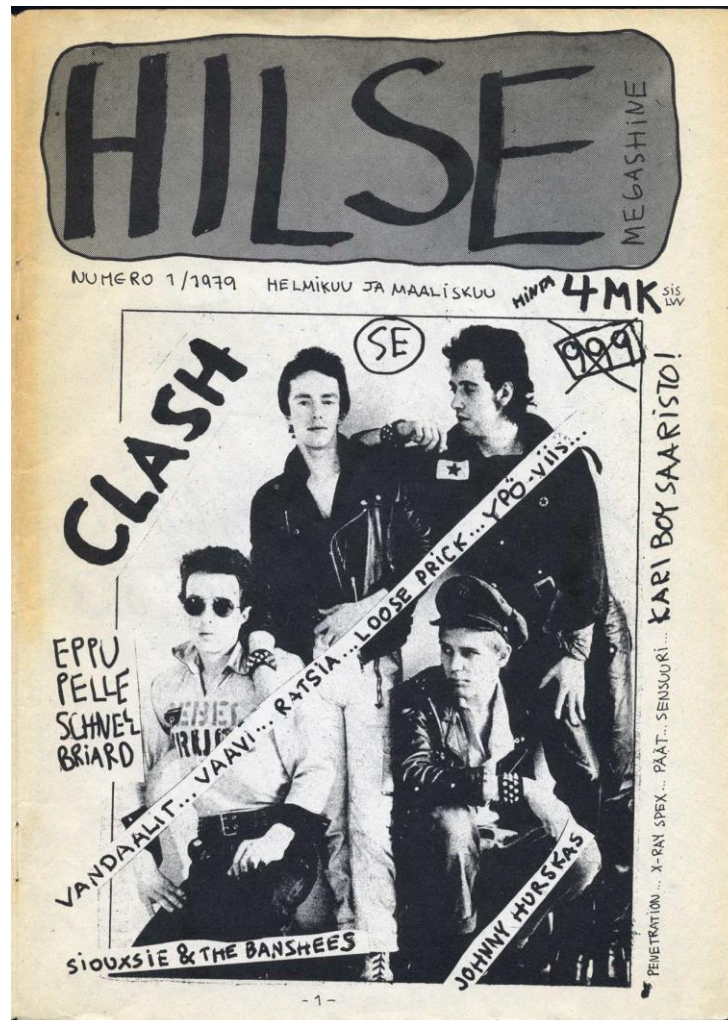


Figure 4: In addition to The Clash, this issue of Hilse features local groups Eppu Normaali, Pelle Miljoona, Briard, Vandaalit, Vaavi, Ratsia, Loose Prick, Ypö-viis, Päät, Se and Sensuuri. (source: Hilse #6, 1979)

Another peculiar aspect about the new groups was the fact that so many of them hailed from outside of the punk centres of Helsinki and Tampere, which may have to do with the fact that not only *Soundi*, but also *New Musical Express* was available in newspaper kiosks across the country (Miettinen, 2021). With their song 'Lontoon skidit', Ratsia pointed out how the 'London kids' who complained of boredom had no idea how rare rock and roll was in their home town Pihtipudas (population of roughly 4000). Many

other important groups were formed outside the main cities, for some examples, Vandaalit were from Hyvinkää, Vaavi from Salo and Loose Prick (who despite their name also sang in Finnish) from Kouvola. Even the most popular groups such as Eppu Normaali (although they are often seen as part of the Tampere scene due to the proximity of Ylöjärvi) and Pelle Miljoona (who later migrated to Helsinki) are both originally from small towns. The bands geographically located in the peripheries of the scene were considered more grounded and original than the groups from bigger cities where the influence of trends and fashion was more direct. Also, being situated at the periphery presented different challenges: even though practice spaces and venues to perform were hard to come by in the bigger cities, the countryside punks were forced to develop new ways of doing-it-yourself (the school disco could double up as a venue). Access to a recording deal was also a utopic idea for many small-town punks, and the first Finnish group to self-release a recording was Ypö-viis with their single 'Energia on A ja O' backed with 'Kotka palaa' in which they declared that their hometown Kotka is burning (orig. 'London's Burning' by The Clash).

Heiskanen and Mitchell (1985) studied Finnish youth subcultures and their findings indicate that there were more punks in small villages (20%) than in urban cores (13.3%), while the largest amount of punks (26.6%) would have been found in industrial suburbs (pp. 314-15). While Heiskanen and Mitchell do not provide an in-depth analysis of the differences between urban and countryside punks, four out of the 20 interviewees featured in the book define themselves as punks and grew up in different environments, however, the interviews reveal very few differences: Jatta, Pave and Kari, who are from urban surroundings see punk more or less in the same terms as Pena who is from a rural village (p. 322-30). From my own experience growing up in the countryside, I can pinpoint that still in the 1990s, lack of access to shows and records as well as the absence of subcultures in the day to day could be seen as crucial dissimilarities. Furthermore, the

intolerance, fear of change and suspicion towards the unknown, coupled with the remote possibilities of encountering like-minded individuals that were emphasised in the rural setting, contrasted sharply with the blasé mood of the capital, where in comparison everything is readily at hand and nothing is shocking.

Although punk bands were mushrooming across Finland, the publishing activities were concentrated in the bigger cities. Poko Rekords from Tampere was founded by Epe Helenius in 1977, and soon became the most active punk label in the country. Already in 1972, Helenius had started the record store Epe's, which focused on mail order sales and thus became an important channel for the distribution of punk to the provinces. During 1978 Poko Rekords released music from Eppu Normaali, Kollaa Kestää, Briard and Karanteeni, and in 1979, another ten domestic punk singles in addition to the output of Eppu Normaali who produced two singles and another LP. Epe also imported foreign punk releases, and their availability was important for punks all over Finland, while the presence of Poko Rekords helped to turn Tampere into an important punk centre alongside Helsinki. Another contributing factor to the large concentration of punks in Tampere may have been its postindustrial status (Bottà, 2020), as well as its position as the stronghold for the Reds who lost the Finnish civil war in 1918, branding it a city of outcasts, fit for punk.

In Helsinki, Atte Blom, one of the founders of Love Records, an important label that had begun by releasing Finnish avant-garde music and jazz in mid-60s, had become interested in the punk movement. In 1978, in addition to the before-mentioned Pelle Miljoona & N.U.S. debut album, the label released singles from Se, Sehr Schnell and Problems?. These groups were also featured in *Pohjalla* ('at the bottom') compilation LP, a very significant release for the Finnish scene leading to a promotional tour, another important vehicle in taking punk to the far corners of rural Finland. After Love Records went bankrupt in 1979, Blom continued to release punk under a new label, Johanna

Kustannus. In the early days, both Helenius and Blom would send many of their punk signings to record at Microvox studio in Lahti, where the bands were captured onto two two-track Revox tape recorders by Pekka Nurmikallio at the basement of an apartment building. The method did not allow for the recordings to be mixed afterwards, and this made Microvox an excellent location for capturing the spontaneity of the bands, and in addition, it was cheaper than multi-track studios. So many bands recorded at Microvox that Nurmikallio's bare-bones recording technique and the short recording sessions surely made a sizable impact on the early Finnish punk sound (Miettinen, 2021; Saastamoinen, 2007).

A further significant development for punk in Helsinki was the creation of Elävän musiikin yhdistys ('live music society') ELMU, which was formed in 1978 to demand practice and performance spaces for musicians, neither of which according to the founders existed in Helsinki.⁹ In 1979 ELMU was granted an abandoned paint storage nicknamed Lepakkoluola ('bat cave'), or simply Lepakko, somewhat near downtown as their headquarters. The building was restored by collective efforts and became a practice space, concert hall and a new meeting point for the Helsinki punks. Soon, ELMU's example was replicated in smaller towns, and other live music societies cropped up all over Finland (Haarala, 2011). The story of Lepakko lasted for two decades, enabling many cultural activities besides punk shows to take place under its roof, until the expansion of the Helsinki city centre towards the west increased the land value in the area, and Lepakko was demolished in 1999 to open up space for more apartment buildings.

Lama ('economic depression') was one of the groups rehearsing in Lepakko. The band had started already in 1977 but only released their first single 'Totuus löytyy kaurapuurosta' ('The truth is found in oatmeal porridge') in 1980. Heiskanen and Mitchell (1985) noted that to their interviewees, Pelle Miljoona was becoming a thing of the past

⁹ A squatted house in the neighbourhood of Kallio called Kill City had been Helsinki's number one punk hangout up to this point.

and the younger punks were on the lookout for something new, with Lama getting the honourable mention (p. 322). Lama represented a transition to a fiercer sound, not yet hardcore, but significantly harsher than the other punk-rock groups. Their production was more aggressive and the band also looked more abrasive than most, with studded leather jackets and coloured hair, the infamous punk look from England that up to this point hadn't been common in Finland. Although most of the punks that were starting new bands after the turn of the decade still credit Lama as an important influence, moving on to the 1980s the hardcore punks wanted to produce something even more fierce, severing themselves from the punk of the past decade. For the most part hardcore punks were young purists – to them punk was serious to a degree that made the original idea seem superficial. Epe, the singer of Lama, shared his feelings about hardcore punks in *Punklandia* (2008):

They started to see us as rock stars, dammit, like 'they go to their shows by car, what a bunch of fucking Elvises' [...] then it turned into a damn religious sect of sorts, and that didn't interest me anymore in the slightest. They fucking started to monitor, like, all kinds of damn things and that did away with whatever fun was left.

Even though some, mainly foreign punks, would place Lama in the hardcore category, due to this clearly frustrated comment, Lama should not be considered hardcore. It implies that the band had their share of criticism from the hardcore generation, even though the 'generation gap' amounted to only a few years. Santoro (2015), sees these kinds of antagonisms as evident in popular music history, especially when new genres or styles emerge, and commenting on Bourdieu, states that this is in fact one of the few features common to all fields: 'the antagonism between those who are already well established in the field, and those who are newcomers. The former have an interest in conservation and orthodoxy, the latter in transformation and transgression' (p. 134). The hardcore youth felt that punk-rock was not shocking enough anymore; the punk rock bands that their older brothers liked sounded tame, and the new wave bands commercial. New wave rocker Maukka Perusjätkä (Maukka 'the average bloke') had taken 'war against apathy' as his war

cry and was wielding a chainsaw on stage, but was still TV-worthy and accessible to ‘the average bloke’. Even Lama played live on TV, and in the beginning of the 1980s Pelle Miljoona and Eppu Normaali were turning into hit products. In order not to be consumed by the culture industry, the punk youth reverted back to guerrilla tactics of underground sonic warfare in their fight against apathy. Punk rock had not stopped any wars, brought down any queens or governments and now it was becoming passé – some even claimed it was dead – and meanwhile, world politics was getting more out of control by the day.

From 1980 to 1981 the Doomsday Clock leapt three minutes forward reaching four minutes to midnight, closest to a global disaster since the Cuban missile crisis in the sixties, and apocalypse was in the air. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists that maintains the clock affirmed in its statement in 1981 that both the United States and the Soviet Union ‘wilfully delude themselves that a nuclear war can remain limited and even be won’ (Feld, 1981). The fear of the future gave the hardcore punks a sense of urgency and a reason to take everything to the limit, for tomorrow the world might end. With new noisier musical horizons and visions of mushroom clouds filling their imagination, these usurpers to the punk throne set out to fight the complacency of punk, the fear of war and to bear witness to the madness. And of course, although the future looked bleak or precisely for the same reason, to have a few drinks and a couple of laughs in the process.

4 War – never again!

When I was growing up in the 1980s, the distance of WWII in terms of time was inconceivably long to a child. Although it felt like the war had happened ages ago, it still cast a shadow. On our wall there hung a black and white picture of a young man, my grandfather, who had perished on the front lines in 1940 when my mother was less than a year old. When I was somewhat older I noticed that my mother's big toes were unusually large and when I pointed this out, I was told that she 'inherited' them from her father. This was revealed to me through a wartime story. Apparently, my grandfather was killed by an enemy grenade which mangled him so badly that even his military tag was disintegrated and his fellow soldiers recognised the victim from his unusually large big toes. This stuck with me, and when it was my time to get drafted I had made up my mind, I was not going to be blown to bits by an enemy grenade. I faced some resistance from my parents, who would have preferred that I go to the army instead of being singled out for being a civil service man. But I had my argument ready: 'So your father died at war and now you want your son to do the same?'

Compared to when I faced the draft in the late 1990s and assigned myself for civil service, as stated in the previous chapter, back in the early 1980s, conscientious objectors were rare, and needed to justify their choice with an ethical stance. Since most of the hardcore punks were of the age to get drafted, the mandatory military service was a common motive for frustration. Jari (b. 1968), the guitar player of Aivoproteesi, an early 1980s group from Rovaniemi, saw the draft as a political watershed:

We weren't really so very political, but rather against many things with our middle fingers in the air. But it wasn't really like that structured, until the first members left for civil service. So, that was the first compulsory, in a way, choice when it came to something political or something to do with opinions. (Jari interview, 2018)

On the other hand, many punks (who played in groups that were fervently against military service) ended up in the army, and this had an effect in terms of line-up changes, hiatus's and countless songs against the army. 'Armeijaan' is one of the three tracks from the debut EP by Bastards (1982) that talks about the threat of military service:

/ Soon the Finnish government will write to me / that I should go to the draft /
/ I should go to the army / to serve the Fatherland /
// I don't want to go to the army //
/ They call me a traitor / they greet me with contemptuous looks /
/ They say I'm a communist / cos I don't want to go to the army /
/ So why would I go to the army? / I have nothing to fight for /
/ I don't want to be a corpse on a battlefield / I don't want to fight against other
people /¹⁰

The anti-war sentiment had already been typical of Finnish punk in the 1970s, and in this sense, there was continuity, with the difference that hardcore further emphasised resistance to war. While the wounds of WWII were still being dealt with, the young Finns were reading the signs of the times and the Cold War was feeding new visions of a futureless world. 'Maaailma palaa' ('The world is burning'), the title track of the first Bastards EP, summed up their fears:

/ People scream in pain / Napalm burns the skin /
/ A hell on earth / World burns to death /
/ Faces distorted by pain / Ground burned by fire /
/ Hiroshima renewed / A hundred times worse /
/ If the great powers / Decide to have a showdown /

In other songs of their first EP, Bastards dealt with various aspects of war such as the massacre of innocents ('Sotaa'), escalation of tensions across the world ('Turvallista huomista') and dystopian visions of totalitarianism ('Huominen tulee painajainen alkaa'). On consequent releases the group would continue to use the war thematic, speaking of the soldiers of God ('Jumalan sotilaat'), about the futility of war ('Liian monta turhaa sotaa'),

¹⁰ Singing language of Finnish hardcore was Finnish; all lyrics translated into English by the author unless stated otherwise.

the threat of war ('Sodan uhka') as well as its aftermath ('Autio ja hiljainen maailma', 'Elotonta tuhkaa'). Other groups shared the same Dischargesque vision. Rattus sang of limited nuclear war ('Rajoitettu ydinsota'), the tragedy of war ('Sodan tragedia'), about a non-militarised world ('Jos ei olis armeijoita') as well as military maniacs ('Sotahullut') and the destruction resulting from their mania for conquest ('Kun pommi on pudotettu'). In turn, Kaaos spoke of the approaching war ('Sota on tulossa'), about preparing to die ('Ootsä valmis kuolemaan'), about the state of war ('Sotatila'), the war 'heroes' proud of killing and those who died for their hero status ('Isänmaalliset', 'Kuolleet sankarit'), religious war ('Uskonsota'), questioning who dies on whose behalf ('Kuka kuolee kenen puolesta') as well as pointing out that wars will eventually end when there is nothing left to be destroyed ('Odotan maailmanloppua', 'Ei enää koskaan', 'Kohti tuhoa'). The list could be continued ad nauseam and lyrics about war became a Finnish hardcore cliché. Despite the good intentions, for example Martti in *Kärsä* #8 saw the subject as 'worn out' by 1984:

Of course you need to be reminded of how horrible it is from time to time, but it isn't interesting that all lyrics have the same content, that Ronald is a shitty guy for destroying the planet with his weapons. It would even be a change if Chernenko is shit cos he is also trying to destroy the planet, but nothing bad comes from the east. Everything is the fault of one Ronald, even the current state of Afghanistan... ('Haistakaa...!' *Kärsä* #8)

Although some bands did point their (middle) fingers also to the East (Riistetyt for one spoke of the 'Red threat'), the bulk of anger was directed at the Western powers, perhaps partially as an effect of the politics of Finlandization, but more likely following the examples from British and American bands who were attacking Thatcher and Reagan. Even if the war thematic was treated lopsidedly and was certainly over-done in terms of quantity, the threat was real; the topic stemmed from real traumas in the past and real fear for the

future. Poko (b. 1961), the drummer of Kaaos, sees the presence of Cold War as the biggest difference between today and the 1980s:

In terms of society the greatest difference is probably that then the fear of war, and first of all the fear of nuclear war, was tangible, which later on has been revealed that it was also very real, that it was a matter of a second, second and a half, whether the button was pushed or not. The Cold War was really tangible, it had a strong presence. [...] there was Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, so, that was a hard line-up on the opposing side. You didn't run out of song topics or hate. (Poko interview, 2018)

The fear of war, and the hatred towards politicians playing a dirty power game and holding the world as hostage drove the urgency that made the young musicians record their songs quickly, while they still could. This fear also connected Finnish hardcore to other scenes across the world that shared their nuclear anxieties. Worley (2011) has analysed how the tensions of the Cold War were reflected in the British punk scene (and beyond) in the early 1980s. Recognising Discharge's crucial contribution, Worley also mentions how groups such as Chaos UK, Disorder, The Destroyers, Amebix, The Skeptix and others 'revelled in the images of blackout and devastation that they set to evermore ferocious pieces of music' (p. 75). Similarly, the intensity of the music of the Finnish groups was rising together with the tensions in world politics.

4.1 *Rising tensions*

'Literature is too serious a thing to be left to the authors, who do not dare to make mistakes anymore.' Jan Blomstedt and Esa Saarinen (1980, p. 8)

In *Punkakatemia* ('*Punk Academy*') Blomstedt and Saarinen propose that the academia may have something to learn from punk. They had understood the primal energy of the style, and noticed a lack of similar vitality within universities.¹¹ However for the

¹¹ David Beer has made a similar proposal in *Punk Sociology*, a work that explores the ways in which sociologists may make use of punk.

punks, the fact that academia was now interested in them made little difference, and few would have known or cared. Of course, it wasn't the punks' fear of being analysed to death that started a new revolution within the Finnish scene, but had the punk youth been aware of academia's interest, it might have served as further motivation to turn their backs on its now-institutionalised '77 variety. In fact, the Finnish 'punkademics' had already fallen behind the times. A new generation was re-inventing the style and to Blomstedt's and Saarinen's merit, it could be said that at least their comment about the state of literature would seem to fit this development. For the hardcore punks, *punk was too serious a thing to be left to the punk-rockers, who did not dare to make mistakes anymore.*

In Finland, unlike the UK where confusion whether to call bands like Discharge 'hardcore' or 'street punk' still lingers, the new faster and rawer 1980s punk was called hardcore nearly straight away. Many older punks saw the hardcore kids as a threat, something akin to what punk had been for complacent rock. Arto (b. 1965), who lived through the transformation, later becoming the editor of seminal Finnish zine *Toinen Vaihtoehto*, sees hardcore as a continuation and a necessary renewal, not as a death of something old and a beginning of something new. At the same time, he agrees that the transformation included a generational feud:

The people who participated in the first wave but still got excited about hardcore were very scarce. You can see it if you read for example some of Miettinen's writings, he totally brushed hardcore aside, he didn't understand it one bit, not one bit. In his opinion it was horrible shit. Complete and utter shit. He somehow fell into the same trap as, if you think about when punk emerged, what the rock crowd thought of punk rock: that it's horrible shit, no melodies, no nothing, completely unbearable shit. (Arto interview, 2017)

Despite the fact that the two terms 'punk' and 'hardcore' are often used interchangeably, the differences are noticeable on many levels. Still, one cannot stress enough that we are speaking of punk when we speak of hardcore, as Arto put it: 'Although I listen mostly to hardcore, hardcore punk, I don't say: "I am hardcore", but: "I'm punk"'. Therefore, it might

also have been more fitting if the following description by photographer Juha Inkinen, who documented the Finnish scene in the early 1980s, would have rather made a distinction between punk-rock and hardcore punk:

Punk had melodies – hardcore did not.
Punk was national – hardcore global.
Punk was romantic – hardcore nihilistic.
Punk was centred on the individual – hardcore was societal.
Punk was visible in the media – hardcore was underground. (2009, p. 9)

Although it is true, as pointed out by Bestley, Dines, Gordon and Guerra (2021), that the evolution of hardcore punk in practice led to a narrowing of the field of punk as its aesthetics became more tightly defined, it is still a challenge to arrive at an all-encompassing definition. However, some of the main issues are brought together in Inkinen's description and each of the points merits a deeper look.

Punk had melodies – hardcore did not. Although to the untrained ear and in the context of 1970s, punk rock may have sounded harsh and unmelodic, it certainly had melodies. The riffs and vocal lines of, say, The Clash or Buzzcocks are not significantly less melodic or catchy than many pop songs – the difference was more evident in the attitude. While melodies are not completely absent from hardcore punk, they are certainly crude in comparison. What was important for hardcore was the drive and the frenzy, or as Arto put it: 'hardcore was faster, more aggressive, more direct, more simplified, rawer and angrier' and its Finnish '82 variety 'even more aggressive, primitive and chaotic than the HC made in many other countries at the time' (quoted in Inkinen, 2009, p. 32). Of course, it can be argued that even the harshest noises carry a tonality, however, what is important here is the intention – hardcore punks often *wanted* to sound rough-hewn, distorted and even anti-musical. With this move, from almost radio-friendly rock and roll with a bad attitude, to a deformed and raw sonic assault, the style reversed the common evolution of musical genres towards refinement. Luigi (b. 1965), Finnish punk musician, known from

groups such as Takuu, Alamaailma and Painajainen (amongst others) had grown up with punk rock, but was coming of age with hardcore:

The funny thing about punk turning into hardcore was that in between there was that god damn new wave crap that you could not listen to at all. I was really disappointed that it was such shit, that punk had turned into this fucking crap. Then it was a true joy to hear something like Lama, cos even Pelle [Miljoona] had loosened his grip. But what I mean is after hardcore emerged you couldn't anymore, you couldn't listen to these '77 punk bands, it sounded damn lame and basically like *iskelmä* [Finnish traditional schlager] to my ears. [...] From those few chords, the few that punk still retained, hardcore stripped away even those few and added speed and expressed things in an even more direct way, more crystallised. (Luigi interview, 2018)

Although punk-rock *represented* noise in a symbolic level, hardcore took to the structuring of noises more literally. Even if some Finnish hardcore bands had melodies that could even be considered catchy, others would go on to expel harmony and recurrence almost completely to make room for unrestrained musical destruction. As Masa (b. 1964) from Tampere groups Antikeho, Bastards, Protesti and Kuollet Kukat pointed out: 'In a sense we [referring to Bastards] had this idea that we play the kind of music that our parents won't listen to. In a way, like, if they had started getting used to, say, Ramones or something, we needed to turn it up a notch' (Masa interview, 2017).

Punk was national – hardcore global. Although punk-rock had already been a global phenomenon, the connections between punk scenes of different countries had still been in formation, and the concept of a global punk scene had not yet been well-established. However, together with the hardcore explosion in Finland, there was a realisation that underground punk scenes had flourished also elsewhere. Sburg (born in the early 1960s) documented the shift to hardcore as the editor of the punk zine *Laama*: 'One of the biggest changes was internationalisation. Hardcore spread also to the third world countries, commencing a worldwide grassroots interaction between punks from different countries. At first, apart from traditional pen-pal-ship, it was mostly about exchanging records and

zines' (Sburg email interview, 2017). Finnish hardcore groups realised that there was a world of potential listeners out there, and began disseminating their music through the network that was forming around underground punk. In addition to individual communications, the information about punk in far-away countries typically spread through scene-reports published in local zines that would usually feature a short list of the most important bands of a given scene, perhaps a brief discussion on the local political climate as well as contact information for local zines and labels. For example, in just one issue of *Laama* (#10) there were no less than eight scene reports: Japan, Poland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Norway and France. Arto cites the scene reports in the San Francisco based *Maximumrocknroll* as a source where one would get glimpses into the realities of punks across the globe:

That opened up the extra-musical meaning of punk: what it means, that it isn't such a small thing, and actually, why are these guys in Venezuela or Colombia or Brazil, why are they also making punk and what do they have to say and what are their premises? Some might get interested in knowing about the history of the country, 'oh, here they have a military junta', and things like that, there is military dictatorship and these guys are risking their lives over there. And then you read about punks in the eastern bloc, when a policeman sees them, they start with the truncheon, take them into custody and shave off their mohawks. I thought like 'wait a minute, others are doing this stuff, and it's a bit different than over here'. (Arto interview, 2017)

Arto goes on to explain that these glimpses have not only provided him with more information in order to better understand other cultures, but also made him feel like a part of something bigger:

This has probably enabled me to think of punk as like a political thing, and like a spiritual thing, an ideological thing, outside of the music. And that there are all kinds of people from many countries and different cultures involved, and that in a way punk forms, to the people from different cultures, their own uniform culture where they are free to encounter each other. Punk is a diaspora culture of sorts. (Arto interview, 2017)

This realisation was important to many Finnish punks who up to this point had been existing in relative isolation. Many interviewees referred to the role played by soap in these

exchanges; previously, soap had been important for punks when spiking their hair, now it enabled free communication and a free flow of punk goods worldwide. Postage stamps were soaped in order to later be able to rub the postmark out, so the stamps could be sent back and re-used. This was a technique used globally and it accelerated the pace in which punk's cultural products and ideas would spread internationally. In figure five an extract from a British zine *Radical Hedgehog* provides instructions for the practice.

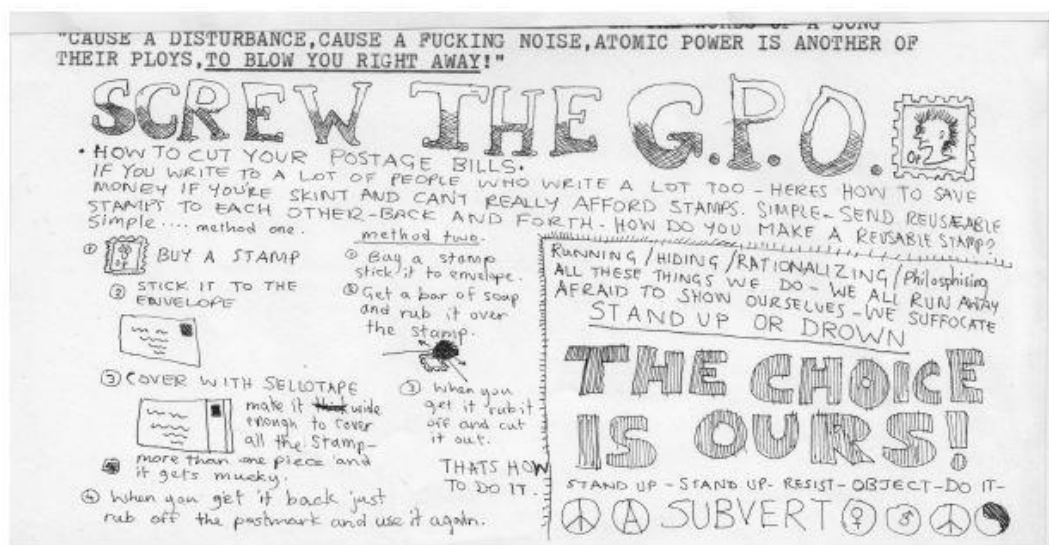


Figure 5: How to cut your postage bills – extract from *Radical Hedgehog* #4. (source: Bull and Dines, 2017)

Punk was romantic – hardcore nihilistic. Although Inkinen was in all likeness referring to an idealised view of reality rather than the Romantic movement, according to Lewin and Williams (2009) punk can also be seen as a Romantic quest for self-discovery. Even if Lewin and Williams did not make distinctions between different genres of punk nor reveal what kind of punk their informants listened to, in a broad sense, their statement seems to fit the experience of punks from different factions and different eras. At the same time, it would be safe to assume that their interviewees were probably not gutter punks with a penchant for hardcore. Despite the fact that hardcore punk has no unified voice, both the music and the message was rawer and more chaotic. Although the mood of the music was often sombre, at the same time Finnish hardcore was naïve, idealistic and revelrous. In

addition, rather than to merely destroy, the hardcore punks wanted to build something new and to have fun in the process, although to some, fun had its self-destructive elements. But even punk rock already had its nihilistic and self-destructive aspects, and Albiez (2011) has suggested that its audiences were in fact drawn by the paradox between joy and nihilism. Actually, nihilism may not necessary even clash with Romanticism as Jones (2002) has seen the discursive negativity in punk, its nihilism, despair, (self-)hatred and cynical laughter as ‘more akin to what Bakhtin saw as the unregenerative “cold humor” of Romanticism’ (p. 34).

Like punk, Romanticism is not wholly unambiguous, but in all events, it should be noted that whatever connections have been produced between them, most punks would not have been aware that their participation in the punk scene was inspired by Romantic ideals (Pattison, 1987). However, as hardcore also had some Romantic elements, such as the insistence in doing-it-yourself, perhaps it would have been more accurate, instead of a complete reversal, to state that some of the romanticism was replaced by nihilism, a sentiment also more fitting to the times. With world on the brink of a nuclear conflict the ‘no future’ proclamation was starting to become very real. Hardcore punk emphasized this both in its harsh sound as well as in its self-destructive ethos. If the world was coming to an end, what difference did anything make in the face of nuclear apocalypse? There was no time to keep perfecting the music or the message; if tomorrow we all may vanish in a bright flash of a thermonuclear explosion we might as well choke in our own vomit today.

Punk was centred on the individual – hardcore was societal. Somewhat paradoxically, Inkinen’s next statement is that in addition to being nihilistic, hardcore punk was also concerned with the society at large. Perhaps these sentiments could be seen as forming separate factions, often however, both nihilism and idealistic societal concerns co-existed within the work of the same group. At times the hardcore punks were eager to point

out the grievances in the ‘system’ or in the ‘scene’ with the hope of changing some of them, and at other moments, a more cynical mood invited alcohol abuse, violence, vandalism and self-destruction. What I believe Inkinen refers to are hardcore’s idealistic moments that coincided with the political awakening of punk, and as with everything else, this was taken to extremes. Jari commented further on the politicisation through hardcore:

If you think about the first punk wave in ‘76-77 there were already some quite societal messages and commentaries, but mostly it was like about ‘you’ – free yourself. That when you’re pissed off, do something about it. You don’t necessarily have to change the society, just like change your surroundings. Then the extreme politicisation, it began exactly through hardcore. (Jari interview, 2018)

However, the politics of Finnish hardcore cannot be defined in partisan terms: fascism, communism and capitalism are merely different ‘systems’ to be resisted. In fact, the oft-appearing anarchy symbol, instead of a dedication to anarchist philosophies, usually meant a refusal of politics and a dissatisfaction with all ideologies – a vote for chaos. On the other hand, to some, anarchy really meant radical politics and sometimes the opposition to everything was so total that it may have even hindered the cause, resulting in petty bickering over how the ‘system’ needed to be resisted. Jari remembers a telling episode from Puntala Rock punk festival in 1983:

Some old grandmas were selling coffee at the festival, coffee and sweet buns, great, even I bought some. So, while I was queuing up, a punk-acquaintance came to talk to me and started mocking them for selling coffee. Like ‘fucking exploiters’. [...] I found it funny, like ‘let the grandmas sell coffee and buns’ – I didn’t like see the great flaw in world politics there. This type gathered a lot of momentum back then. To me it was a bit strange. I didn’t see a role for myself in this very strongly. And that also divided the crew, everything became so serious that eventually even the person drinking the coffee was now guilty, even though they did not mean to comment anything by it. (Jari interview, 2018)

This kind of over-politicising and interior surveillance of the scene resulted in divisions around the world, and still today there are tensions between ‘politically correct’ groups and those that see the circled A in terms of chaos and destruction. However, in the Finnish

context, in the absence of a separate anarcho-punk scene, some of its ideas were incorporated into hardcore and the splintering was most evident between generations. Sburg sees hardcore as the new radicalised punk and the independence as a unifying factor, as well as one of the most important differences between older punk and hardcore. Not to say that Finnish hardcore scene would have been fully independent or politically correct, however, compared to older punk, there were more independent efforts and outspoken anger directed at the grievances of the system. Punk's political awakening through hardcore and the resulting DIY stance also entailed a clean break with punk rock's flirtatious relationship with the media.

Punk was visible in the media – hardcore was underground. While also in Finland punk was widely discussed in the media when it emerged, hardcore punk embraced the DIY ethos, disregarded the media, and the feeling was mutual. With almost the sole exception of *Soundi*, hardcore was featured in the music media only fleetingly. Like many who had been punk rockers already in the 1970s, Ile (b. 1966), the singer of noisy hardcore group Kuolema had heard punk rock for the first time on the radio and noted the contrasting silent treatment that hardcore received. He attributes it to the fact that as the novelty of punk wore off, so did the interest of rock journalists:

I think that was it, that it [punk rock] was different because then it was new. When there was hardcore, it was probably never played on the radio. I've heard *Ääretön joulu*, the EP, being played, and even that, they played a few seconds of each song and stated: 'that was the shittiest record of the month', and that was it. (Ile interview, 2018)

Despite the fact that radio, to which the Finnish government had held a strict monopoly up until the 1980s, was beginning to open up to commercial channels, the content was still rather dull. As a reaction to the declining numbers of young listeners and to answer the pleas of rock journalists and fans, the Finnish public broadcasting company allowed a two-hour slot three times a week for Rockradio at the turn of the decade. Although at first

Rockradio included some local punk, even their interest had quickly faded, as noted by Vote of the independent label P.Tuotanto: ‘punk has not been noticed at all anymore and if they make note of it, it is in the negative sense. to them it is just some laughable and childish phenomenon’ (*Laama* #10). Söderholm (1987) has acknowledged that even when Finnish punk groups started to gain recognition abroad, this went unnoticed by mainstream media. The underground fame that Finnish punk was starting to achieve should have been a noteworthy issue, however, if the mainstream media was not interested in punks or their achievements anymore, there was also no effort on the part of the hardcore punks to achieve media notoriety. More than that, the hardcore punks were happy working at the margins of society that wasn’t interested in them. Läski, the bass player of Pyhäkoulu, confirms that with hardcore, the cliché that youth were always left out did not apply: ‘We precisely wanted to be out’ (quoted in Inkinen, 2009, p. 67). Vertti, the drummer of Nussivat Nunnat, agrees: ‘HC did not aim at everyone listening to it and agreeing. HC-punks were not interested in acceptance’ (quoted in Inkinen, 2009, p. 108). In fact, the lack of acceptance from the outside meant that punk’s own channels of communication were strengthened.

Whereas most of my interviewees who were punks already in the 1970s had found the sound via mainstream media, the hardcore punks were forced to dig deeper in order to discover the exponents of the new sound, and zines were one of the most important channels to these discoveries. Luckily, zines such as *Laama*, *Kaaos*, *Ulo*, *Barabbas*, *Kärsä*, *Lihanukke* and many others provided information and served as an arena for dialogue about the scene – its sounds, its politics, its grievances and its sense of humour are recorded in these Xeroxed, glued and stapled testaments to the hardcore spirit. Therefore, this underground dialogue should be included in the discussion on Finnish hardcore (with focus on early to mid 1980s).

4.2 *Testimonies from the front*

The importance of the fanzine format for punk culture in a non-digital era can hardly be overestimated. This section deals more with what zines reveal about Finnish hardcore, and how these testimonies compare with some of the thoughts of the hardcore punks in hindsight, rather than the zines per se. Through the ideas of the zine writers, musicians and other scene members one can have a glimpse of how Finnish punks felt about music, about the state of the world, as well as the circumstances they were living in. Duncombe (1997) describes zines as ‘noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves’ (pp. 10-11). Sci-fi fans were already publishing zines in the 1930s, however, as Duncombe goes on to describe, ‘in the mid-1970s, the other defining influence on modern-day zines began as fans of punk rock music, ignored by and critical of the mainstream music press, started printing fanzines about their music and cultural scene’ (p. 11). To Duncombe a typical zine (although he recognises the problematic of using the word ‘typical’ in this context):

might start with a highly personalized editorial, then move into a couple of opinionated essays or rants criticizing, describing or extolling something or other, and then conclude with reviews of other zines, bands, books, and so forth. Spread throughout this would be poems, a story, reprints from the mass press (some for informal value, others as ironic commentary), and a few hand-drawn illustrations and comix. (p. 14)

This description would largely hold also in the Finnish context, although there was more focus on band interviews and record reviews than reviews of books or rants and essays.

Punk’s compatibility with the zine format was evident from the start. In fact, one reason for the use of the moniker was actually an American zine called *Punk*, first issued in 1975. However, this publication was a much more ‘professional’ effort and therefore the highly influential UK zine *Sniffin’ Glue*, which had a more rough and ready aesthetic, has often been credited with initiating the punk zine format:

Sniffin' Glue was not so much badly written as barely written; grammar was non-existent, layout was haphazard, headlines were usually just written in felt tip, swearwords were often used in lieu of a reasoned argument [...] all of which gave Sniffin' Glue its urgency and relevance. (Fletcher, 2001)

Sniffin' Glue, like the punk music that inspired it, really gave the impression that 'anyone can do it'. As Jones (2002) has noted, the transgressive grammatical errors, slang and swearwords were seen as something akin to what Bakhtin has termed 'elements of freedom'. Worley (2018) sees *Sniffin' Glue* as fundamental to what followed – the zine format supported punk's DIY ethos and allowed emerging writers to participate in the culture:

Simultaneously, *Sniffin' Glue* and the zines it inspired affirmed the DIY ethos associated with punk, embodying a cut 'n' paste aesthetic that signified qualities of immediacy, dissonance and irreverence [...] writing a fanzine enabled access to an emergent culture through which to trace, celebrate and shape its development. (p. 55)

What could not have been anticipated at the time was that *Sniffin' Glue*'s sphere of influence would grow to be even larger and although in Finland zines first existed only in imagination, they still served as inspiration (Paaso, 2015). Soon however the punk zine culture blossomed and Paaso has marked the year 1979 as the breakthrough of independent punk zines in the Finnish context, counting that roughly 70 new publications saw the light of the day. Overall, Paaso counts that over 300 different independent punk zines were published in Finland during 1977-82, however, with the decline of punk fashion, the number of zines started to decrease and in 1982 there were 'only' 30 new zines.

The roots of DIY zines are deep in the Finnish underground, with independent zines such as *Kastor*, *Ultra* and *Aamurusko* already challenging the status quo in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the sheer number of zines that were published a decade later shows that punk ushered in a new era of grassroots cultural production. As Worley points out above, the zine format democratised the opportunity to participate in the culture, and furthermore, made it possible to participate without co-conspirators. Zines were

increasingly important to punks in small towns that did not have an active scene to rely on and some of the most vibrant examples originated far from big cities: *Ulo* in Korpilahti, *Lihanukke* in Valtimo, *Kaaos* in Toijala, *Propaganda* in Hauho, *Kärsä* in Kärsämäki, all municipalities with less than 10 000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the zine was an access point to people who, although fans of the style, did not necessarily want to become musicians: ‘I had never dreamed of playing, not even about playing HC. But when I saw zines I knew this was my channel of communication’, commented Hilu (quoted in, Inkinen, 2009 p. 19). Worley (2018) sees the importance of the zine also in the sense that it created a counter-narrative that was easier to relate to due to its proximity to the reality of the readers:

Punk’s fanzines opened up a cultural space. Not only did they allow for creative and political expression, but they also enabled a means of intervention. Most importantly, perhaps, they offered a site to claim, contest and retain a sense of cultural ownership in the face of media distortion or wider disinterest [...] Beneath any prevailing cultural narrative, be it defined in newsprint or captured on film to be replayed over and over as disembodied spectacle, lay alternate interpretations scribbled, typed and held together with glue and staples. In fanzines we find cultures recorded from the bottom-up rather than the top-down. (p. 56)

Indeed, whatever the media had said (or in the case of hardcore left unsaid) about punk could be discussed in the zines. Again, the fact that hardcore almost demanded roughness from all of its expressions meant that these young journalists and graphic designers did not need to worry about their publications not meeting with journalistic demands – colouring over the lines was encouraged and the more you disregarded grammar, as well as the conventions of music journalism, the punker the outcome.¹²

By the end of 1981 *Kaaos* had reached its fifth issue and hardcore, which some of the Finnish zines were at first referring to as *uuspunk* (‘neo-punk’), was beginning to take off. Alongside reports of wild concerts by The Exploited and Dead Kennedys, the editor

¹² In many of the following examples taken from zines there are missing authors, dates, capitals, commas, page numbers and so on, however, in the context of zine extracts I have opted to leave them as they are, without using (sic).

Saarinen included pieces on local groups, for instance an account of a Tampere based group called Chaos referred to as a 'Hardcore Punk Explosion':

We are a political group, but not in terms of party politics. We are against the right and the left, but we're still working-class blokes, poor and born to lose. [...] we have no plans how long we are going to go on for. We will stop when we aren't interested anymore or when we develop too much. That would not be Chaos but music. (*Kaaos* #5, pp. 37-38)

By *Kaaos* #6, the first issue of 1982, Chaos had become Kaaos (unaffiliated with the zine) and again interviewed by Saarinen, the band now cited 'all "hard" hardcore bands, especially the super-fast American ones' (p. 9) as their influence. Kaaos stated that they are different from the '77-78 punk bands, not only because they are faster, but also because in comparison they lack musical skill. Jakke, the guitarist-turned-vocalist claimed it was a question of sincerity: 'we are much more honest than these little rock-stars from a few years ago. All of the current punk things that have formed are real' (p. 9). Punk had fallen out of fashion and this automatically made it more honest; those who had stayed were punks because they genuinely felt it, and the new recruits were getting into punk out of interest in something marginal, not something fashionable.

In band interviews, the most common element in Finnish hardcore zines, the question about the group's influences is usually amongst the first. Although a number of foreign bands are mentioned, they are nearly always given a secondary status in comparison to Discharge. Terveet Kädet, although the initial impulse to form the band came from hearing the Sex Pistols, cites their favourite band to be Discharge (*Kaaos* #8), as also seen from their leather jackets in figure six. In *Kärsä* #2 they declare their style to be 'Hard core punk (à la Discharge)' (p. 9) and in *Laama* #9 the band's vocalist Läjä comments how the influence was not only musical: 'the greatest influence for me has been DISCHARGE's lyrics. as you may notice. a minimalistic thing. within two lines you can say the issues of ten lines.' Although Läjä wrote also about war, some of his lyrics were criticised for being

enigmatic, at times speaking of green bicycles or having a bed that was too short. Although content-wise Läjä's writing is certainly prolific and original, the power of brevity he was after was influenced by Discharge: 'they should come out as simple and as tight as possible. short as hell. two or three lines. but that's damn difficult' (*Laama* #9).



Figure 6: Terveet Kädet's leather jackets speak volumes about their devotion to Discharge. (source: http://www.cvltnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/556578_326948244051586_979675627_n.jpg [last accessed: 25.09.2021])

Most Finnish groups of the time recognise their debt to the group from Stoke-on-Trent. Bastards acknowledges that Discharge is their favourite band on different occasions (*Kaaos* #7, *Laama* #6, *Ulo* #15) and other groups such as Riistetyt (*Kaaos* #6), Vapaa Pääsy (*Kaaos* #7), Rattus (*Laama* #7) and Mellakka (*Kaaos* #9) cite them as their principal influence. Although the Finnish punks were rather unanimous on the subject of Discharge, to some their influence started to become overbearing. In *Laama* #6, Kaaos refers to the 'god' status of Discharge being too evident with many bands, and now cites the Bristol trio (Disorder, Chaos UK and Amebix) as their main influence.

The zines also reveal a common aspect with Discharge, which contributed to the urgency of the sound. The British group's legendary 10-track recording of *Why?* was made in less than three hours. However, since their early EP's had sold significantly well, Clay Records should have been in a position to provide more studio time and therefore the shortness of the session had been a choice. In Finland, at the start of the hardcore era, the recording costs were usually covered either by one-man independent labels (that sold significantly less records) or by the bands themselves, and therefore the studio sessions were short by necessity. The eight tracks comprising the Riistetyt 7" EP *Laki ja järjestys* had been recorded and mixed in eight hours and the band comments in *Kaaos* #6 that although this is not very much compared to some chart bands, it was enough since the previous time (the Kaaos/Cadgers session) they only had two hours to record four songs.

This may have been a blessing in disguise. As the Finnish groups started gaining notoriety, even abroad, the labels began to invest in more studio time. Yet the style often benefits from certain spontaneity and simplicity, and therefore this strategy could turn out to be counterproductive. When Kaaos first attempted to make a full-length recording, a longer stay in the studio resulted in disappointment:

Matti [*Kaaos* zine]: What happened in the end with the new LP?

Poko: At first it was supposed to come out on Propaganda and we went to Laser [studio] to make it. Well, it was a wanker place where they don't have a clue about punk.

M: Wasn't Poison [from Destrucktions] producing?

P: He was just sitting in the same room. [...] We spent altogether 57 hours at Laser and we didn't manage to do anything. You could not get the sounds right and the mix is all fucked up. It was like, we took each track on its own and even if you dropped a needle they got rid of the track. It was that sort of pigeon fucking. (*Kaaos* #10)

For Kaaos, 'enough' studio time actually meant too much studio time and it had a detrimental effect. Eventually the band entered studio JJ in their home town Tampere and, in a significantly shorter session, made the recording that became *Ristiinnaulittu kaaos*.

Although in comparison to hardcore, punk rock from the seventies sounded overproduced, in light of one of punk's first motivations – wanting to stand out from the overproduced rock dinosaurs – the search for crudity rather than for 'good sounds' represented continuity.

Despite differences resulting from the generational clash, there was continuity also ideologically: the idea of Eppu Normaali's 'Poliisi pamputtaa taas' ('Police is battering again') became 'Kytät on natsisikoja' ('Cops are nazi pigs') and the message of Kollaa Kestää's 'Jäähvyäiset aseille' ('Farewell to arms') was echoed in dozens of hardcore songs. However, for the most part, the zines confirm that the probe of societal grievances was not very deep and often the content of Finnish hardcore amounted to variations of the same anti-war and anti-system slogans. Politics and politicians were quickly dismissed as rubbish, the police were seen as pigs or nazis (or as in the case of Kaaos a combination of the two), and, of course, war was bad. Naturally, the hardcore kids were naïve, most of them were still in school, and some with healthy disdain towards education. Although Terveet Kädet vocalist Läjä is an example of an art-school educated hardcore punk, usually the resistance to the 'system' included the resistance to the school system. The following extract from *Soundi* shows how members of Bastards had been mocked even for going to high-school, and in addition, for not dressing up in the hardcore fashion:

Rike (guitar) and Masa (drums) are more like normal young men. Since these guys also graduated from high-school last spring, the other punks from Tampere don't always take them seriously. 'Riistetyt for example laugh at our appearance and our education, but they're not so serious – actually they're our friends. The problem is that some take jokes published in some zine too seriously. They would also believe if Riistetyt would jokingly say that communists are ugly and they should be killed. Lateri from Riistetyt is wondering, how high-school graduates can be punks. Yes, we are punks, if punk is what we understand it to be', Rike and Masa state. 'If punks are just shouting "fuck the cops" and breaking stuff, we don't even want to be punks'. (*Soundi*, 9/83)

Although Rike and Masa downplay the seriousness of some of the disputes in the zines, Vote's reaction below gives a different impression, citing bickering between the punks from Tampere and Helsinki and a lack of solidarity in the scene as a whole:

I would just like to write a few words about a thing that has started to piss me off quite a bit lately, namely that amongst the finnish punks there is no kind of solidarity or joint action. Always just fucking with each other. Is punk really its own worst enemy in finland? I've been imagining that our enemies were the cabinet, the church, the army and the system, but i guess it isn't so. The punks from tampere hate the ones from helsinki and the ones from helsinki hate the tampere punks, from the helsinki punks you hear how all the tampere punks are glue sniffers and from tampere punks how the in helsinki they are divas and assholes. (*Ulo* #13)

To Vote, although the punks in Helsinki seem to be united, they care little for bands from outside the capital, whereas the Tampere punks are divided, which he considers stupid. Vote sides with the bands from outside of the Tampere – Helsinki axis, whom he sees as potentially freer from stupid prejudices. In hindsight, Poko agrees that the Helsinki punks had their own circles, and observed the divisions in Tampere, but also found them a bit comical. However, disagreeing with the lack of unity, Poko rather sees that Finland-wide, the punk scene constituted a one big family:

I had so many friends, in Oulu, in Helsinki, Pietarsaari, everywhere. We were moving all the time, sometimes across Finland, from one friend to another. I spent the weekends, and even longer, at my friends all over the place. And then, erm, that was our family. It included probably hundreds of punks. It was kind of like we were outside of everything. And I despised a little the kind of normal, so-called normal life and family life, you couldn't even imagine it. It felt like everyone is wasting their time doing that, that it isn't the so-called real life at all. That this is the real life [laughs] that we are living. (Poko interview, 2018)

Although there were different points of view to the unity of the scene, on the whole, even if memory can be unreliable, the recollections of the interviewees seem to emphasise less on the divisions than evidence from the zines. While zines were indispensable channels of information at the time, and continue to be important as a collective memory of the scene, some of the writings were highly personal, and should not be taken to represent the opinion

of the scene as a whole. However, information obtained from zines is indispensable also for the following section which focusses on the invaluable contribution of independent labels in helping Finnish hardcore groups eternalise their sound and make it available for punks beyond the Finnish borders.

4.3 Putting Finland on the map

Although for example Terveet Kädet and Rattus released their early works themselves, many lacked the means, the determination or the organisational skills to follow their example. However, new groups were being constantly formed across the country, creating a demand for someone to take up the task of publishing records. While independence had its challenges, it also meant that a new generation of punks were freer to do as they saw fit with the culture that was handed down to them. As O'Connor (2008) has observed, while punk 'in 1977 was wide open to economic pressures [...] by the early 1980s punk had become a more or less autonomous field' (p. 4). Dunn (2016) describes how the people behind DIY labels are driven to releasing records by love for the cause, rather than love for profit:

They do so with little fanfare, and usually with little to no financial gain. More often than not, they do it as a labor of love. But there is more going on than just altruistic fans helping out their friends. DIY punk record labels embody alternative and counter-hegemonic forms of cultural practices in the modern capitalist world (p. 129).

Whether the people behind Finnish labels would have been consciously engaging in 'counter-hegemonic' activities or instead had other motives, their activities would have certainly counted as alternative. Of the labels that released hardcore punk in Finland only Poko Rekords operated on a larger scale, and even their interest in the style soon faded. The most important independent publishers that had faith in the new noisier sounds were

one-man operations that were instrumental to the vitality of the scene locally, and projected its music to the stream of punk records circulating in the underground abroad.

Although repeated interview requests to the persons behind two of the most important Finnish independent labels of the early 1980s, Vote Vasko of P.Tuotanto and Heikki Vilenius of Propaganda Records did not produce results, the history and importance of these two labels passes through the releases they produced and distributed, and has also been well-documented in zines. The early publications of P.Tuotanto and especially Vote's aptitude in record trading and distribution had a sizable impact on the scene, even earning him the title of 'godfather' of Finnish 80s punk (*Laama* #10). The label started when, after ordering Swedish punk records, Vote was asked if he knew of any stores that would be interested in stocking them. He decided to get some extra copies for himself and passed them on without difficulties (*Laama* #10). P.Tuotanto was founded as a distribution in the spring of 1979, and by the next year, in addition to Finnish independent releases, Vote had included imports from Switzerland, Germany and England to his list. A further development took place when the move towards a new rougher style of punk inspired Vote to begin publishing activities, and in 1981 P.Tuotanto released the *Punk ei ole kuollut* ('Punk's not dead') compilation. The tape featured mostly practice room recordings of unsigned bands and was approved by Sburg:

This is the first really epic feat from Vote and P.Tuotanto – a cultural achievement for the benefit of Finnish punk. Punk's not dead, exhibit one. This does what it is supposed to do – shows the doubters what real punk is about. This is it. If someone tells you anything different they have not understood what the thing is. If you don't like this, you don't like punk. What they offer in TV or the papers is not punk. Leave that alone. This is punk. (*Laama* #5)

Perhaps even more inspiring and ground-breaking was the label's first vinyl release, a split 7" between Kaaos and Cadgers (1981), a daringly noisy and lo-fi effort. At this point, globally, very few had pressed such rough recordings on vinyl, and the review in *Laama*

states that The Exploited, Motörhead and Lama seem like ‘computer programmed symphony music’ in comparison:

If a record can get more horrible than this then it will be art. the screaming, racketeering, raging and hating is non-stop, constantly at the limits of human capacity [...] if you don’t like it, you will hate it. if you like it, there is something wrong with your head. but i’ve always been a little bit like this... (*Laama* #5)

Apparently Sburg was not the only one who had something wrong with his head, since Luigi describes the effect that the record had on him in the following way:

When I heard it, I was doubled over with laughter like ‘wonderful fucking punk, like totally wonderful fucking punk. This is real, real punk’. It put you in a damn great mood because it had the right fucking spirit. It was of course immensely delightful to hear someone singing things like ‘cops are nazi pigs’ and ‘god damn mutherfuckers’. A great confrontational and scabby attitude, and when you looked at the cover, although I didn’t see the original cover, I had the second pressing, we were cackling at the appearance of the dudes like ‘fuck how scabby these guys look, we fucking have to go visit Tampere’. (Luigi interview, 2018)

Although in 1982 P.Tuotanto continued to publish essential records such as *Systeemi ei toimi* compilation EP and *Laki ja järjestys* EP by Riistetyt, the significance of the label as a publisher pales in comparison to its importance as a distributor. P.Tuotanto was responsible for a massive correspondence effort with punks abroad, and this resulted in copies of Finnish records making their way to the far ends of the earth, as well as similar records from abroad arriving to Finland. These cultural exchanges were based on passion, and in *Laama* #10 Vote states that although ideally, he would make a living by distributing records, it would require hiking up the prices, something he was not willing to do. However grassroots this activity may sound, as we will see in the following chapters, the impact of P.Tuotanto has been notable. Figures seven and eight are examples of ads placed by Vote to both Finnish and foreign zines and give an idea about the scale in which P.Tuotanto operated.

PUTTING FINLAND ON THE MAP

Propaganda compilation LP (35 songs).....8.00
 Riistetyt - Valtion vankina LP.....8.00
 Appendix - Raha ei oo mun valuttua LP.....8.00
 Rattus - WC räjähtää LP.....7.00
 Lase - LP.....8.00
 Varanen - Kaganaka '84 mini-LP.....5.00
 Bastards - Marissa cassette LP.....5.00
 Bastards - Marissa palaa EP.....3.00
 Kaos/Cadgers - 8 song EP.....3.00
 Kaos - Toteellinen kaos EP.....3.00
 OOO - Odeja ihmisille EP.....3.00
 Bucketeateri - Tervetuloa helvettiin EP.....3.00
 Puliti compilation EP.....3.00
 Shitlickers - Cracked copskulls EP.....3.00
 Huudutviitt - 9 song EP.....3.00
 Europe's Arm - 10 state ha bisogno..EP.....3.00
 Massmedia - Des jesus.....3.00
 Klutiat - Liberté LP.....3.00
 Klutiat - Liberté LP.....3.00
 Upright Citizens - Bombs of peace LP.....7.00
 Razors - Banned punx 12" EP.....6.00
 Buttocks - BUS EP.....3.00
 Buttocks - Kill the pigs EP.....3.00
 Harushrer - Menehal habe ich satt EP.....3.00
 Chaos 2 - Almaroch EP.....3.00
 Razor Blades - Hateful youth cassette LP.....5.00

P & P 7" 1 - 1.00 2-3 - 2.00 4-8 - 3.00 9-15 - 5.00
 12" 1 - 3.00 2-3 - 5.00 4-6 - 10.00
 cassettes same as 7" records
 checks payable to Voitto Vasko
 NO personal checks

P.TUOTANTO
 c/o Voitto Vasko
 76780 LAMMINMÄKI
 Finland

Figure 7: P.Tuotanto advertisement promoting European punk records in San Francisco based MRR. (source: Maximumrockroll #6, 1983)

P TUOTANTO

Propaganda kokoelma LP.....40,-
 Hard Core '83 kokoelma LP.....40,-
 OI3 - Takaisin todellisuuteen LP.....40,-
 Bastards - Järjetön maailma LP.....40,-
 Rattus - WC räjähtää LP.....28,-
 Terveet Kädet - LP.....30,-
 Rattus - Rajoitettu yhänsota EP.....12,-
 Terveet Kädet - Ääretön joulu EP.....12,-
 " - Kädet suojelee EP.....10,-
 Ratto - Ei paluuta EP.....12,-
 Appendix - Huora EP.....12,-
 Shitlickers - Cracked copskulls EP.....12,-
 Bristles - Don't give up EP.....12,-
 Anti-Cisex - Mapped ass EP.....12,-
 Electric Heads - Order EP.....12,-
 " - Anti-sex EP.....12,-
 Born B.C. - Power & privilege EP.....12,-
 Wretched - In nome dei loro EP.....12,-
 Innocentes - Miséria e fome EP.....15,-
 Olho Seco - Nada EP.....15,-
 Upright Citizens - Bombs of peace mini-LP...28,-
 Klutiat - Liberté mini-LP.....28,-
 Razors - Banned punx 12" EP.....25,-
 Buttocks - BUS EP.....12,-
 " - Kill the pigs EP.....12,-

Posti & pakkaus kulut:
 7" 1 - 2,- 2-3 - 3,- 4-8
 - 5,- 9-15 - 9,-
 12" 1 - 5,- 2-3 - 9,-

P.TUOTANTO
 c/o VOITTO VASKO
 76780 LAMMINMÄKI
 PUH: 958-35685

Figure 8: P.Tuotanto advertisement in Finnish zine Ulo. Vote was distributing records from all over the world and in addition to local releases, the ad contains groups from Brazil, Italy, UK, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. (source: Ulo #14, 1983)

In addition to offering foreign punk to locals at affordable prices, P.Tuotanto was *the* source for Finnish hardcore for counts of foreign distributions and individuals, often providing the first dose of Finnish hardcore brutality to unsuspecting listeners abroad. Although Vote's efforts were crucial especially for the global spread of Finnish hardcore, Propaganda Records was producing raw material (as well as controversy) on a larger scale.

Propaganda Records initially started as a zine based in Hauho, a small municipality between Tampere and Hämeenlinna. Paaso (2015), who sees that *Propaganda* was 'at the core of hardcore punk', states that the zine 'seemingly did not even attempt at readability, its pages having been stuffed to the brim with text spinning in all directions' (p. 61). The first issue, a Xeroxed stack that according to its maker is not intellectual, consists mostly of stream-of-consciousness scribbling ranging from cake recipes and poetry to record reviews and short opinion pieces, written mostly on a type writer and commented on the margins with a pencil. Vilenius acknowledges that the zine is comical and messy, and portrays these as desirable qualities in comparison to the more established *Hilse* which according to him was becoming 'more polished and more stupid' (*Propaganda* #2). Even when by its 10th issue the zine had grown into a printed publication with a circulation of 1000 copies, it remained true to its sloppy graphic design and the mix of type- and handwritten chaotic outbursts. By this time, *Propaganda* had moved to Helsinki and was starting to become known as Propaganda Records, however, the success of the label had not been self-evident from the start. Referring to the first Bastards EP, which was also Propaganda Records' first hardcore release, Masa remembers that in comparison to the label's initial (non-hardcore) investments it was a smash hit and paved the way for more:

The first Bastards EP, it came out in several different colours, I think it was already pressed in six different colours at the time. The pressings were like 500 per colour, so about 3000. But the thing was that somehow many of them ended up abroad. I don't know exactly how it worked out, but you could say they spread

all over the world. Both Vilenius and Vote, they used to trade records abroad, so they sent local ones and got foreign ones in exchange. (Masa interview, 2017)

Other releases on Propaganda Records in 1982 include full-length albums by Riistetyt (*Valtion vankina*) and Appendix (*Raha ei oo mun valuuttaa*), *Totaalinen Kaaos* EP by Kaaos, and the legendary sampler *Russia Bombs Finland* featuring eleven Finnish bands. In *Kaaos* #9 Vilenius cites his addiction with games of chance as the motivation behind the publishing activities: 'It's all due to gambling addiction. [...] You won't get any money, but you can satisfy the gambling addiction. I don't really understand why in Finland there are any record labels at all. This won't make you rich' (p. 22). Whether Propaganda Records was a profitable venture or not, in addition to advertising in zines both locally and abroad, Vilenius provided exposure to the label's output by sending out review copies. As seen from the example in figure nine, record reviews in Finnish zines were often as primitive as the music – a short reaction in one or two sentences – however they communicated to their readers that new noise was available.

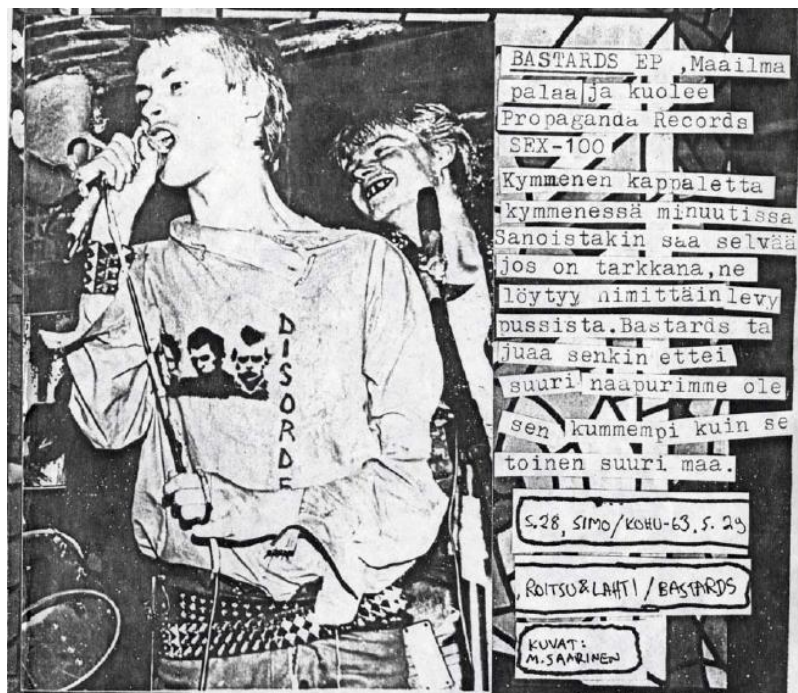


Figure 9: The (entire) review of the Bastards EP: 'Ten songs in ten minutes. You can even distinguish the lyrics if you pay attention, you can find them inside the sleeve, you see. Bastards also realises that our big neighbour is not that different from the other big country' (source: *Kärsä* #5, 1983)

If record reviews like this one did not leave much to comment on, they eventually grew in size and the level of analysis became deeper (even in Kärssä). The reviews in *Laama* gave the reader more to engage with, such as the following extract assessing the *Valtion Vankina* LP by Riistetyt:

I'd just say: Forget the gruel-punk bands. Helpless pop... Riistetyt sledgehammers EVERYONE to the ground. Lateri rages as he would be at the very least the angriest man in the world... Maybe the hardest shouter at the moment. Words you really can't (?) / don't even need to (?) distinguish. You get the scream anyway. And the playing goes on... What playing? Unscrupulous pummelling below the belt. Furious high-performance punk. Horrible roaring one after the other. Even the sounds are incredibly fine. You can hear the drums well and at times they (even the hits) are truly cruel. The guitar mangles your head with the sound barrier. One of the best Finnish guitar sounds. Physical distortion... One of the hardest records ever released. (*Laama* #8)

Riistetyt had made an impression on Sburg with their debut album, and the reviewer's chaotic writing style suits the music it is describing. However, not everyone felt the same way about the new sounds.

Interested in maintaining the orthodoxy of the field (Santoro, 2015), the old guard was less enthusiastic, and perhaps the most telling example of the resentment of punk rockers toward hardcore is Jyrki Siukonen's patronising review section titled 'Do what you can' in *Soundi* (5/83). In the 1970s Siukonen had been the drummer of (punk rock/new wave group) Kollaa Kestää that recorded for Poko Rekords. According to him, in musical terms, the three groups in review do well enough: *Rajoitettu ydinsota* EP by Rattus (released on Poko Rekords) is praised for its 'tightness'; the versatility and the successful 'micro-melodies' of Appendix's *Raha ei oo mun valuuttaa* LP get mentioned; even Riistetyt on *Valtion vankina* LP is seen as musically apt. However, hardcore as a musical style is dismissed as something that does not give the reviewer enough to write about, thus warranting a deeper look into the message:

Riistetyt are like a group of boys, who willingly drank a bottle of beer, peed in their pants and started shouting about how mistreated they are, how the world is

evil and the system is rotten, and there is even the threat of war god dammit, instead of shaping up and putting on a pair of dry diapers. (*Soundi* 5/83, p. 68)

Although the lyrics in the Riistetyt album are hardly an example of exceptionally creative punk writing, from Siukonen's extreme reaction one is tempted to conclude that the critique is also a result of the generational clash. Similarly, in the case of Rattus, Siukonen states that he is willing to forgive the simple monotony and the complete lack of melody in the songs, but again the immaturity of the lyrics is too much to dismiss:

Of course it is clear that the songs of Rattus do not need any magnificently floral stylistic devices or poetic meters, but frankly there is also no sense in this kind of helpless repeating of worn-out topics. If one has to sing about nuclear war (I cannot help but to suspect that the tenacious depicting of the end times and the bomb thematic of the current punks is more likely to be a part of the form than the content – which would naturally mean that there is no content), then the boys should put their heads together and come up with at least one figure of speech that would seem original, or even an entirely new approach. (*Soundi* 5/83, p. 68)

Criticised for repeated songs about war, punks have often used the argument that as long as there are wars, as long as there are nuclear stock piles, there is a reason to make another song about them. When it comes to Siukonen's speculations about the 'form' and 'content' of Rattus songs (I doubt these words came up when composing the songs in the practice room), it seems appropriate to refer to Adorno's view which sees that 'Form can only be the form of a content' (quoted in McClary, 2015, p. 82).

When it comes to the Appendix album, Siukonen states that although it is undeniably one of the best in its category, nevertheless it is full of rot, and not any more attached to reality:

The worldview offered by the album is void of any warm or homely emotions, cold and hopelessly shitty place, something reminiscent of John Carpenter's *Escape from New York*. However, it is hard to imagine that the life of the Appendix boys would in any way be such continuous wallowing in muck and bile, but since they are ferocious punks, of course they need to try their best. (*Soundi* 5/83, p. 68)

Although at the time the worldview of the hardcore ‘boys’ was not shared by Siukonen who was clearly irritated by their lack of finesse, recently he has remarked (with the authority of a Doctor of Arts) that ‘snobbery is a narrow view into art’ and that ‘elitism was not fitting for a worker’s city like Tampere’ (Lindberg, 2018). However, it is fairly unusual that a Finnish music journalist would have offered such harsh criticism – even if it was dissonant, hardcore seems to have struck a chord. The differences between the reviews of a punk-rocker-cum-rock-critic writing for a music paper and a hardcore fan writing for a zine are significant. To the former, hardcore represented everything that was bad about punk, and to the latter, everything that was essential.

For better or for worse, the groups recording for Propaganda got a significant amount of coverage from *Soundi* during 1983. Juntunen wrote a hardcore punk special entitled ‘Riistetyt, vihatut ja vainotut’ (‘Exploited, hated and persecuted’) for which Vilenius, Riistetyt, Kaaos and Bastards were interviewed (*Soundi*, 4/83). Other Propaganda groups interviewed over 1983 were: Appendix (*Soundi*, 9/83), Bastards (*Soundi*, 9/83), Terveet Kädet (*Soundi*, 10/83) and Kaaos (*Soundi*, 12/83). In the light of this, recording for Propaganda was advantageous to the groups: it gave them exposure they would not have gotten had they self-released the records. Although the output of Propaganda was enthusiastically received by the punks, and bands were eager to record for the label, there was also criticism.

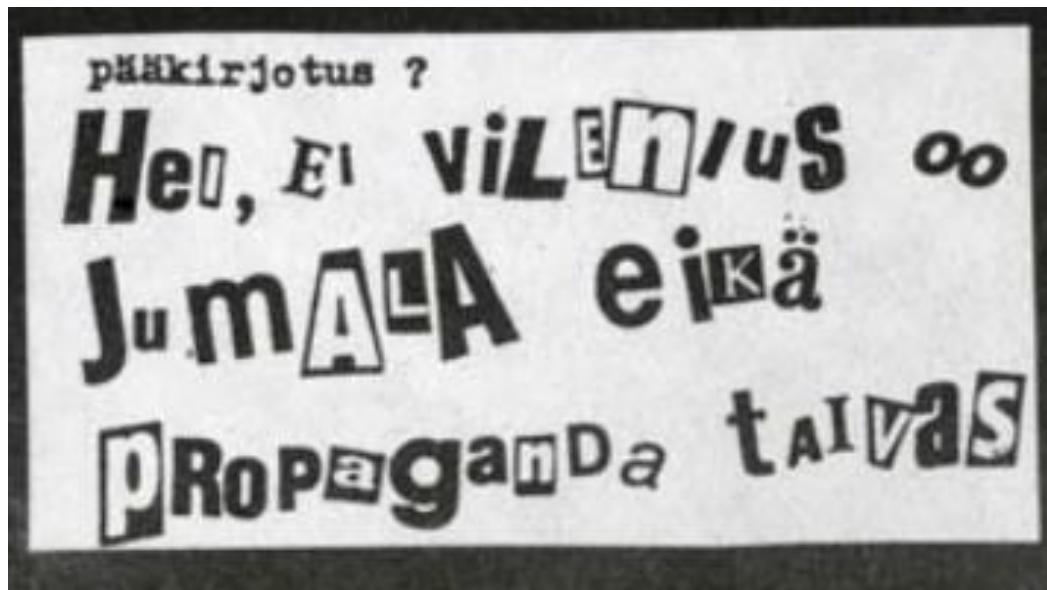


Figure 10: 'editorial? hey, vilenius is not god nor propaganda heaven'. (source: *Ulo* #15, 1984)

Seen in figure 10, the 'editorial' of *Ulo* #15 questions the 'god' status of Vilenius, reminding the readers that there are other alternatives. Some saw Vilenius as greedy, and simply by comparing prices in ads posted in zines by P.Tuotanto and Propaganda it was clear that Vilenius was charging more for the same records. As Propaganda releases continued coming out in a steady pace throughout 1983, more accusations of Vilenius taking advantage of the bands started to appear:

Matti (Kaaos zine): You've been called a con man, are there any foundations to this claim?

Heikki Vilenius: Neh punk bands are so poor that you cannot con them out of anything.

Matti: Riistetyt just complained that they didn't get any money out of Skitsofrenia.

Heikki: They got 5 records per person and they also got money. They wanted their share from Valtion vankina in records. (*Kaaos* #9)

Riistetyt were not alone in having frustrated feelings. Kaaos deserted the Propaganda camp and released their *Ristiinnaulittu Kaaos* LP on Barabbas Records. Although giving credit

to Vilenius for doing a great job at distribution, at the same time, Läjä accuses him not giving Terveet Kädet their share, and even so, keeping the prices of the records high:

But VILENIUS, even though he's an ok guy, he's conning the shit out of bands as well as 'customers'. At least to us nothing has been paid as of yet and from what I hear nor to the other bands, RIISTETYT, KAAOS etc. [...] Well Propaganda does allow us to make records cos we want to but fuck it if he doesn't start paying something. It won't work anymore Vilenius... (*Ulo* #15).

However, not all comments were negative and other bands showed appreciation for the fact that they got to make records, had artistic freedom and fair amounts of studio time. Saarinen, the editor of *Kaaos* thanks both Vilenius and Vote for the efforts they have made on behalf of Finnish punk:

And why the hell does everyone fuck with Vilenius. I suppose he will rip off as much as he has the nerve to and ask for comical prices for the records, but you don't have to buy them and for the bands publishing your own record is just as cheap as before. Stop crying and act... (*Kaaos* #9)

In *Laama* #9, Vilenius tries to explain the difficulties he had faced with delays at studios and pressing plants, as well as lazy bands that take too much time to deliver the artwork. Furthermore, answering the accusations of being a rip-off, Vilenius claims that financially the *Propaganda* '83 compilation LP was the greatest mistake of the year, pointing out that the bands also expect him to provide marketing and exposure, which he has attempted to do, although this always implies extra costs to the label. In addition, the bands lack booking agents, a gap he has also tried to fill by organising shows which always end up in the red. In the next issue Vilenius continues to defend himself, demanding more unity from the punks. He takes another stab at the bands, stating that abroad hardcore has evolved but the Finnish bands are still trying to sound like Riistetyt in '82. Again, Vilenius goes on to blame the bands for their lack of professionalism:

Once more there is not enough attention paid to the sounds – the same fuzz. This is about basic sounds – not about hours in the studio (oh the practice room) or about production. Abroad they make do with even less studio hours. It's about a

little bit of skill – about knowing what an amplifier or a set of drums are. Well in Finland it is so fucking difficult to make/get shows and too easy to make a record – too fashionable to make a record. (*Laama* #10)

From the outburst one gets the idea that Vilenius was as frustrated with the groups as they were with him, and although he is still calling for action, it seems that by this time a lack of motivation was starting to eat away at some of the ‘older’ bands and scene members.

Although most of the important publications were done by the two labels discussed above, it is worth remembering that many groups also self-released their recordings. In addition to Terveet Kädet and Rattus mentioned above, for example Maho Neitsyt, Varaus, Nukketeatteri and Tampere SS released most or all of their output themselves. There were also other independent labels such as Barabbas Records which, in addition to the full-length album by Kaaos, also released the debut LP of KTMK, *The Horse* LP by Terveet Kädet, and the influential compilation LP *Yalta Hi-life*. Even after P.Tuotanto and Propaganda ground their publishing activities into a near halt, there were others to pick up from where they left off. Although the late 1980s was globally significantly quieter than the first part of the decade, this did not mean that the activities ceased completely. In fact, in 1987, a compilation 7” on Ev-levyt (which after this release would be known as SHJ records) entitled *Suuren hiljaisuuden jälkeen* (‘After the Great Silence’) suggested that there in fact had been a period when punks seemed to have quieted down, but that this silence was now over. The turn of the decade saw the formation of new labels such as Alternative Action and Fight Records, both of which still continue their publishing efforts. Covering the later stages of Finnish hardcore however, would constitute a far too wide of a scope for the task at hand. The snowball of noise had been set in motion and for our purposes it is more relevant to take a closer look at the music itself and its connection with imperfections.

5 Finnish hardcore and the aesthetics of imperfection

‘Remember what Epipanius said about Sergius’s virtue: “simplicity without flourish”’

Andrei Rublev (dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, 1969)

‘The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense’

Joseph Conrad (‘A Familiar Preface’, 2006)

‘Most people do not realise the power which genius possesses, of comprehending the essence of a subject without the need of learning it laboriously’

Saw Throat, *Inde\$troY* (Manic Ears Records, 1989)

5.1 *Dancing to Disorder*

In the previous two chapters, the discussion has centred around Finnish punk and hardcore from a historical point of view, attempting to construct an image of how hardcore punk developed in Finland. As discussed above, the basic building blocks were obtained from foreign bands, however, if you listen carefully, there are notable differences to the Finnish sound. Is Finnish hardcore to be considered a specific style in its own right? Even if within the small niche of Finnish hardcore there is still too much variety to make generalisations, imperfection is an important characteristic across the board, not as a philosophy, but as a sign of authenticity. The imperfections may also have been one aspect that differentiated Finnish hardcore from some of the other budding scenes. Not that hardcore from other scenes would have been perfect, however, Finnish hardcore, even at its most dexterous, contained particularly rough edges that accentuated the rawness of the style. Hegarty (2007) has seen musical ineptitude as a ‘strong fundamentally noisy anti-cultural statement’, making a virtue out of an actual lack of skill:

The inept player will make many mistakes, or what are perceived as such. He or she will make choices and create combinations that are ‘wrong’, and this is what has led to the belief in the creativity that comes from a lack of preconceptions and a willingness to try out anything, even if badly. The results can be taken (and in punk, were) as more authentic, the lack of preconceptions allowing a greater creativity and personal expression to emerge. (p. 89)

The acceptance of musical ineptitude is also what makes the imperfections enjoyable – greatness was not measured by the complexity of a guitar solo, the right timing of the drum fill or the vocalist's correct pitch. As Hegarty notes: 'ineptitude of any sort undermines the notion of skill itself. Skill becomes a judgement, not a craft. Lack of skill is the judging of that judgement, and the ending of that judgement (as it loses its relevance)' (p. 99). Therefore, it may have been more important that the hardcore punks didn't always hit the mark, especially if it would have meant toning down the discharge of raw emotions.

Addressing the aesthetics of music, Hamilton (2007) discusses imperfections and concludes that often their impact is in fact positive. Although Hamilton's analysis revolves around improvisation in jazz and performance in classical music, many of his arguments also seem to fit hardcore punk. Although certainly not a style that relies on improvisation, in punk there is nevertheless a high level of spontaneity, starting from the creative process: the songs are not composed in the traditional sense, sometimes taking a fixed form only once recorded. Jypi (b. 1967) from the ranks of Poikkeustila and Kaaos (later also Kohu-63) attested to the importance of not thinking too much:

If you think too much about the music you are playing, or the music you are making, then you kind of lose that like, first of all, the playing loses its drive, and then, the music itself loses an authenticity of sorts. (Jypi interview, 2018)

According to Busoni's notion (quoted by Hamilton), something is in fact lost when the music is notated: 'The instant the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form' becoming 'fixed' or 'frozen' (p. 195). Therefore, punk music maintains the composer's inspiration more directly, however, since the compositions are less fixed prior to recording, they are sometimes 'frozen' in imperfect forms. However, due to this spontaneity, punk is able to maintain some of the freshness that is characteristic of improvisation. Even though when going out on a limb the improvising musician normally has years of preparation to fall back on, it is really the capacity of taking the leap that is important. This capacity of surrendering

to the unexpected was important also to Finnish hardcore, and although their songs would have been rehearsed prior to recording, some of these musicians were far from prepared. Nevertheless, leap they did, and sometimes landed on something that has a unique quality. As Hamilton notes, the 'improvised feel' can also be found in music that is not genuinely improvised and in fact, some Finnish hardcore records sound like the musicians would have followed Whitmer's 'General Basic Principles' for improvising musicians:

Don't look forward to a finished and complete entity. The idea must always be kept in a state of flux. An error may only be an unintentional rightness. Polishing is not at all the important thing; instead strive for a rough go-ahead energy. Do not be afraid of being in the wrong; just be afraid of being uninteresting. (quoted in Hamilton, 2007, p. 202)

In line with Hegarty's comment above, Hamilton (1990) recommends that the musician who wants to be sincerely creative 'will push himself into areas of expression which his technique may be unable to handle' (p. 336). The hardcore punks often pushed themselves far beyond what their technique could handle, however the move added musical sincerity. As Simon Frith (1996) has noted, different pleasures are offered by the musically complex and the musically simple, and the pleasures offered by the musically simple may be just as valuable as those derived from the musically complex. Instrumental dexterity is not a requirement for stirring emotions with music, in fact, overreliance on skill can be seen as a hinderance to the creation of music that is interesting and moving. Commenting on punk rock, Medhurst (2002) answers the accusation that the punks could not play their instruments with the standard response from punk rhetoric: 'it doesn't matter'. Medhurst suggests that it did not matter to the extent that the 'punk-ness of anything could be determined by its not-being-able-to-playness' (p. 226). If this attitude was clear with punk rock, hardcore in its more extreme forms, also outside of Finland, took the 'not-being-able-to-playness', and as a consequence the 'punk-ness', to hitherto unforeseen levels.



Figure 11: The jackets of Tampere SS members announce their Disorder influences. (source: Tampere SS: Sotaa, 1983)

In Finland, if Discharge was the all-round favourite, naturally there were other groups that had made an impact, and when it comes to the topic of this chapter, another British band aptly named Disorder is even more relevant (figure 12 shows Tampere SS's Disorder jackets). In fact, Disorder was mining a slightly different vein than Discharge, and although the latter hardly consisted of classically trained musicians, Disorder's music (as well as their attitude) was more off the rails. However, to some hardcore punks Disorder's brand of increased (musical) recklessness was like a siren's call. This direction took punk even further away from the mainstream as any ambitions to 'make it' were buried along with the metronome and the books on musical education. If mainstream punk had sounded rude and crude to some, underground punk, lacking the financial backing (and control) of major labels sounded much harsher in comparison. Still, Disorder made a global impact

with their early releases. The documentary film *UK/DK* (Collins, 1983), in which Disorder members are downing pints of what, judging from their reactions, must have been rather nasty cider, provides insights to Disorder's attitude: according to their singer Boobs 'just generally having a good laugh' would have been the group's main motivation. In fact, this part of the documentary brings about a certain familiarity with the feel of the Finnish punk scene, where the motives seem to often have been akin to Disorder's. Indeed, two Finnish hardcore veterans, Lättä and Lahti, the singers of Kohu-63 and Bastards respectively, have described the sound of Tampere as a 'drunken sound' or 'drunken mayhem' as Lahti confirms that they 'did not play sober' (Bottà, 2020, p. 137). Together with the encouragement found in the bottle, examples like Disorder whose mockery of musicality was evident, encouraged the young Finns to follow their lead, and even amplify the crudity.

Court (2017) analyses musical amateurism from several angles more related to popular music. He describes musical amateurism as: 'A characteristic set of beliefs, a body of knowledge, and a way of knowing, all organized around the principle that it is possible, and perhaps preferable, to play music without established musical knowledge' (p. 3). Working with the etymology of the word, Court defines the amateur as acting out of love for the music, whereas the professional is usually seeking economic gain. Still, his discussion on punk is limited to Sex Pistols, who were not entirely amateur in this sense, although his description above would fit some forms of DIY punk even better. The Finnish bands of course were unprofessional, and the first obstacle for many was how to acquire an electric guitar – some had also constructed amplifiers out of old tube radios. Hennion (2015) has seen that rather than being an agent manipulated by unknown forces, 'the amateur is a virtuoso of aesthetic, social, technical, mind and body experimentation' developing 'surprising techniques [...] to gather the conditions of their happiness' (p. 163). What was pushing the hardcore musicians to create despite the obstacles was their

enthusiasm. Jypi for one had started a band with his friends even before they had instruments (or the skill to play them). A couple of years younger than the 'older' hardcore punks (like his older brother who played the bass in Bastards), Jypi and his friends had a burning will to play and after a period of making a racket around the apartment in Hervanta, an infamously rough suburb of Tampere that was home to many punks (Bottà, 2020), the youngsters of Poikkeustila were told they could occasionally use Bastards' practice room downtown:

They let us in there to practice, so we can at least sometimes play at their practice room since our playing was mainly, before then, it was practically like beating on cardboard boxes in the living room. Massive will but no equipment, not even an electric guitar. [...] One of the first songs we made was probably some Disorder song like 'dammit let's write like Finnish lyrics to this you know, and then let's learn how to play it'. I think it was 'Poliisivaltio' which is a Disorder song, but then quite quickly you started making your own things. Dunno, of course what you listened to had an influence, there's no escaping that. (Jypi interview, 2018)

To the members of Poikkeustila, it was less intimidating to attempt to play like Disorder (their version was of 'Violent Crime'), which did not require a high level of musicianship but still could produce powerful results. Here, the outcome was also marked by the distance between what these youngsters set out to do, and what they managed to achieve:

Somehow that like intensity of hardcore clicked right away, and that was, it was fucking fantastic. And then in a way we were aping somehow, the sound came out of trying to ape the English bands but by accident creating your own, your own system, and I guess that's how it often happens. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Jypi used to often hang out with his older brother's band mates and he remembers observing a similar process of attempting to replicate a sound, but landing on another. In the case of Bastards, he witnessed a clear and conscious attempt to create the Discharge guitar sound, as well as emulate their style of riffing. However, failing to do so actually made the sound that much more honest:

I remember that (Rike) Jokela was always trying to find some Discharge guitar sound, but it isn't anything like that on the Bastards record, it's a hell of a lot

crummier version of the original sound. [...] Crumminess has also the good side to it that it is totally fucking honest, cos when you kind of try to ape something but in a way, you don't manage, it becomes your thing, and then you keep playing that thing of yours and it becomes yours for real, or something like that. (Jypi interview, 2018)

The permutation created by Bastards was crummier than the original, but in the process, originality had been added by accident. I have appropriated the term crumminess from the Finnish (as well as the Brazilian) punks, who have taken the word with negative connotations and given the meaning a contrary charge. The term was already used in my earlier research where I opted for this translation for the Finnish term *kämänen* (or *tosco* in Portuguese), for which there isn't a perfectly fitting term in English (Ullvén, 2016, pp. 36-38).

Whereas Poliisivaltio was an example of a group at the margins of an already marginal style, Bastards were more organised, and as a result, arguably more significant. Not only did they have equipment and a practice room, but also a label to support their efforts. Although complete amateurs when coming into punk, the members of Bastards had cut their teeth with their progenitor group Antikeho. Masa confirms that when it came to Bastards they already were somewhat conscious of the way they wanted to sound, and confirms that Rike was particularly concerned about his guitar sound:

We already kind of had a vision about how we wanted to sound, meaning that I recall how Rike had some Discharge album with him and said that the guitar sound should be along these lines. Well, the rest of us kind of didn't have a similar thing with our own instruments, but Rike was sort of very particular about his guitar sound, that it should be of a certain style and like a thick sound. (Masa interview, 2017)

Still, the end result was different from what the band aspired to since musically they were cruder than their role models, and even so had set the bar higher in terms of tempo. In fact, their chaotic sound may have been an 'unintentional rightness'. Jypi explained the appeal of music that is rough around the edges in the following way:

For people, crudity often brings to mind a sort of unpretentiousness, you know, it is associated with that because, the crudeness or crumminess, whatever you want to call it, it is honest, it does not pretend, and people probably can sense that in the music itself. (Jypi interview, 2018)

The sincerity of an unpolished recording made by amateur musicians meant that the listener was being offered a product that was unrefined, and therefore truer to the circumstances. This was also closer to the reality of the common punk than some of the punk rock recordings, which in 1977 may have sounded amateur, but were now revealed to have been produced and polished. This is what *real* punk should sound like!

If Bastards had a vision about the band's ideal sound, others described a less of a conscious process. Tomppa (b. 1962) from Rattus felt that hearing hardcore helped the band to evolve from punk rock to something that felt more like their own (email interview, 2015). To him they were not so much seeking a specific sound (at least not consciously) but just keeping the tempo as fast as they were able to. VP (b. 1964) agrees that searching for the sound was not very conscious for Rattus, also because since they were anyhow in a studio of sorts, everything sounded good and in addition there was little time or money for unnecessary polishing (email interview, 2015).

For Kaaos, the process of creating the band's sound also seems to have been more chaotic than conscious. By their full-length album *Ristiinnaulittu Kaaos*, released in 1984, the group had already been around a few years; however, one reason why the music kept its intended rawness was the ever-changing line up. There was, still, a sense of objective from Kaaos's part since the group had rejected the outcome of the previous session and decided to start from scratch. Although, according to both Jypi and Poko, they had no idea of what they were doing, this time they had the good fortune of having a suitable recording engineer. Heikki Silvennoinen, who had hardcore experience from working with Bastards and Riistetyt, despite being an established guitar player, apparently also had sympathy for amateur musicians:

I remember when we were recording the Kaaos album, Ristiinnaulittu, Vesku, who was from Orivesi, was playing the bass, and he had some crummy god damn 100 mark [less than 20 euro] bass and the neck was completely fucking twisted (laughs). Jukka Järvinen who nowadays plays in Popeda was there with Heikki and they were looking at the bass like ‘oh fuck this is horrible’ cos it would not play in tune. They were wringing the neck, they took the bass apart and tried to fix it and well, I guess they did manage to get it in some sort of shape although on the record it does sound like it’s quite out of tune. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Still, it was up to the musicians to make up their minds about what they wanted to sound like. Poko acknowledges that although when it came to the drumming there was a clear attempt to break the mould, at the same time, the recording process was haphazard and the resulting sound a combination of accidents:

I can’t say about that, how the sound was made, cos it came out on its own, it was just what we liked. Simply. Cos it wasn’t at all calculated, it was pure. [...] Very much half by accident, or entirely by accident. It’s an affair of the heart. (Poko interview, 2018)

Although from the part of the musicians, the effort to look for a fitting sound had been rather uncoordinated, it is safe to assume that Silvennoinen’s help had been important in capturing the heart of the chaos. The record stands out from the band’s discography as a more ‘mature’ work, with darker overtones, but still keeping in touch with the same primaeval rage as their earlier recordings. However, the opportunities to record varied from band to band, and Masa, who had also recorded with Silvennoinen when playing in Bastards, remembers another recording session that was more challenging:

It could have been the Protesti recording which we made in some studio, so there was a bloke who had never like recorded rock music of any kind but mostly some accordion and humppa music. So, for him it was a wondrous thing. In a way, at least Hesu Silvennoinen had some kind of a background in rock, of course this was a slightly different affair. (Masa interview, 2017)

Of course, the situation described by Masa sounds like a recipe for disaster. However, depending on what the band was proposing to do, like with Protesti’s brand of musical recklessness, the combination may have resulted in something original. Luigi’s ample experience as a punk musician in many different groups, some of them of a particularly

harsh variety, lead him to the conclusion that accidents may bear surprising fruit. In the example of Alamaailma, an error was clearly an unintentional rightness:

It was an accidental gunshot [laughs]. [...] When Takuu guitarist at whose parents – erm, we played in the storage room of their sauna – when the guitarist was called in to have dinner, there was always a couple of friends to see the practice and drink beer. So, we came up with a pass-time and took up instruments that we for sure didn't know how to play. Then the guitarist, he started getting pissed off with that, so he always detuned the guitar before going to eat, but we just got more excited like 'good, good' [laughs]. (Luigi interview, 2018)

During the dinner breaks, Alamaailma 'composed' a number of songs, and when their primary group Takuu went to the recording studio, they took the opportunity and made a recording using the same studio time. The resulting racket has its merits, and Luigi believes that the secret behind the appeal of the sound of Alamaailma is that despite its limitations it transmits the good mood that the musicians had when making it:

There you have an image of the zeitgeist. [...] I think the thing is the feeling that it transmits. A good, a joy of doing, even though you do not know how to do a fucking thing, nothing. Simply that, this horrible racket, you remember how damn fun it was. (Luigi interview, 2018)

Of course, few listeners, even amongst punks, will have sympathy for music that was the result of incapable musicians making a recording with a bewildered sound technician. However, there are those like Luigi who cherish the effects of this kind of music:

Sympathetic crumminess, it sounds authentic, it doesn't sound forced. A little also due to the circumstances, cos these studio geezers as well, they've been totally fucking puzzled, like how the hell one is supposed to mix this, these guys just turn everything to full blast [laughs]. You just hear screeching and buzzing and then 'one, two, three, four'. In the beginning they didn't get it for real, like 'what the fuck, what are you supposed to do?' Because it was just like 'what fucking noise pollution?' That's what I assume, that it wasn't very soothing to anyone's ears. Like some so-called studio geezer who does it for a living, they must have been fucking terrified like 'what the fuck?' And on top of everything in those days the gang was also all sauced up, like 'now they'll break even the hardware, and vomit on the plush'. (Luigi interview, 2018)

What the music of Alamaailma communicates is a complete disregard even for the unwritten laws of punk. However, whether crumminess results in sympathy or confusion

depends largely if not entirely on the listener and even some fellow punks reacted negatively to the extremity. Reviewing the *Propaganda Hardcore* '83 sampler, filled with now-legendary specimens of Finnish hardcore, Rike from Bastards states that 'Alamaailma and Kuolema are really horrible. I do not know whether to laugh or to cry' (*Kaaos* #8).

5.2 'Stupendous to some'

Even the compilers of the bootleg sampler *Killed by Finnish Hardcore 1981-85*, who refer to themselves as three American fans, felt that the more extreme groups were passing the acceptable level of crumminess. The limited space on a 12" vinyl record forced the compilers to choose which bands were left out and, in the process, they ended up dividing Finnish hardcore roughly in two camps: the tight and the crummy:

we did leave out some notable Finnish bands of the early 80's who played more traditional Punk Rock, and several more whose song writing and recording quality we felt was not up to the level of most of the bands on this comp. (liner notes)

The compilers refer to the song-writing skills and the quality of the recordings as factors that affected their decisions, however, perhaps the only possible answer to the question of how much crumminess is good is in the ear of the listener. Of course, the 'tighter' groups would be more accessible to most, as also the example of three self-confessed fans of the style favouring them would suggest, however in my experience, the appreciation of crumminess has grown. It did not have an instant appeal, and learning to appreciate it was not a straightforward process, but rather more akin to a reward after exposure to sounds that were borderline unpalatable for extended periods. Although admittedly, part of the appeal of crumminess is based on obscurity and marginality, in musical terms, being able to withstand and even enjoy noise that others find too disturbing can also be seen as a test of endurance that separates the wheat from the chaff.

Although an expertly compiled album, some of the groups that were left out by the bootleggers are exactly the noisiest and unruliest hardcore bands such as Sekunda, Dachau, Takuu, Abortti 13, Protesti, Painajainen, Poikkeustila, Markkinointioperaatio and Alamaailma. Certainly, in broad musical terms, the well-known bands often have better production values and more capable musicians, while the more obscure camp consists of bands of rougher quality. Still, the compilers of *Killed by Finnish Hardcore* included Kuolema's 'Äpärä', describing it in the liner notes as an example of a 'particularly raw and noisy brand of thrash [...] a subgenre of Finnish hardcore into which we did not dare delve too deeply. It's short, fast, and sloppy. Second rate to some, stupendous to others.' The comment implies that the compilers included Kuolema, since they acknowledge that some find it stupendous. But why then is Kuolema stupendous to some?

In order to understand how punk songs have been analysed, I attempted to consult musicological sources that discuss punk. In his otherwise insightful analysis of punk culture, Dale (2012) offers a musicological study of 'Increase the Pressure' by Conflict that I found puzzling (pp. 140-143), and a similar reading into Crass song 'End Result' (pp. 143-148), showing that although 'anyone' can make punk music, dissecting it can be made into a complex affair. The outsider is left struggling with unfamiliar terminology: 'what the *tonic* is he talking about?' My ignorance of musicology hardly serves as a basis from which to criticise Dale's analysis, however, I cannot be alone amongst punk listeners when feeling uneasy faced with such a reading. Dale however seems to imply that the opposite is true when stating that the 'competent listener' capable of capturing 'harmonic uncertainty' in 'Increase the Pressure' would be 'the anarcho-punk "fan", whose ears are arguably more competent in this context than, say, a classically trained scholar' (p. 141). I doubt that many listeners of Conflict would discuss the harmonic uncertainties in their songs, but I stand to

be corrected. However, when Dale analyses 'End Result' we are again faced with mystifying terminology:

Whatever we make of this basic two-note intro, it is fair to say that it is not, in any clear sense, an enforcement of a pure harmonic I: in other words, it undermines the 'subjective' purity normally associated with the unimpeachable dominance, as it were, of the absolute tonic note in diatonic functionalism. (p. 143)

Eventually Dale does acknowledge that the performers themselves might be unfamiliar with much of the terminology, nevertheless, he imagines them having 'a high degree of consciousness' of the musical details that his analysis is based on (p. 145). Be that as it may, it is probable that the musicians spent less time writing the song than Dale does analysing it. In all fairness, Dale offers also a more down-to-earth analysis that is relevant for the chapter at hand when he states that 'For many punks the fact that the music is a bunch of crap is precisely what's great about it' (p. 191) and that 'there is every reason to believe that many punk fans actively enjoy hearing "mistakes" on recordings' (p.159).

Another example of punk musicology, Easley's (2015) analysis of the guitar riff schemes of early American hardcore punk, although using somewhat less mystifying language, also makes the music it analyses seem trivial and uninteresting. Or as McClary and Walser (1990) put it: 'The studies of popular music that [...] are products of traditional musicological training [...] tend to make the music they deal with seem very poor stuff indeed' (p. 281). Using the example of blues, McClary and Walser argue that, in popular music, meaning is usually not found in pitch relationships, stating that 'the musical interest resides elsewhere, in the dimensions of music that musicology systematically overlooks' (p. 282). Discussing how musicology suffers when it comes to analysing rock music, McClary and Walser offer several explanations for this claim, concluding that musicological analysis of popular music is often a choice between poetic or technical mystification, failing to address whether the music 'kick's butt' or not. The problem that

traditional musicologists face when attempting to analyse rock music is that they would need to ‘deconstruct the premises of their discipline and all the theoretical tools they have inherited’ (p. 281). The analytical methods available are still ‘tied to those aspects of music that can be fixed or accounted for in notation’, however, popular music, let alone punk, is rarely annotated (p. 282). In addition, McClary and Walser criticise the musicological tradition for not recognising the interrelationships between music and society, however, due to a great extent to their criticism, most musicologists today do include the social in their analyses (Shepherd and Devine, 2015).

In turn, McClary and Walser also describe the problems of popular musicologists, who tend to suffer from overreliance on lyrical analysis, as well as still trying to control the music by means of a single totalising method, which leads to a failure to address the dimensions of music that are most compelling to the listener. McClary and Walser (1990) suggest that more attention should be paid to the aspects that ‘trigger adulation [...] Even if (especially if) those are just the aspects that strike terror in the scholar’s rational mind’ (p. 287). Although these dimensions that defy rationality are, of course, all the more difficult to analyse, it is nevertheless in these areas that much of what moves the listener happens:

Musicologists have been trained to perceive music through modes of ‘critical listening.’ Consequently, many of them tend to regard physically and emotionally oriented responses to music as naïve and childish. Yet if rock has any political power [...] then that power most likely does not reside in the sophisticated abstractions that the theoretically trained alone are able to discern. (p. 287)

As of late, there have been calls for a ‘public musicology’ that would make the field understandable and approachable for non-specialists, and perhaps also reveal what is it about music that appeals to the untrained listener. Court (2017) maintains that the discipline of musicology is grappling with its own crisis of knowledge, seeing that musicologists have ‘imagined an epistemological hierarchy in musical life and placed themselves at the top’

(p. 10), and that this self-justification has created the distance between them and the public. Although it might also be interesting to read a proper musicological analysis of the same song, I will attempt to make a small contribution of musicology from below in the form of an approachable account of a Finnish hardcore punk song, focussing not so much on the composition of the song itself, but placing emphasis also on performance and production.

‘Äpärä’ (‘Bastard’) by Kuolema, originally released on the *Propaganda* ’83 sampler, starts with the drummer giving four rapid strikes, three on the snare and one on the tom, followed by a hit on the crash cymbal. The practice room quality of the sound immediately hints at lo-fi obscurity. This is confirmed when at the cymbal hit, the rest of the band joins in, creating a first impression of total chaos. The guitar and bass completely cover the drumbeat apart from the cymbals, which bleed together with the guitar forming a hissing noise from which it is difficult to distinguish a riff or a rhythm. Even though the drums are nearly inaudible, at the same time the beat is ‘there’ and somehow the listener can feel that it is frenetic and lightning fast. The sound is penetrating and the strings keep repeating a texture that feels like a riff, or alternatively a broken power tool. The presence of the bass guitar is barely heard, although again with the help of imagination, one can feel it seeping into the cracks and crevices in the guitar sound. Understanding what is happening with the instruments is made ever more difficult by the constant rapid assault of psychotic vocals delivered by the singer who starts his maniacal delivery together with the bass and the guitar, seizing the listeners attention. The vocals dominate the sound scape, yet somehow it is impossible to understand what the first verse is trying to convey. The band is looping a structure that is repeated four times and on the last repetition the vocal line is better articulated and one understands that the singer utters ‘*tää on mun elämä*’ (‘this is my life’). The riff suddenly changes to an even more tightly compacted structure comprised only of two repeated chords, and eventually ending on a third one before crashing into a

wall. In the chorus the vocal performance is crystal-clear despite sounding like bits of the singer's vocal chords would be flying out with the words: '*Painu vittuun, painu vittuun, painu vittuun äpärrä!*' ('Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off you bastard!'). During the instrumental break the singer screams into the air: '*Et sä oo mua parempi!*' ('You're no better than me!'). Here we have arrived at 9 seconds.

Immediately after the singer is finished with his *a cappella* denial of hierarchies the drummer marks the same four hits heard in the beginning of the tune, and the second verse is comprised of chaotic musicianship similar to that of the first one. The vocals also resemble the first verse: the three first lines, no matter how many times you listen to the song, are indecipherable as if the vocalist would be mumbling until he reaches a line he can remember, which again is the last one before the song breaks into the chorus. The listener begins to realise that the chaotic nature of the first verse and chorus were intentional, since the second loop is nearly identical to the first. The solo vocal exclamation is repeated and the third verse begins once again with four drum hits.

This time however, the vocalist is not accompanying the band. Suddenly the riff becomes much more audible, and thus arguably more powerful. It clearly uses four chords with rapid fire picking. Although muffled into an extremely compressed package by the recording quality which sounds like the song was performed inside a cardboard box caught in a hurricane, the instrumental assault is surprisingly steady in its steamroller kind of primitive barrage. Right before entering the chorus the drummer throws in a clearly audible drum roll starting appropriately on the snare drum and rolling off to the tom to finish in time for the chorus. The vocal break on the third verse makes the final chorus stronger as the vocalist has had a few precious seconds to catch his breath. The wish that the bastard would 'fuck off' is repeated and similarly to the previous pattern the solo vocal line ends the song, while the cymbals are ringing in the afterglow (real punks don't choke cymbals).

Despite the extreme harshness of Kuolema, Ile, the vocalist declares himself to be a punk rocker at heart, citing Pelle Miljoona, Ratsia and Lama as his most important influences. This is how he explains his trajectory from a punk rock fan to the singer of one of the rawest groups of the era:

In my case it went like this, I started as a punk rocker, a so-called punk rocker, and the music simply like slid into that [hardcore], like music listened to and music played, since, like the original Kuolema was anyway more kind of punk, and then it became, due to lack of playing ability and such, it became hardcore [...] When you cannot play nicely, that's how it became hardcore. (Ile interview, 2017)

Although hardcore was also in vogue and this inevitably influenced Kuolema, Ile attributes the choice to the fact that his singing skills were not up to the task when it came to punk rock, but they served well enough for the purposes of hardcore:

I did have a punk band called Rampton, so that was punk, but I couldn't fucking sing. You see I never wanted to play, I've always wanted to be the singer. I wanted to be a singer, but I never knew how to sing, and I still don't, and that is why I became a hardcore singer [...] I just didn't manage. (Ile interview, 2017)

I asked Ile about the circumstances Kuolema was recording in to arrive at their primitive sound on 'Äpärä' and he revealed their DIY recording technique: the song was eternalised in the practice room with a portable cassette player. Did Kuolema search for the optimal spot to place the cassette player in or was it just randomly lumped anywhere? 'Yea, we did, we did, yes, yes, we did search for it. The, like the [cassette] LP, it's compiled from at least two, maybe even three sessions, so it wasn't a one-off,' Ile confirms. Even at the risk of sounding disrespectful, I was too curious to understand how Kuolema approached the process and learned that they were by all accounts attempting to play as well as possible:

Yes, yes, yes of course, yea, yea, to play well but aggressively, and shitty in a way, but shitty in a good way. Or angrily, not shitty, but angry, and in our own way, not shitty, but in our own way. No one wants to be the worst of the worst but like, it was the time, if we didn't manage better it's because we didn't know how, of course we tried, we didn't want to be bad. (Ile interview, 2017)

He doesn't see the recording as a result of either conscious choices or total chaos, but rather as a combination of the circumstances with their inabilities. Although the sound of Kuolema was dictated by limitations it is important that the band believed in their brand of noise despite its deficiencies. Acceptance of the limitations means that the sound can still be enjoyed today, and in the interim it has inspired many similar bands, whereas excessive musical vanity could have caused the band to discard their recordings.

5.3 *The (geo)politics of crumminess*

In addition to other arguments in favour of imperfection, Saito (1997) explains its beneficial effect in connection with accepting the challenges we face in the day to day as individuals. Using an example of chips and cracks in tea wares resulting from factors beyond the potter's control, Saito sees that the appreciation of these aspects 'encourages our acceptance of and submission to our condition of life' (1997, p. 83). Saito states that 'by not discarding the cracked tea bowl but rather cherishing such an object, this submission of one's ego to the natural processes receives a positive aesthetic endorsement' (p. 383). Although acceptance goes against punk philosophy, at the same time, recording with primitive equipment if nothing else is available, is certainly punk. Another example related to punk could be that even if squatting is a non-conformist way of life, it also involves accepting cracked tea ware, so to speak, out of necessity. Saito also addresses the difference between pots that were cracked and chipped because of inevitable circumstances, and others that were *designed* to appear defective. She quotes Yanagi's comparison between Korean peasant's bowls and Japanese tea wares made by connoisseurs to emulate the former, which recognises the difference between the two as 'between things born and things made' (p. 383). However, for Saito, appreciating only the 'born' kind of imperfections is a purist position, and to her made objects can also signal transience and

human surrender to natural processes. Hardcore punks however side with the purist position. Imperfection is not actively sought, nor is there an intention to strive for something idiosyncratic, but crumminess merely happens, born out of the limitations of the musicians:

Dunno if the folk making the music would have thought that ‘we are searching for some anomaly’ I think that they just have been doing that stuff at the limit of their capabilities, you know. That is the point, they have been doing what they can, as well as they can, and that is the result! It’s closer to the truth. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Although it is of course possible that some hardcore bands could have consciously played badly and managed to get away with it, the general consensus seems to be that one simply hears it when the crumminess is authentic and not by design. Jypi agrees that the intention to sound crude was there, however, that is not quite the same thing as intentional crumminess:

Probably afterwards it has also been done consciously, but I don’t believe that back in the early 80s it would have been conscious, like it could be that you consciously tried to find cruder and cruder sounds, that might have been deliberate, but I don’t think the purpose would have been to try to sound crummier you know. There’s a small difference. (Jypi interview, 2018)

However small, and perhaps impossible to authenticate, this difference is crucial. A recording that is not based on genuine ineptitude but an imitation of it would turn the music into a sort of parody of the style. However, imperfection can be an asset of unforeseeable value when the rawness is authentic and combined with passion and refinement in the right measure. Of course, not everyone would agree that the blend of rawness and refinement in the music of, say, Disorder, or Kuolema, is ideal, however since the right measure is determined by the listener, the bands that tip towards rawness and the people who listen to their music show that in this case there are no objective wrong or right answers.

Still, there is a certain amount of quality that is required of a given recording to be considered music even in the realm of hardcore punk. For Ile, hardcore was a way to

become a singer without knowing how to sing, which would suggest that hardcore further democratised punk, making it accessible even to those that found punk rock too challenging. However, when I suggested this to Masa he was quick to disagree: ‘I kind of have a different opinion on that because I think that like the ‘77 sort of punk is significantly easier to play than hardcore punk, like in my opinion, playing hardcore is significantly more demanding’ (Masa interview, 2017). Quite correctly, as a drummer, Masa points out that with the increase of tempo, the level of difficulty is also augmented. Hardcore lowered the bar in the sense that almost any noise would serve as legitimate, but on the other hand, playing ‘tight’ and fast hardcore demanded more musical chops than ‘77-punk. Court (2017) refers to Steve Waksman who has understood this as an ambivalent response to musical technique: while agreeing with the commentators that bestow meaning on musical ineptness, on the other hand he acknowledges that the speed and aggression, particularly of hardcore punk, present many technical challenges akin to the ‘new virtuosity’ of heavy metal. Blush (2010) describes the style’s speed mania in *American Hardcore*:

Hardcore music was unique in that it focused on speed and anger – it was all about playing as fast as possible. The more talented bands occasionally implemented mixtures of mid and fast tempos. Hardcore guitarists – with their newly-fashioned style of attack – ripped as fast as possible. Soloing represented traditional rock bullshit and was thus strictly forbidden, so these bands developed previously unheard rhythmic styles. Singers belted out words in an abrasive aggressive manner. Drummers played ultra-fast, in an elemental one-two-one-two. That insistence on quickness imposed limitations, which soon turned into assets. (p. 63)

The insistence on speed marked the hardcore sound also in Finland and after hearing American bands that were significantly faster than their UK counterparts, many Finnish groups became obsessed with fast tempos. In addition, Jypi saw the speed as a reaction to punk rock:

Yankee hardcore, I used to like it a lot, mainly Minor Threat, and they were fast compared to the Europeans, and maybe that’s where it originated. And maybe the speed was also some kind of commentary in a way about where the ‘77 punk had

ended up you know. It was a bit like ‘fuck it, this is like the new generation’, of course you didn’t really think in those terms, but like ‘this is how it’s done now’, like ‘now were doing a new thing, no more of that ‘77’. (Jypi interview, 2018)

The speed, and the technical challenges it created, differentiated hardcore from older punk: not only were the 1970s punks uninterested in hardcore, but the speed mania also meant that there was limited access. The speed also imposed another difficulty: retaining ‘groove’ while still playing as fast as possible. Although some would find it absurd to speak of a groove when it comes to hardcore punk, there certainly are important differences between a perfectly linear hardcore beat and a ‘groovy’ one, and in addition, there was something different about the Finnish hardcore ‘groove’.

Discussing the different ways that music affects us, Levitin (2006) recognises how a groove is at its best when not strictly organised – too much organisation would make it emotionally flat and robotic. While some Finnish hardcore drummers were certainly talented and well-rehearsed, it still is rather evident that they were self-taught. Others were clearly in the early stages in the process of learning how to play. However, this did not keep them from trying, and the urgency of the hardcore moment led many drummers into the recording studio when their drumming was still ‘fresh’. In addition, the approach of most Finnish hardcore drummers, that is, playing with brute strength rather than technique, emphasised the disorganisation. However, if a strictly organised rhythm would be considered emotionally flat and robotic as Levitin suggests, then by comparison, a groove that is disorganised ought to feel human and loaded with emotion:

Musicians generally agree that groove works best when it is not strictly metronomic—that is, when it is not perfectly machinelike. [...] the gold standard of groove is usually a drummer who changes the tempo slightly according to aesthetic and emotional nuances of the music; we say then that the rhythm track, that the drums, ‘breathe.’ (pp. 167-168)

The emotional nuances of Finnish hardcore can range from unhinged aggression to jovial teenage humor (even within the same song), and accordingly the tempo changes can be

drastic instead of slight – the drums sometimes ‘breathe’ rather heavily, and other times they are gasping for air. Continuing on the human-ness of irregularity, Levitin argues that a groove that is not perfectly linear also reflects our everyday existence which can be chaotic and uncertain:

Real conversations between people, real pleas of forgiveness, expressions of anger, courtship, storytelling, planning, and parenting don’t occur at the precise clips of a machine. To the extent that music is reflecting the dynamics of our emotional lives, and our interpersonal interactions, it needs to swell and contract, to speed up and slow down, to pause and reflect. (p. 168)

We can feel these timing variations because our brain has created a model of a constant pulse, so we know when a musician is deviating from it. The same occurs with melodies, as Dale (I think) tried to explain above when addressing Crass and Conflict; we also expect a melody to continue on a logical path and cringe (some of us with pleasure) if a note breaks this expectation:

Music communicates to us emotionally through systematic violations of expectations. These violations can occur in any domain—the domain of pitch, timbre, contour, rhythm, tempo, and so on—but occur they must. (Levitin, 2006, pp. 168-169)

Judging from Levitin’s notions of groove (he cites ‘Superstition’ by Stevie Wonder, ‘Super Freak’ by Rick James and Bruce Springsteen’s ‘I’m on Fire’), he might not be aware just how harsh these violations may get and might even object to calling a hardcore beat ‘groovy’ (as might some of the punks). The ‘violations’ Levitin speaks of are ever so slight that it is difficult to justify using such a harsh word, however the violations in Finnish hardcore punk are grave in comparison and justify the term, occurring in all of the domains mentioned above, and sometimes in all of them simultaneously. Although to some these violations are too grave to accept, to others, it is precisely this challenge to the expected that is interesting.

Some interviewees confirmed that although in hindsight it is easy to read political comment into the unruliness of the Finnish sound, at the time they had not seen the connection between politics and playing fast unorthodox music at the limits of their capabilities. Not opposed to the reading of the hardcore sound as radical politics, with the advantage of hindsight, Jari connects punk with other historical movements that criticised through art. He sees that for example the Dadaists were already using some of the same ideas to contest the direction that the world was heading:

It's the same idea in principle, sort of like, towards a mechanised world, when you are a human in a world that is being mechanised you can become alienated from it and experience these things as anxiety-inducing. And that kind of rough and rugged and dirty reflects the feeling of being an outsider, and alienated, and maybe also a bit angry. Or you see that everything that the others are doing is completely deranged and crazy, and it visualises that. Or like I'm starting to feel insane in this organised world of yours. (Jari interview, 2018)

Unruly noise replicates this feeling of insanity, and even if the musicians would not have been aware of it, the crudeness of the music still maintains its inherent political power. In Attali's (1985) view '*the code of music simulates the accepted rules of society*' (p. 29, italics in the original), and therefore by analogy breaking this code also implies the refusal of the codes that music is simulating. While the tempo of the music in itself does not signify some form of radical politics, the resulting disruption does, and Attali has recognised that noise and politics are inherently connected. Operating at the fringes of the Finnish scene, Jari saw the rawness of fellow northern Finland punks Terveet Kädet as an encouragement since especially their first EPs sounded horrible, but were nevertheless fun, and something completely different:

[Crumminess] just somehow was a part of that thing, that it wasn't a big deal [...] Then again, we had no money. We were really poor. Like if you broke a guitar string you had no idea where to get a new one. Even if you did, we didn't have the money. We were dirt broke. You could not even imagine going in a studio. (Jari interview, 2018)

Jari points out one rather obvious reason for their crumminess: the problem of the punk underground is a socioeconomic problem (Greene, 2012), and many punks were crummy because they did not have a choice. Although GDP per capita had risen significantly over the 1970s, and at the beginning of 1980s Finland in this regard was on par with the Western economic powers such as Germany and UK, many interviewees reported having experienced economic hardships: walking instead of taking the bus was opted to save the coins bummed on the sidewalk for a bottle of wine, butts collected from the streets in order to roll a cigarette. For unsigned bands like Aivoproteesi, the lack of available means to access proper studios meant experimenting with similar recording setups as Kuolema:

So, we were recording with the boombox, a four tracker at best if someone got hold of one. Of course, when you finally got to go into a studio we knew nothing. So, we played like the engineer told us and, in a way, as well as we could. You didn't dare to think about or suggest anything production-wise, like 'he knows what he's doing'. [...] Now that I have listened to it afterwards, I guess I could have said something. (Jari interview, 2018)

Although recording in a real studio should have been an advantage, this was not a given. Attali (1985) has seen that the production aspect of music has become a form of (quality) control, and it is the sound engineer rather than the musician who determines the quality of the recordings:

Little by little, the very nature of music changes: the unforeseen and the risks of representation disappear in repetition. The new aesthetic of performance excludes error, hesitation, noise. It freezes the work out of festival and spectacle; it reconstructs it formally, manipulates it, makes it abstract perfection. This vision gradually leads people to forget that music was once background noise and a form of life, hesitation and stammering. Representation communicated an energy. Repetition produces information free of noise. (p. 106)

Therefore, lack of production can also mean freedom from control and the more extreme forms of Finnish hardcore can be seen as sort of 'return of the repressed' where error, noise and hesitation are seen as vital parts of one's existence. What to some communicates a

racket, an annoyance, a disturbance, a violation of beauty or simply poor taste, to others is noise untamed and full of vitality.

After writing about punk since the 1990s, most famously in his zine *Game of the Arseholes* that contains thoughtful analysis also on Finnish hardcore, Stuart Schrader (b. 1978) created a website that has direct relevance to both punk and imperfection. Acknowledging his debt to Attali, Schrader gave his project the subtitle 'Political economy of bad music' and in 'Excerpts from the Shit-Fi Manifesto' he writes:

Our bad music does not speak in the economic terms record labels understand. Our music originates in basements and garages in non-English-speaking countries or at the margins of the US scene and is recorded with primitive equipment. Our music is the demo and live recordings of bands already deemed too bizarre or untalented 'to make it.' Our music is not just lo-fi, it is SHIT-FI.

Running since 2006, Shit-fi.com delivers coverage of 'raw, marginal, politically radical and esoteric music, with a focus on DIY, punk, hardcore, and metal'. Schrader believes that at the same time as the capitalist music industry had deemed the music he covers obsolete, in its obsolescence it carries a refusal of the same. He acknowledges that the refusal might be almost insignificant in size, maintaining however, that 'even tiny holes in the dark fabric of global capitalism provide nourishing light'. Schrader reminds the reader that, especially after the turn of the century, the advances in technology have become more readily available globally, and are being used increasingly to mask a lack of talent. Shit-fi is about bands that did not have access to these shortcuts, or chose not to use them, and made music regardless of the fact that they did not have optimal conditions or honed skills:

Shit-Fi proceeds from the axiom that professional production is not at all correlated with the power of music to affect one's life. [...] The collective experience of music is certainly different from the private one, but we reject the implication that the enjoyment of music is proportional to the traditional talent displayed by its creators. (Schrader, 'Excerpts from the Shit-Fi Manifesto')

I recently caught up with Stuart on a Skype call which he answered from Baltimore, MD. Now he sees that the world in many ways has moved beyond the moment when Shit-fi was

created. There are new ways in which talentless music is being made, and these elements are invading even mainstream music, which for him signals the end of the Shit-fi project. However, when the project started, some of these technological developments were new, and their effects strongly felt. Therefore, Stuart was trying to develop a kind of political and economic analysis of Shit-fi music that went beyond merely extolling the virtues of 'bad' music, but also reflecting on its meaning in a world that was rapidly changing:

On the one hand the underground is an alternative to the homogenizing tendencies in music, on the other hand, those homogenizing tendencies and new technological adaptations are themselves becoming, you know, they're infiltrating the underground, right. (Stuart interview, 2020)

If technological advances were radically altering the recording process for underground music, in addition, all obscure music which previously required enormous amounts of research and dedication even to discover, was now available at the push of a button. While on one hand this development was welcomed by punks because it enabled free sharing of music, on the other hand it was affecting the obscurity and marginality of punk as a whole. While the technological advances were democratising the opportunity to record or listen to music, at the same time they were killing what was original about punk by reducing imperfections. Therefore, finding meaning in horribly twisted and underproduced sounds became a way to resist these developments:

What kind of music is absolutely the most resistant to those tendencies of homogenization? Well, you know let's just look at the most, like, ugly, stupid, you know, talentless music, that like, you know, nobody would even want to try to homogenize cos it's just too ugly or whatever. (Stuart interview, 2020)

However, there is a contradiction about Shit-fi I could not let go. Which is more Shit-fi, a band that is clearly talented but chooses a crude aesthetic, or the completely inept band failing to overcome the challenges of music making but trying regardless? Without wanting to rank bands according to their Shit-fi-ness, Stuart nevertheless pointed out an important difference between Sweden's Shitlickers and Finnish bands such as Sekunda:

L: What is the Shit-Fi-est record? Is it that, cos Shitlickers for example gets a lot of praise, and like a very thorough analysis, and rightfully so, but Shitlickers would be an example of a band that's kind of like as close to perfection...

S: Yea.

L: As you can get inside this realm of shittiness.

S: Exactly.

L: But they are really the ultimate like fucking great shit-band.

S: Yea.

L: Whereas like the shittiest band wouldn't be the great shit-band, it would be the really shitty shit-band like Sekunda, you know.

S: Yea, exactly, exactly, or Kuolema. Yea, totally, I mean, those bands are, you know, incredible. You know it's like, Shitlickers, they were like, to me it's like they set out to achieve something, and they were successful, right. And I think *maybe* that's true for Sekunda [laughs] but I find it hard to imagine that they, you know whatever their vision in their head was, of like what their band would be, and then what their recording is, it's hard to imagine that those are the same.

(Stuart interview, 2020)

Indeed, Sekunda sounds simply too crazy to have been the result of a conscious drive to arrive exactly at the result they did. Although Shitlickers also communicates spontaneity, the fact that they sound like they were successful in what they set out to do and Sekunda like they were not, paradoxically gives a shit-edge to the latter. Responsible for the guitar playing and singing for Sekunda, Kivi (2006) has confirmed that their classic recording session, the songs from which ended up in the *Russia Bombs Finland* and *Lasta* compilations, was indeed quite rash:

We went to a demo studio in Lepakko basement with Ville Nisonen producing and played some 16 songs live to a cheap cassette in 15 minutes. The sound check took some more time, though. We would have played more, but the bass amp caught fire and started smoking, and since it wasn't ours we just turned it off and put the fire out with my leather jacket and rushed out before they would make us pay for it, ha ha.

Although it would be safe to say that Sekunda was not aspiring to make a coherent and easily approachable recording, at the same time, the fact that the recording is harsh is not completely by chance. There is recklessness in going to the studio unprepared and as the name of the group declares, Sekunda were not afraid of being second-rate. Like Alamaailma, they sound like they truly did not care. It was not until bands like Sekunda and Alamaailma developed that musical anarchy was taken to its logical conclusion, and

the fact that these bands still cause admiration and confusion on a global scale speaks to their extremity. If the ‘not-being-able-to-play-ness’ correlates with ‘punkness’, then these groups can be seen as punker than punk.

Now, is the argument of this chapter that Finland had the most untalented punks that also made all the wrong choices when it came to the recording process, but nevertheless accidentally hit the nail on the head each time? Certainly not. There are many bands that show musical dexterity as well as effort, and others that have simply been forgotten because their mangled noise did not produce a reaction. However, overall, when things did not work out quite as imagined, the Finnish punks seem to have cared less than some, and on occasion this attitude forged punk music that is heartfelt. It also made the existence of some of the essential Finnish hardcore recordings possible, and markedly affected the sound of many bands that today are considered essential listening to any hardcore punk aficionado. The harshest forms of Finnish hardcore, although perhaps unconsciously, achieved a total re-evaluation of all musical values, adding chaos to the previous axiom: ‘hardcore is *chaotic* noise not music’. Finnish hardcore also reinterpreted what failure means, and although it is difficult to determine what constitutes success or perfection in hardcore punk, it is safe to say that a certain amount of imperfection should be included in the right answer. In the words of a popular axiom of Thomas De Quincey (2004): ‘Even imperfection itself may have its ideal or perfect state’. Whether imperfection is perfected by Shitlickers, Sekunda or someone else is left for the listener to decide.

While evaluations in aesthetics are tied also to individual preferences, Saito (1997) sees that what she calls ‘the Japanese aesthetics of imperfection and insufficiency’ can, in addition to stimulating the imagination and generating curiosity, be regarded as a challenge to prevalent taste. Although she does not address music, this connection is made by Koren (1994) in his discussion on Japanese wabi-sabi aesthetics, which to him:

appeared the perfect antidote to the pervasively slick, saccharine, corporate style of beauty that I felt was desensitizing American society. I have since come to believe that wabi-sabi is related to many of the more emphatic anti-aesthetics that invariably spring from the young, modern, creative soul: beat, punk, grunge, or whatever is it's called next. (pp. 9-10)

There appears to be a kinship between this aesthetic school and punk, however, one stumbling block that Koren overlooks may be too significant. In Saito's (1997) view, the Japanese aesthetics of imperfection and insufficiency can only be appreciated when they are lacking in qualities that could be attained:

It is important to note that this aesthetic celebration of the imperfect and the insufficient presupposes not only the yearning for but also the attainability of the optimum condition [...] the appreciation of the imperfect was not merely directed toward the sensory qualities such as asymmetry, irregularity, or obscurity, or their contrast with the opposing qualities. These qualities are aesthetically appreciable precisely because their opposites are possible to achieve. (p. 380)

Saito goes on to note that the proponents of this aesthetic tradition 'came from the position of social privilege and cultural sophistication' (p. 380). Therefore, there is a significant difference between hardcore punk crumminess and the Japanese appreciation of imperfection. Saito (1997) further emphasises this point when she cites Confucian scholar Dazai Shundai:

Whatever tea dilettantes do is a copy of the poor and humble. It may be that the rich and noble have a reason to find pleasure in copying the poor and the humble. But why would those who are, from the outset, poor and humble find pleasure in further copying the poor and humble. (p. 381)

Of course, even the poorest of hardcore punks could have dedicated more time to perfecting their craft, but the point is precisely that they did not, and if they had, they could have potentially lost what was important and special about it. Or is it too idealistic to suggest that some punks would have embraced their condition and found happiness in disfigured noise? However, rather than seeing emancipatory potential, Saito suggests that in the Japanese context the aesthetic of imperfection would have been used politically to 'justify insufficiency and poverty through aesthetizing them' (p. 381). Elsewhere Saito (2017)

recognises that both picturesque and wabi-sabi aesthetics have been criticised exactly because it is morally problematic to derive aesthetic pleasure from signs of social ills. Would the crumminess of Finnish hardcore then be less ‘morally problematic’ because Finland is a welfare state? Is it more acceptable to enjoy the crumminess of Finnish than Peruvian hardcore? Although in the 1980s most Finnish hardcore punks were penniless, still, many eventually got to record in real studios and release their music on vinyl, which for example in the Peruvian context was considered to be an ‘elite format’. Speaking of the self-produced cassette of Peruvian mid 1980s group Narcosis, *Primera Dosis*, Greene (2016) states that:

First Dose represented a Peruvian means of punk underproduction centered on the iconicity of the pirated demo cassette: amateurishly recorded, easily copied, impossible to authenticate, economically necessary, expressively democratizing. Vinyl in Peru represented the conspicuous musical format. Its relative affordability and accessibility in the North’s wealthy economies was unknown in a country where it was representative of more elite forms of cultural consumption. (p. 37)

Is the Peruvian punk rocker recording with DIY techniques forbidden to consider their craft equal or even more authentic, just because in general terms it is ‘poorly made’? When Kuolema did the same in Finland was it more or less authentic? Would Finnish punks then be wrong if they enjoy the crudeness of a tape recorded by Peruvian punks? Saito (2017) recognises that while it is worthwhile to appreciate imperfection ‘without regard to its origin and consequences’ in order to ‘sharpen our perceptual sophistication’, at the same time she states that when imperfections indicate suffering and social injustice, ‘it is ultimately morally problematic to derive a disinterested pleasure based upon imperfectionism’ (section 5.2). Just like the Korean peasant whose tea ware came out less than perfect may have lamented the shortcomings, in the same way, the peripheral punk whose recording shows the crumminess of the circumstances that produced it may have wanted it to come out different and less imperfect. Stuart recognises this contradiction, and

sees it as a challenge of the Shit-fi concept, confessing that in hindsight he can see that a part of his analysis has probably been projection:

Is there an inherently kind of anti-capitalist politics to this imperfect aesthetic? This anti-professional aesthetic, is that like a refusal of certain types of, you know, commodity relations and so forth? I still think the answer is yes, like that kind of underpins the whole Shit-fi project, to like find a certain kind of latent, or maybe explicit, but sometimes latent anti-capitalism in this music, in the kind of non-commercial forms of distribution and reciprocity and, you know, exchange, that are really like not driven by profit, you know. That's what's beneath it all to some degree. But then you get to this challenge [...] say like a band from Brazil or a band from Columbia, you know, they record this music that sounds so fucking insane, and crazy, and you ask them about it and they're like 'oh, that sucks', you know, 'we were poor, we didn't know what we were doing, we didn't have the resources. Our dream in like 2010 or 2020 is to like, now we're adults, we have enough money, we wanna go back and re-record the music and make it sound the way it's supposed to sound'. And then when they do that it sounds fucking boring and shitty right, and like all of the unique qualities that made it so amazing, that came out of the conditions of poverty, and whatever, you know, they're gone now. (Stuart interview, 2020)

This dilemma is not easily resolved and although Stuart hopes that imperfect punk music would be inherently anti-capitalist, and that there are rotten punks who can declare that the disfigured noise they recorded is not only what they managed to record, but also what they wanted to record, he recognises that there are no guarantees:

For me, as this like, whatever, like bourgeois intellectual from the United States, it's like, I appreciate Sekunda or Armageddon as these like radical breaks from like the world I'm in, but then those people, now they would potentially wanna say like 'we just wanted to be in the world you're in'. (Stuart interview, 2020)

I react by pointing out that if chaotic music in the Finnish context could be seen as protesting the bureaucratic, rigid and controlled nature of the society – a radical break – then in contrast the Brazilian or Columbian punks could potentially want to make organised punk music that contests the chaotic nature of their surroundings. Stuart understands the comparison: 'Yea, right, exactly, exactly, but then, you know, if that record existed, because of my taste I wouldn't be interested in it'.

6 Spreading the dis-ease

While subcultures often travel along the same lines as main-stream culture from the centre towards the peripheries, hardcore punk in general and Finnish hardcore in particular gives evidence to the contrary. While punk originated in New York and London, its hardcore variety germinated in the margins of the British and American scenes. Similarly, in the Finnish context some of the local scene's exponents existed far from the big cities and the centre for Finnish hardcore was actually Tampere rather than the capital. O'Connor (2004) has seen the European punk scenes in a semi-peripheral position in comparison to the North American one, and although for example from the UK point of view this may seem odd, in the case of Finland it is certainly true. Still, despite its inconvenient geographic location, Finnish hardcore has managed to swim against the stream, and even create waves in the centres. As mentioned briefly above, one of the important differences brought on by hardcore punk was that it was international since the beginning. Due to the efforts of key scene members, the music of the Finnish bands spread quickly through countless packages posted overseas. Some of them landed in the hands of foreign zine makers who recommended the recordings to their readers, beginning a snowball effect that keeps rolling to this day. The exposure of Finnish bands also sparked the interest of foreign publishers who sought to promote the sounds that had impressed them, or in some cases, even saw small scale commercial potential. Another means of spreading the news about Finnish hardcore was the activity of band members in distributing their own music, not only through record and tape trading, but also by taking their noise to foreign audiences on DIY tours. Below, these three channels will be discussed in detail.

It is important to keep in mind that practically all of the bands discussed in this chapter were singing in Finnish, which certainly has an effect on how the music sounds,

and in addition prevents reacting to the lyrics. Normally this would have been a disadvantage, especially in the English-speaking countries, however it seems that in the case of Finnish hardcore the opposite has been true. In fact, when some Finnish groups like Bastards, Terveet Kädet, Riistetyt and Rattus, after becoming aware they had listeners abroad, decided to switch their singing language to English, the results were considered of secondary quality both by Finnish and foreign listeners alike. In fact, it has been suggested that Finnish could potentially be *the* hardcore language par excellence.

To most foreign fans of Finnish hardcore, the language is part of its appeal and also the Finns recognize how fitting the language is for the style. This is in contrast with other genres of music where using Finnish has traditionally been a hinderance for international success. For example, Finnish groups such as Nightwish, Children of Bodom and HIM, that have become popular abroad, all sing in English, as did Hanoi Rocks, the first one to break into international fame in the 1980s. Frith (1996) has argued that just as words are made to fit music, musical styles have adapted to languages, and therefore Finnish hardcore would have become different by adapting to a strange language. In Frith's view much of rock music has been performed in English because rock music's conventions, such as rhyming, create problems for languages which usually do not finish sentences with blunt edged consonants. In fact, the prolonged vowel at the end of a phrase, a reoccurring trait in Finnish hardcore, seems to be one of the aspects that caught the attention of foreign listeners. In addition, the sounds of ä and ö, although they exist phonetically even in the English language (the 'a' in 'can' and the 'i' in 'bird' for example), seem to have aroused the curiosity of non-Finnish speakers also visually. While the sounds of Finnish have not been especially useful for pop music, in punk they serve a purpose. In fact, Frith (1996) understands punk as liberating in the sense that it's 'ugliness' and 'incoherence' meant that

Finnish words (yes, Frith actually uses Finnish as an example) could also sound good when sung (pp. 175-176).

The Finnish interviewees agreed that the language sounds good for the purposes of hardcore punk. VP from Rattus sees Finnish as ‘angry and angular’, and made the exact same evaluation as Frith does: ‘For once there’s a musical style, to which the Finnish language fits like a glove’ (Rattus email interview, 2015). From the American point of view, Felix Havoc (2013) has described the effect of the language in the following terms:

Finnish is probably the best language for hardcore vocals because it has so many hard consonants and exaggerated long vowels. A Finnish hardcore band can be singing about flowers and puppies and still sound super hard and desperate just by singing in the native tongue.

To analyse why the Finnish language is especially fitting for hardcore in linguistic terms is beyond my capabilities, however its suitability has been recognised by many. The language that is aggressive-sounding to foreign ears and cryptic to foreign eyes helped the Finnish hardcore singers to project their anquished cry of alarm and protest across cultures, and it has resonated far and wide, across the span of generations.

6.1 *‘You want this, it’s fucking choice’*

The internationalisation started when the small ad sections (buy/sale and contact etc. columns) started having contact information for foreign bands and individuals. These, often more or less unknown instances, were contacted by letters asking how local punk was happening in their countries or cities, if they were interested in exchanging ideas about punk, exchanging materials, writing a scene report, if they had the contacts for bands and labels etc. The network expanded like a wildfire driven by wind. The dilemma was not whether you would find addresses and additional enthusiastic contacts but rather if you were able to keep things in a reasonable scale. New contacts seemed to spawn as many new interesting contacts as your resources could handle. In addition to exchanging letters, the communication also involved exchanging records, cassettes, zines, reports on bands and scenes, photographs and gig posters.

- Sburg (email interview, 2017)

If the centre for the beginning of hardcore punk has to be defined, it has been suggested that it would be California, more specifically the southern suburbs of Los Angeles like Orange County, Hermosa Beach and Santa Ana (Blush, 2010). As attested to by Sburg, with hardcore, the communication between scenes in the global punk underground exploded, and many Finnish punks were exchanging letters and materials with likeminded individuals in a range of countries. However, as key scene members in Finland had noted, the zines from California were beginning to have a global reach and through them it was possible to get your message across to a variety of scenes. Since the late 1970s, California had been a home to a burgeoning punk culture which however by 1979, according to Azerrad (2001), was all but dead as the hipsters had moved on to artsy post-punk:

They were replaced by a bunch of toughs coming in from outlying suburbs who were only beginning to discover punk's speed, power, and aggression. They didn't care that punk rock was already being dismissed as a spent force, kid bands playing at being the Ramones a few years too late. Dispensing with all pretension, these kids boiled the music down to its essence, then revved up the tempos to the speed of a pencil impatiently tapping on a school desk, and called the result 'hardcore'. (p. 12)

The description seems fairly accurate although the style wasn't called hardcore as of yet – the new punk kids were tapping into the possibilities that punk had opened up and breathing new life into the dying idea. The shift was visible also in the local zines. The folding of the early punk scene in Los Angeles coincided with the end of *Slash*, a professional publication which also covered other styles of marginal music but was sparked by the punk explosion. Others such as *Flipside* made it through the transition and continued their activities throughout the hardcore era and beyond. By the early 1980s *Flipside* had grown significantly from its initial goal of 1000 printed copies per issue.¹³ *Flipside* was one of the

¹³ By the zine's 6th anniversary the press run was of 6500 in the US plus additional copies printed in Germany for European distribution (*Flipside* #39, 1983).

first American zines to feature information about Finnish hardcore, when in issue #31 (1982) it ran a scene report about Finland. While the report (written by Ollie of *Hallelujaa* zine) consists mostly of titbits on Finnish groups and zines, as well as a couple of personal attacks, having the information about the bands did not mean that the enthusiasts could simply walk into the nearest record store to pick up the latest Finnish releases. Luckily, both for the Finnish groups and for the American punks interested in European hardcore, as seen in figures 12 and 13, Propaganda Records was well-informed about where to advertise.



Figure 12: Propaganda Records advertising its early releases in *Flipside*. (source: *Flipside* #36, 1982)



Figure 13: Propaganda Records advertised also in Ripper. (source: Ripper #8, 1983)

New zines focussed on hardcore were also being formed and one that gave exposure to the Finns early on was *Ripper*, which in issue number eight included information on zines *Laama* and *Vaihtoehto*, as well as record reviews by editor Tim Tonooka of Nolla Nolla Nolla, Bastards ('you want this, it's fucking choice') as well as Propaganda's *Russia Bombs Finland* compilation:

Most of these bands are characterized by a thick Discharge type roaring thunder mated to an ultrafast DC style thrash beat— a fabulous combination. The sound quality is excellent too. None of the cuts are losers, and there's enough diversity to keep it interesting. (Ripper #8)

Tonooka's ears had accurately picked up Finnish hardcore's influences, and the impact of this compilation LP as *the* promotional package for Finnish hardcore, and its continuing relevance can hardly be overestimated. While Tonooka's approval must have aroused curiosity amongst the readers of *Ripper*, it was another California-based zine that would take the praise of Finnish bands to the next level.

MAXIMUMROCKNROLL, or simply *MRR*, based in San Francisco, was a newcomer and perhaps no-one at this point could have foretold the status it was going to achieve as the most wide-spread and influential punk zine on a global scale. In addition to providing detailed scene reports from across the United States, *MRR* had also begun to cover more and more international scenes, the Finnish being one of the first. The voluntary staff of *MRR* (also known as 'shitworkers') voiced their opinions in the review section, as well as in the 'top ten' lists. The 'top tens' in *MRR* #3 (in this issue they were actually top 20s) of zine founders Jeff Bale and Tim Yohannan reveal that Finnish hardcore was well-liked amongst the staff. Out of Yohannan's twenty chosen records, only five are European, and out of these, three are Finnish: Terveet Kädet, Riistetyt and Rattus. In turn, Bale included nine European recordings out of which six are Finnish: Terveet Kädet, Maho Neitsyt, Bastards, Nukketeatteri, Kaaos and Kohu-63.

On the review front, the reception was equally overwhelming, and between Bale and Yohannan the issue number three included no less than 14 reviews of Finnish records in a separate section, the introduction to which stated: 'One thing can be said at the outset – Finnish hardcore releases are almost uniformly excellent. They are much better than the general run of British or other European punk offerings, better even than most American stuff'. The section is dominated by Bale's writing, and although his praise is not unconditional (Riistetyt gets criticised for not having enough variety on their *Laki ja Järjestys* EP and Bastards loses points for weak drumming), the overall reverence given to

the Finnish scene is impressive. The record that had the greatest impact on Bale is *Ääretön Jouluku* EP by Terveet Kädet: ‘This well-produced record has everything – ultra tight thrash power, join-in choruses, and lead vocals so demented they make the MEAT PUPPETS sound like the BEE GEES. The hottest punk EP released thus far this year, really’. In turn, already in *MRR* #2 Yohannan had concluded that ‘Finland rules’ in the review of P.Tuotanto compilation cassette *Punk ei ole kuollut*, and later reinforced the message by calling *Russia Bombs Finland* ‘a must’:

OK, you’ve been reading in these pages how great Finnish punk is, so order this compilation of almost all of the best bands (save RATTUS, LAMA, KOHU-63, and a few others). That’s all the proof you need. One band after another comes charging at you and demonstrates why this relatively small and out-of-the-way country is the tops in European thrash. (*MRR* #4)

Already by *MRR* #5 Yohannan sees the raving about Finnish hardcore getting repetitive, but is still left helpless faced with the exhilarating power of Varaus: ‘Once again, I am *forced* to rave about Finnish thrash. This is one of the many bands from that country which inspire amazement. I hadn’t heard of these guys before, but they’ve obviously been practicing to achieve such power’ (italics in the original). In the review of Rattus’s *WC Räjähätä* Bale also saw that praising Finnish bands was getting dull: ‘I’m getting tired of repeating myself, but this is another great Finnish thrash record’ (*MRR* #5).

However, few issues later reviewing the Appendix EP, Bale makes a remark that seems to indicate that the tide is turning: ‘Some of the well-known Finnish thrash bands are running out of ideas and getting more and more generic, but APPENDIX are not one of them’ (*MRR* #11). In the following issue Bale singles out Kansan Uutiset for the same criticism finding them ‘overly derivative’: ‘Finnish thrash in the RIISTETTYT tradition. More specifically, KANSAN UUTiset produce the sort of incoherent thrash with poorly synchronized vocals that characterized the first RIISTETTYT EP’ (*MRR* #12). Bale (2012)

has later admitted that he eventually grew tired of hardcore punk, going as far as disowning it completely:

If I have any retrospective regrets about the early days of *MRR*, it would be that at the time I was in a phase of my life in which a) I was espousing absurdly simplistic left-wing politics, and b) I was enamored of thrash-style (“hardcore”) punk. In short, when my politics were at their dopiest and when my musical taste was at its nadir.

If Bale’s political views seem to have been fairly unstable, the musical reasons cited for changing his opinion about hardcore are equally vague and one is tempted to conclude that although the style might have shown signs of decline, also Bale’s (2012) personal taste seems to have been developing in a different direction:

I embraced super-fast thrash punk for a time, probably because it seemed so extreme and over-the-top, and because it was exhilarating in the same way that the roar of a jet engine is exhilarating. But just like jet noise soon becomes annoying and obnoxious, so too did the HC-style punk, at least for me. [...] “hardcore” simply did not stand the test of time, so much so that I now pretty much detest that subgenre of music (especially its most macho and boneheaded manifestations).

Although it is certainly understandable why someone would dislike the most macho and boneheaded manifestations of hardcore, at the same time it is puzzling how Bale manages to go from praise to detestation, commenting that he would probably be embarrassed to be reminded of the records he had recommended in the early days of *MRR*. As Bale states, this is his personal opinion, and does not reflect *MRR*’s sentiments on hardcore punk.

Over an impressive run of 37 years in print and its continued relevance in digital form, in a (heterogeneous) scene like punk, for a publication that grew to be as popular as *MRR*, it is hard to escape criticism. Blush’s (2010) tone turns to somewhat less-than objective when he describes *MRR* as a ‘first rate publication’ that ‘offered all-inclusive coverage of the budding scene but browbeat its teen readers with tired Marxist ideals’ (p. 34). It is not suitable for the task at hand to go deep into the ideological battles within the US punk scene, however, it seems clear enough that there is a connection between *MRR*’s

left-wing politics, and their openness to covering the punk scenes of the world. In addition, Sburg sees the radical political correctness and ‘policing’ of the scene (that was also practiced by *Laama*) as an integral part of building and maintaining the scene’s integrity:

This kind of enthusiastic quality control and teacheryness is associated in part with the starry-eyed and always correct reasoning of youth, and on the other hand the growing pains of a subculture. Nowadays all kinds of opinionated rigorousness amongst the punks has been named punk-policing, and can be joked about. In the 80s it wasn’t always possible. Although punk was supposed to not have rules and although some aspects of my own critical approach may now 35 years later seem questionable, some kind of aspect of inner quality control also belongs to subcultures. Their power and their vital condition are largely based on doing things in their own terms, and if the intention is to be something different from the regular mainstream, it is not necessarily functional if at the same time the values and trends of the mainstream are tolerated. The idea gets watered down – of which history has an abundance of examples. (Sburg email interview, 2017)

Although it is not unfair to accuse *MRR* for practicing this sort of inner quality control that Sburg refers to, for example when it came to the Finnish bands, *MRR* covered them despite not knowing what was sung, though not without adding a disclaimer before the review section in *MRR* #3: ‘be aware that the following evaluations are based on the music alone. We can’t always determine the political content because the lyrics are in Finnish’. Not knowing Finnish also meant that the reviewers would not have been able to determine the quality of the lyrics, and in fact, Stuart saw this as a potential advantage:

They didn’t understand the lyrics and that really helped. Because, you know, obviously, like, I can’t read the lyrics but my understanding of the lyrics to, like, you know, Bastards or like Riistetyt or whatever, the lyrics are stupid [laughs]. And if like Jeff Bale or Tim Yohannan could have understood the lyrics they might have had a different attitude. I mean they would have appreciated the like, anti-war, you know, anti-government side to those lyrics, but I think they would have thought like ‘wow these are really simplistic and kind of dumb’. (Stuart interview, 2020)

In full agreement with Stuart’s comment, I would add that not only do some of the lyrics sound simplistic, which was a major stumbling block for me as a teenager, the native speaker will also note how badly articulated some of the vocal performances are, with half pronounced, mumbled words and awkward accents. However, there is a potential

advantage in listening to hardcore in an unfamiliar language – the listener is free to focus on the music. Stuart agrees with this view, stating it as one of the reasons why he still tends to listen to music that is not sung in English more eagerly, the challenge with the English-speaking bands often being getting past the lyrics. He saw the fascination of *MRR* reviewers with the European scene in general and the Finnish scene in particular in the following terms:

The reviews by like Tim Yohannan, Jeff Bale, Ruth Schwarz, and then Pushead and eventually Jello Biafra, all of those early reviews, like, I think they see these European bands as playing like a very pure form of hardcore punk. You know, it's like, in the United States the hardcore scene, uhm, like the sound changed very quickly [...] but then in 1983 these guys in, you know, San Francisco get like a Terveet Kädet record and it sounds, it's like a very pure hardcore punk sound. So, I think it was just like a couple of years have passed and US hardcore, the sound was changing but these foreign bands seem still like very true to the original sound and I think that just like really grabbed their attention. (Stuart interview, 2020)

While the energy released by the explosion of the first wave of hardcore punk in the United States was starting to dissipate, in other scenes this chain reaction was still ongoing or only beginning and they still maintained the freshness of pure unadulterated teenage rebellion. The difference in the timeframe of the emergence of hardcore punk in different places would have placed its apex in different periods of time.

Finland being a country that was not often in the limelight, exoticism may have been another factor that played a role in the surprising reception of Finnish hardcore. *Touch and Go* from Lansing, MI, reviewed the Kaaos/Cadgers EP in its issue number 18, and the reviewer is impressed by the punk look of the Tampere bands and surprised that there is punk in Finland at all: 'when I think of the place where they live I think of steam rising off of a tranquil bay...i'm glad it aint as dull as all that'.

The language barrier being unsurmountable, reliable information on Finnish punk culture was difficult to come by, which put a lot of weight on the words of the scene

reporters. Together with the special review section in *MRR* #3, there is a Finland scene report. To start things off, Vote rejects 1970s Finnish punk: ‘forget them—they were all shit’. Even when addressing the hardcore bands, Vote keeps a critical tone and states that the Finns are slavishly following every fashion originating in the UK, which in his opinion is stupid (although he states that the Finnish bands are nevertheless his favourites). According to the report, the local labels (with the exception of Johanna and Poko) are uninterested in punk, and most venues refuse to book punk shows: ‘every fucking town has hundreds of discos, but nowhere for punk bands to play.’ However, to Vote, the biggest problem within the scene is the lack of solidarity, with tensions building up not only between Tampere and Helsinki punks, but also within Tampere where the groups ‘hate each other’. This view is corroborated by contributor Jäsen Z from Tampere, who extends the lack of solidarity to all Finnish punks: ‘truth of whole the shit: there is NO anything you’d call as “scene” in finland cos all the punx are just hating each other and there is NO any kind of solidarity between finnish punx.’ Whatever the reason for so much frustration about the Finnish scene, descriptions like Poko’s, who saw punk scene as a family, clash significantly with the pessimism shown by Vote and Jäsen Z. Masa also noted that despite the differences between the Tampere bands, punk still rather united than divided. Clearly, not all agreed on the lack of solidarity between Finnish punks, or at the very least, time has done away with petty squabbles. However, in his second scene report published in *MRR* 12# (1984) Vote keeps insisting on the damage done by divisions:

I want to correct a misconception I’ve heard and read about, namely that Finland is the ‘punk mecca of Europe’. We may have lots of great bands and records here, but the scene itself isn’t healthy. Bands are very jealous of each other, etc. Without that, the scene would be much better.

Despite Vote’s grievances with divisions, he seems to have been part of the problem by siding with some bands like Rattus and Terveet Kädet and denigrating others, such as

Kohu-63, who are unfairly deemed to have ‘the stupidest lyrics ever put on record’ on *Lisää Verta Historiaan* (Poko Rekords, 1982). Sburg sees the internal scene disputes as a part of punk, and points out that similar rivalries were evident also in the scenes abroad, however at the same time, also seeing more unity than division in the Finnish scene:

Traditional intimidations between cities took place in many countries. A good example being the landmark compilation LP of American hardcore *This is Boston not L.A.* which meaningfully brings out the issue in its title. But more than actual confrontations, there was friendly co-existence between the punks from different cities. Especially in the early days when punks were scarce and everything was new, it was enough to see badges in the clothes of people from out of town to go and chat and ask where you are from, are there many punks over there etc. (Sburg email interview, 2017)

Perhaps it is simply a ‘punk thing’ to create and maintain disputes, and as other things ‘punk’ the tensions were amplified with hardcore. Probably a scene that would have existed in harmony would not have been ideal either – surely that would have been too much like the hippies!

6.2 *The epidemic expands*

While the record reviews in zines must have been tickling the curiosity of the readers, there is no way to derive any real joy from a review without having the music to listen to. This section discusses some of the ways in which the music of Finnish bands was made available to people in the punk centres. In West Germany, punk had arrived almost immediately, however the typical ‘deutschpunk’ sound of bands such as Slime and Razzia from Hamburg, and the emergence of a more politicised punk underground took until the 1980s. Höhnie (b. 1965), known for his label Höhnie Records as well from groups such as Rasta Knast, was a young punk rocker in the late 1970s and he had first heard Finnish punk on the radio:

The first Finnish punk song I heard on German radio in -79. I was 14 years old, but it was not a German program, it was, you know the legendary DJ from England John Peel, he had a radio program in Germany, everything was in English, you know for the British soldiers, the radio station was called BFBS British Forces Broadcasting Service. (Höhnle interview, 2017)

It took him 20 years, to find out that the song was 'Ota mut uudestaan' by Hellhound, a version of 'Suzy is a headbanger' of Ramones, with Finnish lyrics. Meanwhile however, Höhnle had discovered Finnish hardcore when 'Outo maa' opened the *MRR* compilation LP *Welcome to 1984*, which in addition to Terveet Kädet also included Rattus. Although this extremely important compilation would be distributed far and wide, resulting in unprecedented exposure for the two Finnish bands, at around the same time in Germany an even more significant turn of events for Finnish hardcore was unfolding.

As discussed above, the Finnish sounds were released and distributed by micro-size labels as well as the bands themselves, and the increased demand abroad due to the exposure in foreign zines led to some recordings getting re-pressed several times over. However, even the 'major' label of the Finnish underground, Propaganda Records, was a one-man operation and had difficulties in handling all the recordings produced in the heat of hardcore frenzy. Therefore, a deal was struck (with the devil) that would help put out the releases Vilenius did not have the resources to publish himself. Höhnle saw the fact that Finnish records were being published in Germany as a surprise:

That's a shitty story with Rock-O-Rama, you know they licensed all the records from Propaganda Records, then Rock-O-Rama turned out to be a Nazi label since the mid 80s and, what can I say, I think Propaganda Records was not able to put out a lot, you know, records in short time so that's why he, you know – some records like the first Riistetyt, first Appendix, it's two versions, it's a Finnish version and a German version, it was a different cover but same songs. But many records like Destruktiions, Kansan Uutiset, H.I.C. Systeemi, they only came out in Germany what is a, it's a bit of a miracle, but I think the main reason is because he couldn't handle it and so to get it out quite soon he licensed the stuff to Germany. (Höhnle interview, 2017)

Rock-O-Rama had been publishing German punk since 1980 and at first there was no reason to suspect that the label would end up releasing neo-Nazi music, still, the move

eventually put the Finnish groups in an awkward position. It has also been suggested that the Finnish ‘con-man’ was being taken for a ride by the German swindler. Masa remembers that at the time there were rumours about Vilenius’s dealings with the *R-O-R* label owner Herbert Egoldt not going entirely according to plan:

Vilenius had a licensing deal with them, and I also heard that Vilenius got a little screwed over. Like there was an agreement on a given pressing, say 2000 or something, and they had pressed more, like using the same deal. But it would have been hard to prove and show back in those days, and even if you would have proven it, what could you have done about it? (Masa interview, 2017)

By 1985, *R-O-R* had published unknown quantities of 14 Finnish hardcore albums (plus H.I.C. Systeemi on its sublabel Eraserhead Records) and this resulted in a massive increase in visibility and availability for the Finnish bands, especially in Germany and across Europe. It is also notable that all of these records were long plays at a time when most hardcore groups, especially in Scandinavia, were releasing seven-inch EPs.

The involvement of *R-O-R* in releasing and distributing Finnish hardcore would warrant a study of its own. A formidable task, especially since Egoldt passed away in 2005, however even his dealings with the fascist bands seem to indicate that his motives for publishing records would have been financial rather than ideological. After the police raided *R-O-R*’s offices in the 1990s, resulting in seizure of thousands of white-power CDs, cassettes and vinyl, Egoldt ended his dealings also with neo-Nazi bands (Dyck, 2016). In fact, Dyck has suggested that Egoldt did not even have Nazi sympathies, but was in it for the money:

Although white-power musicians met the increased government repression with frustration overall, some members of the German white-power groups were actually happy to see Rock-O-Rama leave the white-power music scene, not only because Herbert Egoldt did not share their right-wing political views, but also because he had developed a reputation for short-changing the musicians who recorded with Rock-O-Rama (2016, p. 42).

Shaffer (2017) also attests to the theory that profiting off of bands would have been the main motivation for Egoldt's publishing activities and cites rumours about him making a million dollars from Screwdriver records alone before the authorities put an end to his label (p. 172). Although Finnish hardcore records would have been a less of a cash cow, still, it seems that Ergoldt had seen marketing potential in Finnish noise. He also appears to have been right, since even though the pressings were far from limited, today on internet marketplaces these albums fetch the money initially invested several times over.

Even if vinyl in the early 1980s was more accessible, it still wasn't readily at the reach of all to have a vinyl release and for these bands, the cassette format provided a viable alternative. Recordings on cassettes could be reproduced at home, making the process of getting the band's sound from the practice room to the 'consumer' much quicker and more cost effective. As mentioned previously, the hardcore explosion also produced a vast network of tape-trading between bands, labels and enthusiasts on a global scale. Many home-made Finnish cassette compilations of varying quality were put together, and the music of Finnish groups was included in similar efforts abroad. In Germany, Finnish groups, most of which had no vinyl releases, appeared for example on *Lärmattacke 1* (Anti-System Tapes, 1983), *Lärmattacke 2* (Anti-System Tapes, 1984) and *Noise Attack* (Lärm-deponie, 1985).

In the UK, one tape-trader to promote hardcore from Finland was Shesk of *Xcentric Noise Records*, whose compilation tape *Beat the Meat* (1981) had made the rounds in the global underground. The compilation had also sparked a response from Finland: 'I received my first tapes from Finland via Vote Vasko (P.Tuotanto label). I remember being blown away excited at all these new bands playing great hardcore stuff, especially the amazing Terveet Kädet, Cadgers, Rattus' (Thompson, 2015). From this point forward, Finnish bands would make part of *Xcentric* compilation tapes such as *Hard Core or What?* (1981), *Punk*

is (1982), *Raw War* (1983), and eventually the 1984 compilation LP *Beating the Meat* with the participation of Terveet Kädet and Rattus. However, when it came to the wider UK punk scene, at this point, international hardcore bands singing in languages other than English remained curiosities known only by dedicated tape traders and zinesters.¹⁴ With the rise of UK hardcore, also the influence of international bands seems to have grown, and Glasper (2009) states that enthusiastic youngsters all over the country were connecting to international hardcore through the scene reports in *MRR*, and through bands that were beginning to tour the UK: ‘Why borrow from the Clash and the Stranglers when you could now aspire to Rattus and Siege?’ (p. 9).

In America, the situation was similar and the awareness of and access to Finnish hardcore would have been limited to a select few. At the time, *MRR* would not have yet had the status of ‘punk bible’, and the Finnish punk records they recommended were not readily available to the average consumer, or even to the ‘average’ punk. After finding a comment of his about Kaaos/Cadgers EP online, I approached Rob of 1980s Washington DC groups Government Issue and Artificial Peace about how he had stumbled upon Finnish punk. In his case, it was word of mouth. Artificial Peace had travelled to New York to open for Bad Brains in 1981, and after the gig the band stayed at friends’ place where they listened to Lama and some other Finnish groups. It transpired that the records had been ordered straight from Vote after getting hold of his contact address from another D.C. punk Ian MacKaye:

So I had to go to NYC to get what was already known in D.C. Although I never heard Ian or anyone else then speak about the Finnish scene at that time and even once I started trading records with Vote, I never saw any Finnish hardcore records in any shops. [...] Maybe later some Finnish records became available in record shops, but it was mostly through trading directly with guys like Vote. Yet I'm

¹⁴ Other compilation LPs from the UK in which Finnish groups appeared include for example *Daffodils to the Daffodils Here's the Daffodils* (Pax Records 1984), featuring Destrukctions, and an unorthodox Christmas album *Have a rotten Christmas II* (Rot Records 1985) that included Rattus.

unaware of anyone else in Finland besides Vote trading records. You had to have the connection. (Rob email interview, 2019)

To Rob, Finnish hardcore sounded more American than British, and he agrees that back then it also sounded better than bands from the other international scenes, however, also to him, hardcore in general has failed to stand the test of time, and of the Finnish bands Lama is the only one that holds up today:

Even in 1981 and '82, most hardcore bands in the US were awful. It seemed few could write and play within the genre and at the same time write interesting songs, sound good, and have an original stage presence. [...] It was an interesting experiment in that kids with no real musical training could form a band and play in front of people. On one hand, it lowered the barriers to entry and democratized the opportunity. On the other hand, a lot of crappy bands got on stage and put out records. (Rob email interview, 2019)

To some of the participants in the first wave of hardcore, time has not gilded the memories and they have adopted a rather critical view. Rob sees the energy of hardcore waning already by 1983:

Hardcore was new in 1981 but by 1983 it had accomplished what it set out to do. [...] By then hardcore had lost its originality as both a form of music and as a scene. It was no longer a rebellion against the commercial/corporate rock or progressive rock scenes that placed the musicians at the top of the apex and the fans at the bottom. Eventually, the hardcore scene had become a copy of the traditional rock scene, but on a smaller scale in terms of money and size. (Rob email interview, 2019)

Rob acknowledges that many would not agree with him, certainly those for whom hardcore was just beginning. Although the cut-off-point of 1983 is rather early, at the same time, many *would* agree that the peak form of hardcore lasted only for a short while. However, unlike some bands in the US context, the Finnish groups never got to be famous enough to reproduce the commercial and hierarchical failures of corporate rock (with the possible exception of the Riistetyt tour described in the following section). In addition, the interest of the subsequent generations speaks strongly against the argument that hardcore punk did not stand the test of time, as it still continues to give a lot of 'crappy' bands the opportunity

to get onstage and release records. Coincidentally, it was Rob's band mate that had influenced teenage punk rocker Felix Havoc (2013) to listen to Finnish punk through playing it in a local college radio station:

When I was a teenager in the early 1980s Tom Lyle from Government Issue had a radio show on the local college station WMUC, just outside Washington DC. Tom was really up on hardcore from around the world and used to play a lot of Finnish and Brazilian hardcore that was very little known and hard to find. In those days most record stores stocked stuff like Black Flag, Circle Jerks and Dead Kennedys, but to find a record by a band like Kaaos, or Riistetyt in a shop was extremely rare and these bands were only repped by a small elite of collectors and MRR subscribers.

Starting after mid-1990s, Havoc Records would re-release counts of Finnish punk. These publications were important not only by contributing to the reputation of Finnish hardcore in the US, but also for spreading globally amongst punk enthusiasts of the subsequent generations who had not had the chance to acquire the originals (that by then had become collectors items with prohibitive prices). Writing about the *Skitsofrenia* album by Riistetyt, Havoc (2013) describes his astonishment upon first hearing the opening track 'Mieletöntä väkivaltaa':

When Tom dropped the needle on Riistetyt's 'Mieleonta Vakivaalta' (sic) I was spellbound. That rumbling bass, the raw jagged guitar, the barking harsh vocals, the spastic drums all sounded so fresh new and exciting to me. I taped that radio show then listened to it over and over. That was the first time I heard bands like Riistetyt, Appendix and Kaaos. I carefully scanned each issue of MRR for Finnish releases and scene reports and flipped over every strange looking record at the record store to see if it might be Finnish. This song, and that radio show started my lifelong fascination with the Finnish hardcore scene.

If the opportunities to pick up Finnish records had been few in the early 1980s, eventually the void was filled with some local releases. *Bad Compilation Tapes* from San Diego had already released several cassettes of Italian hardcore, and the next European scene to get the label's attention was the Finnish one. In 1984 *BCT* released compilation cassettes of Rattus and Terveet Kädet, and in the following year Kuolema was included in their sampler.

In 1986, after releasing two Finnish tapes with various artists, BCT also went on to press a compilation LP featuring Rattus and Terveet Kädet.



Figure 14: Finnish hardcore advertised in MRR by Ratcage Records. Shitlickers and Headcleaners, both Swedish groups, as well as Electric Deads from Denmark, are placed misleadingly in the same 'box' with Finnish bands. (source: Maximumrocknroll #8, 1983)

As seen in figure 14, in New York there was a source where Finnish hardcore could be acquired, and more importantly, Ratcage Records was the first US label to produce a full-length Finnish release on vinyl. In 1984 Ratcage released the eponymous album of Rattus, which included some of their older tracks re-recorded, and the result has been stimulating punks across the globe ever since. The longevity of this record is but one example of the lasting power of Finnish hardcore through several punk generations.¹⁵ While not all remain spell-bound with its exhilarating roar, others still regard the original groups

¹⁵ In addition to the initial Ratcage pressing of 3000 copies, the album has been licensed to labels in Switzerland (Zurich Chainsaw Massacre Records 2003), Italy (Radiation Reissues 2012) and Brazil (Criminal Attack Records 2016).

with same veneration as when they first heard them, and more importantly, punks everywhere that were not ‘there’ first time around can still feel the energy transmitted through the music created by Rattus and others. Schrader (2001) described the album in ‘Finnish Hardcore Scum File’:

I wonder how the drummer managed to beat so many damn things at once. This record is so over-the-top! I imagine some New York Hardcore thug in 1984 walking into the Ratcage store, asking what was new, and the hearing this LP. The image of some tattooed tough guy in tight pants getting pulverized by Finland’s Rattus is one to savor. (MRR #213)

The unhinged screams uttered in the harsh tone of the Finnish language, the furious riffing and the relentless pounding of the drums, all come together in Rattus’s signature sound which has been admired and even copied across the punk world.

Creating a complete list of Finnish hardcore records released abroad, or even labels that have released them, would result in a tedious exercise. However, in the US context, in addition Havoc Records, and a host of labels that produced one or two Finnish releases, Feral Ward is another publisher that has shown interest also in contemporary Finnish bands, and recently Puke n Vomit has re-released 013, Appendix and Bastards LPs as well as *Russia Bombs Finland* (which had already been reissued by Höhnie in 2008). For a few more examples, in Germany, the early releases on R-O-R seem to have cemented the fame of Finnish hardcore and subsequently many labels have continued to release Finnish records. During the 1990s, Ecocentric Records, apart from re-releasing the seminal recordings of Sorto, also put out new hardcore bands such as Amen, Selfish and Tuomiopäivän Lapset. After the turn of the century, other German labels picked up on the combination of lack of availability and underground popularity of Finnish hardcore. The label Power It Up from Peine has re-released material from Sorto, Kuolema, Genocide, Kansanturvamusiikkikomissio, Tuomionpäivän Lapset and Terveet Kädet. Another notable label to focus on Finnish noise was Assel Records from Göttingen that re-released

a stream of 1980s Finnish classics including the demo recordings from Bastards, Klimax and Poliisivaltio that were previously unavailable on vinyl, as well as releases from contemporary bands such as Neuroottiset Pelimannit. Höhnle Records, that during the 1990s was specialising in German punk, in the 2000s took the re-releasing of Finnish records even more seriously (while also supporting some current bands), and has now published more than 40 titles of Finnish punk, the most recent additions in 2021 being the ultra-rare 7" samplers *Lasta* and *Hyvinkää*. Although I have opted for less exposure for the later developments in these exchanges, as the examples listed above show, Finnish hardcore has continued to find new listeners not only in the centres but also, as will be discussed in chapter seven, in the global peripheries. The dedication and work of individuals has been instrumental in the dissemination of Finnish hardcore, and the labels and individuals mentioned here are but a few of those promoting Finnish punk globally. In addition to availability, taking the whole live experience to the audiences abroad has contributed to the continued relevance of 1980s Finnish hardcore, as the bands were already touring at the time, and some have continued to expand their travels more recently.

6.3 *Hardcore invaders*

As commented in chapter four, gigs were scarce in Finland in the early 1980s and the bands often played only a handful of shows in a year. The fact that shows were few and far between was the result of a combination of factors. Most importantly, venues that would accept hardcore were hard to find. Many musicians and much of their audience were under-aged, and sometimes not welcome to the bars even after coming of age because of their weird garbs and wild hairdos. The lack of solidarity between different pockets of punks may have been another variable that decreased the mobility of bands inside the Finnish scene. In addition, as declared by Vilenius, when he tried to provide opportunities for the

bands to play live, the events often ended up in the red, eating away at the motivation to organise more shows. Visits of foreign bands were rare since Finland was geographically on the periphery, at the end of road, since the Soviet Union was out of bounds for foreign punk bands. The lack of live routine meant that alcohol was often used to curb stage fright, sometimes resulting in chaotic performances, and the equally drunk audience was a potential threat to the venue. Söderholm (1987), writing from the Finnish point of view, goes as far as stating that a hardcore event is about antistructure, to the point that it is impossible to draw the line between success and failure: the concert may be allowed to decline into total disorder because of hardcore's ideology of 'screwing up' (p. 55).

The difficulties in booking local gigs, together with the realisation of the vastness of hardcore's international dimension, eventually drove the Finnish bands into organising shows outside of Finland through the contacts created by active tape and record trading. As stated by Söderholm (1987), hardcore altered rock music's traditional centre periphery divide that was still intact for other styles of rock, opening up the possibility for Finnish bands to make their way abroad:

When it comes to hardcore punk, the centre-periphery relations are defined differently. The field of hardcore is egalitarian in the sense that the traditional centre of European rock music – England – has not achieved a self-evident role of a forerunner within hardcore punk. For example, Finland, Germany and Italy are countries that have plenty of bands that perform hardcore punk. The invasion of Finnish hardcore outside of Finnish borders took place mainly around 1982-84, when many Finnish groups (e.g. Kaaos, Riistetyt, Terveet Kädet) went to perform in different European countries as well as in the US. The diffusion of Finnish hardcore into the world was not the kind of cultural export that would have been commented on in official and commercial media, but typically to the punk movement, the information is disseminated solely through the punk press. (p. 58)

Although the UK scene in Finland clearly had a vanguard position, in any case, the field of hardcore was more egalitarian than the circles of mainstream rock. Even if the details of Söderholm's description are somewhat inaccurate (the first hardcore groups played outside

of Finland in 1983, and Terveet Kädet did not perform abroad until after the turn of the century), it is true that the early exploits of the Finnish bands were not dealt with in mainstream media (with the notable exception of *Soundi*). Again, together with the interviews, zines are serving as the collective memory of the scene, and the travels of Finnish hardcore bands are mapped mainly through tour reports. Eventually, also the public broadcasting company Yle showed interest in the travels of Finnish punks and the final section of this chapter is based on the TV documentary *Kohu-63 Amerikassa* (Ketonen, 2007).

6.3.1 Rattus infestations

Growing up in Florida, Bob Suren at first had listened to the American variety of hardcore, but as he got deeper into punk he became increasingly interested in bands from other countries. Suren (2015) states that through punk he felt connected to a family of people he would never meet in places he would never see, and to him, ‘knowing that there were like-minded people around the globe was galvanic’ (p. 119). A serious record collector, Suren describes that after he had acquired all of the easy-to-find stuff, his predilections became increasingly exotic and he specifies that he developed ‘a particular sweet tooth for Finnish music’:

Finland seemed to have an endless supply of amazing bands with unpronounceable names like Maanalainen Pelastrusarmeija (sic), Aivoproteesi, and Kansanturvamusiikkikomissio. I didn’t know what these bands were singing about, but I knew we were on the same side of the fence. We were allied. I knew anything from Finland was going to be great. At the top of my list of Finnish favourites was Rattus. (p. 150)

Rattus had split up in 1988 after a brief stint of flirting with metal that culminated in the infamous *Stolen Life* LP. However, soon after the turn of the century, they were one of the Finnish groups that understood that their legacy was not forgotten and decided to extend

their story. After Suren realised in 2004 that Rattus had made a come-back, he sent them a fan email, and mentioned in passing that if they ever wanted to play a show in Florida he would be happy to help. There was an instant response from Vote, acting as Rattus's manager, telling him that of course Rattus could not come to the United States just for one show. Suren responded that he realised this and emphasised the 'if' part of his initial offer:

His response was something like, 'We'll come for two weeks. We'll start the tour from New York City.' Huh? I guess Vote was asking me (or telling me) to book a tour for Rattus. It seemed a little pushy, but it was Rattus, the gods of Finnish punk, after all. I thought about this for about five minutes and then said, 'I can make this happen.' (p. 120)

After the two-week tour (which started in Florida) Suren was convinced that his initial gut feeling about being on the 'same side of the fence' had been right: 'it was evident that we were all part of the same thing [...] all connected by something large, something intangible and without boundaries' (2015, p. 121). In the 1980s Rattus had twice planned to tour the US ('84 and '86), and both times they were forced to cancel. After the 2004 tour however, they have returned to the US again, as well as completing two tours in Mexico, Brazil three times over, and numerous gigs and shorter tours around Europe. While Rattus was on hiatus, their fame had spread, and the opportunities to connect with the people around the world had exploded. Back in the 1980s, touring had been a completely different ordeal.

The single most important source document from the 1980s for insights into the early tours of Finnish hardcore bands is without a doubt *Laama* #10, which covers the tours of Rattus and Kaaos in Europe, as well as the US tour of Riistetyt. After already having made a trip to play a single show in Denmark the previous year, Rattus started their first European tour in April 1984, and conveniently for punk historians, Sburg and Vote had joined the road crew. Their extensive reports, Sburg's for *Laama*, and Vote's for the *Rattus* zine which he wrote the following year, cover the journey that took the band through Sweden, Germany, Holland, Italy, Yugoslavia, England and Denmark. Like Vote, Sburg

saw the Finnish scene in a critical light, and states that by the time they got to Sweden the live shows already showed signs of improvement: 'the rampage was such that it surely cannot be found on this side of the bay. People were f-l-y-i-n-g in the air'. Instead of what Sburg sees as the passive and hopelessly drunk atmosphere back home, he felt a more positive energy emanating also from the German punks in Hamburg: 'we got to take note that the live riots in sweden were not so unique [...] there were no signs of even getting out of breath (whereas for the finnish drunk bums it is usually enough just to push their hands deeper into the pockets)'. However, who made the greatest impression on Sburg were the Italians in Milan whose dedication to punk culture he saw as incomparable with what he had become used to back home:

it was very nice to exchange scene-experiences and wonder about italy-punk's lifeforce and the enthusiasm with which connections with the world (esp. USA) are created and the entire extremely positive atmosphere surrounding bands/gigs/zines and on the other hand to lament over how many millions of light years away unreachable this sort of thinking and conscient scene floats from the reindeer-land's 'another sorbus' mud-wrestling. (Laama #10)

Although Italy certainly had a lively hardcore scene, perhaps the Mediterranean air had somewhat affected Sburg's judgement, since the praise does not quite meet with the reality. Out of the four gigs promised to Rattus, only one actually happened. Even the one existing show was booked on the wrong day when Rattus's tour calendar said Ljubljana and it was hastily moved to another date. In addition, Sburg noted that he had never felt as cold as sleeping on the stage of the Virus squat, the sleeping quarters provided for the band. Before heading to Ljubljana, Rattus however managed to play a show at the legendary Virus, which was evicted by the police only a few days later.

In contrast, the organisational skills of the Yugoslavian punks seem to have been up to the task, since Annikki states in the *Rattus* (Vasko, 1985) zine: 'Being in Yugoslavia was actually great, the show was good, we got to sleep on something soft after the week in

Italy, and Vellu let go an impossible long fart'. On arrival to Ljubljana Rattus was informed that the show had been promoted in the papers, on radio and on TV, and that punks had been arriving to the show from all over Yugoslavia. As seen in figure 15, indeed quite a number of local youths, 500 according to Vote's estimate, had made their way to the concert, and the lively event was described by Sburg:

it may be that in the beginning for a 1-2 min there was open-mouthed marvel, but when the first ones dared to step on the stage everything tore up and hard. it looked heavenly when on the stage at best there were a dozen studded jacket derelicts of the people's republic of yugoslavia who had lost their senses and acumen, and even the boys were grinning so hard that presumably the rocket speed was at its most extreme. (Laama #10)



Figure 15: Rattus, Ljubljana, 1984. (source: https://rattus.kuvat.fi/kuvat/EUROPEAN+TOUR+1984/Ljubljana_1984B.jpg [last accessed 25.06.2021])

Vote describes the show as the best of the trip, luckily, since the distance to the next show was considerable: from Ljubljana to London. After arriving to their destination, the road crew discovered that also here the four planned shows were non-existing. Despite the

disappointment, they stuck around, and a possibility of playing a show in Leeds cropped up at the All Dayer punk fest:

hopefully Rattus's brooding over not having played fast enough was not because after each performed barrage people were shouting 'FASTER, FASTER' because that was a so-called ovation which, when screamed loud, was meant to proclaim that probably nothing as fast had been experienced before and e.g./especially ALL of the adult-rock-tempo shit-oi uk-hc-attempts present only reinforced these kinds of views. (*Laama* #10)

Rattus had made an impact on the audience, and according to Vote (1985) they were the first band to get the crowd moving: 'About 40-50 punks trashed like mad through the whole set, it was really fun'. Apparently even those who missed the show like Shesk were affected: 'I went to the pub [...] and when I got back after a few beers, I'd just missed Rattus! Fuck. I missed Rattus in their hayday – by about two minutes. I'll never get over that one' (Thompson, 2015). For those of us that missed the show there is a rather professional multi camera recording of the occasion and the people indeed are whistling and howling after each song (also the 'Faster! Faster!' chants are documented towards the end).¹⁶ The drum kit takes a formidable beating during the half hour show, the guitar and bass accompany the hectic rhythm almost flawlessly and the strange, throaty, off kilter vocals must have sounded exotic to say the least. The video ends in the midst of screams asking for 'More, More!' The band went on to play another two shows, in Århus Denmark and Hannover, West-Germany, before their interrail tickets were expiring and they needed to head home. In the *Rattus* zine (Vasko, 1985), although admitting that after the tour the band was a little exhausted, Vellu summed up his feelings: 'The trip gave me a hell of a good feeling. It opened up my worldview, and it was nice to play for people who liked it'.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AW9nwAOytWM> Jettisoundz Video
https://www.discogs.com/label/161049-Jettisoundz-Video?sort=year&sort_order=asc&page=2

6.3.2 Bastards on trains

Rattus was not the first Finnish band to go on tour. In 1983, *Soundi* took notice that, although the Finnish punk bands barely had concerts locally, the American zines were praising the groups, their records were being published in Germany, and now they were also starting to tour abroad. In a short report entitled ‘Punkkimme ulkomailla’ (‘Our punks abroad’), Juntunen wrote about Bastards, the first group to take the plunge in October 1983. Rike emphasises the DIY attitude that was required to take up touring:

I guess Bastards is no better than the other Finnish punk bands, but we don’t stay waiting in the cellar for things to be done for us [...] We organised our European tour ourselves by getting in touch with Italian punks, and the boss of our record label was dealing with things in Germany (*Soundi*, 12/1983, p. 10)

Even though a European tour may sound grand, the reality was far from glamorous. The members of Bastards jumped on board a train in Tampere with interrail passes in their pockets, dragging along a guitar and a bass, and after crossing the entire Europe, arrived at the Virus squat in Milan for their first concert. The long trip was worth it and according to Rike a thousand punks attended the concert, although perhaps the figure should be taken with a pinch of salt.



Figure 16: In 1983, Bastards and Rattus played in Denmark. (source: https://rattus.kuvat.fi/kuvat/Aarhus,+DENMARK,+1983/Aarhus_1983.jpg [last accessed: 09.09.2021])

Bastards played another four shows in Italy before heading to Berlin for two gigs, and the last show (the poster seen in figure 16) of the tour happened at a punk festival in Århus, where also Rattus played their first show outside of Finland. Rike sees that the trip was good despite difficulties:

It was cool to see that Finnish punk is already known in Europe. In the gigs we saw even Bastards written in the backs of leather jackets. I guess Finnish hardcore differs from continental punk because Finnish bands are starting to have good sounds and even melodies. On our trip we saw punk bands from Yugoslavia, Italy, France, Germany and Denmark, and all of them played noise in the American style. As fast and hard as possible – you don't have the patience to listen to that kind of stuff endlessly. (*Soundi*, 12/1983, p. 10)

It seems that to Rike, fast hardcore was becoming annoying and he wishes that future Bastards material would reach, in addition to punks, also different listeners. The interview in *Soundi* also reveals that the band had been invited to tour the UK, with 15 dates already set, however, the tour plan fell through and Bastards disbanded. Looking back, Masa saw the strain of the previous tour as the main reason:

Mainly it was like the rest of the band versus Rike. I guess it was partially because Rike was like the boss, and kind of rightfully so, since he was the only one that was interested in doing stuff, and of course he made the songs and so on [...] but somehow the relationship started getting a bit strained when we were spending a little too much time already with each other. (Masa interview, 2017)

On the whole, the Bastards tour was not only pioneering, but also quite successful (of course not in monetary terms): most of the shows agreed to actually happened, the band avoided major setbacks (the bass player's lost interrail card being an exception), and didn't suffer excessive harassment at the borders or at the hands of the police (in Italy their arms were checked for needle marks). Masa also remembers that the most important thing, the gigs themselves, were good:

The gigs in my opinion were kind of successful, like, at that point we had been together for quite some time and had practiced the songs pretty well and, at its best, the playing was even like quite tight then. You could say we were at our best at that junction. We didn't mess up a lot of gigs, like they went well also in the sense that we didn't screw them up with too much alcohol. (Masa interview, 2017)

Alcohol, which played a significant role in the Finnish scene, was cheaper and more readily available abroad and for the most enthusiastic drinkers this presented a challenge. Whether it was the excessive amounts of drink or something else, the following accounts of Kaaos and Riistetyt are of tours that were not entirely successful.

6.3.3 Kaaos and Riistetyt – too drunk to tour?

Kaaos lived up to their name on tour. The general idea was in line with Bastards and Rattus: to get in touch with people abroad to book shows, get interrail tickets and embark on an adventure. At first, the idea had seemed surreal to Jypi:

I didn't believe we would go somewhere abroad to play – like 'stop kidding'. [...] In a way, I saw myself as a kid, like that it wouldn't be possible for me. But then, little by little, after the record (*Ristiinnaulittu Kaaos*) was out we thought: 'It's possible. Like fuck it, we can just get interrail passes like that and bring guitars and we'll go there and start playing' and the idea started to feel fucking great.

Like real fantastic. But practically you didn't believe it was real before you sat in the train over here and popped open a beer [laughs]. (Jypi interview, 2018)

As also told by Poko at the beginning of his tour report in *Laama #10*, Jypi confirms that the crew had been drinking heavily on their merry way through Sweden, and plenty more upon arrival to Copenhagen. As a result, even before they managed to arrive to Holland for the first show, there were complications. In *Laama*, Jakke explained that he got separated from the rest of the crew and was detained by the Danish police, and the other Kaaos members were left at the train station wondering what had happened to their singer. In Jakke's version of the story, since he did not remember the name of the town where the band was headed he returned back home, however, Jypi speculated on different motives for Jakke's disappearance:

Jakke turned back from Copenhagen, cos he had, I think he had a hangover, I bet that was the reason. Like since we had been drinking on the boat to Sweden, and through Sweden, and then in Copenhagen, he got home-sick, he realised that he can't take it if he drinks for a whole month, and he already had such a bad hangover that he just vanished. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Meanwhile Kaaos carried on without their singer, hoping that he would appear miraculously. However, as the hope for Jakke's apparition was getting thin, they found a way around the situation:

He had gone home, and there was Pökki from Orivesi, Poko's friend, who was with us. We went to Venlo in Holland, [...] there were the guys from a band called Pandemonium who Poko was pen-pals with, we went to their practice room and practiced the set and Pökki started singing. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Jypi remembers that they practiced twice:

And it was a fucking hard gig. Really brutally hard gig. [...] I was in the habit of always going into the crowd to muck about with the guitar but they fucking mucked about just as hard and I hit myself in the head with my own guitar a couple of times, almost blacked out. And Pökki as well was going damn crazy amongst the people. That was one fucking hard gig. (Jypi interview, 2018)

Flexibility and spontaneity allowed Kaaos to overcome Jakke's disappearance and the successful show with their replacement singer meant that the band could go on with the tour.

Unlike the other tour reports in *Laama* #10, the Kaaos one is condensed into a single page, perhaps because after a further two shows in West Germany, one of which is described to have been the best one Kaaos had ever played, things started again going downhill. In Kempten, the show was supposed to happen in a school, however the principle, known for his Nazi sympathies, cancelled the event after finding out it was a punk concert. The punks that had travelled to the show from all around Germany stoned the windows of the school and waited for riot cops to show up in order to fight them. As a result, even Kaaos ended up in the tank, accused of damaging a car and stealing a flag, and the fines they had to pay to get out put a dent in their tour funds. In Berlin, the organiser was nowhere to be found and the difficulties continued when they were not allowed to enter Italy due to insufficient cash money. The group moved on to southern France to enjoy cheap wine, after which three quarters of the band took the direction home. Although the tour consisted only of three shows, it still served as motivation for Kaaos to organise another one in the following year.

In turn, Riistetyt had everything laid out in front of them by chance. Chris from Bad Compilation Tapes was booking a tour of the US for Raw Power from Italy, and Vote convinced him to include Rattus. Chris was excited and accepted to take them on board, however, when it turned out Rattus could not make it, Riistetyt was offered in their stake. Chris had no idea that Riistetyt had begun to morph into what would become their new alter-ego Holy Dolls, and the move saw the band reduce the tempo, add melodies and glam punk influences (coinciding with Rike joining them after Bastards disbanded). However, the change towards more commercial sounds, while the American audiences were

expecting to witness the frantic hardcore of their earlier recordings, was only a part of the problem – Riistetyt had also transformed into rock-star divas in the process! In *Laama* #10 Sburg recounts how upon returning from the tour there was talk of amazing success, however, soon the news contradicting these claims started reaching him and since most accounts seriously clashed with the ones given by Riistetyt, he decided to contact the tour organiser.

In *MRR* #18, Chris had already written a report of the tour, however not dwelling in negative aspects despite losing several thousands of dollars of his own money. In three tightly edited pages in *Laama* #10, in which Sburg abridges Chris's response, he sets the record straight for the Finnish readers – touring with Riistetyt was hell. In the group's defence, Chris considers their drummer Make absolved from the attitudes of his band mates, however, the rest seem to have been acting like idiots. The majority of the blame falls on Rike's attitude, which included treating Chris like a businessman who was trying to take advantage of the band, when in reality they were being paid from Chris's pocket (Riistetyt had even demanded a legal contract to be drawn before the tour). While the bassist Mikkey is dismissed as a spoiled brat, Rike in turn is regarded as a calculative liar who always wanted everything to happen in his terms. Chris states that every time he tried to treat the Finns as adults (which he almost always did) they took advantage of it, and just drank loads of beer and vodka. However, Chris's favourite insult was when towards the end of the tour the Finns started calling him the little Mexican. While Riistetyt kept consistently causing problems and with their glam punk getting awkward reactions from the crowds, Rike nevertheless kept repeating the self-delusional fantasy that they were popular. However, Chris saw the hardcore punks' reactions to Riistetyt in three categories, one third liked them a lot or somewhat, one third was completely indifferent, and one third was either laughing or booing. Although it is a formidable feat to have played 24 concerts

as one of the first non-UK hardcore bands alongside Raw Power (and B.G.K from the Netherlands who were touring at the same time), it was unfortunate that, rather than the success it was first portrayed to be, Riistetyt had made a mess of it. Even the biography on their website indicates that the tour was not entirely successful, stating that after the US tour the band had no other solution than to have a break that lasted until 1999. In Riistetyt's defence, after the group returned to their hardcore roots, even the US scene seems to have forgiven the shortcomings of the first tour, since their reincarnation has returned there on three occasions (2005, 2010 and 2016). A further four Brazilian tours and numerous trips around Europe make up a list that commands respect, and somewhere along the way, Riistetyt must have learned their lesson.

6.3.4 'There are no drums in New York!?' Kohu-63 in America

In order to end the discussion on Finnish touring punks on a more contemporary note, the 2006 North American tour of Kohu-63, a group formed in 1976 in Tampere, is an excellent example of how grassroots the reality for a touring DIY punk band (even as old and renowned as Kohu-63), can still be in the 2000s. A documentarist was travelling with the band and the resulting film *Kohu-63 Amerikassa* (Ketonen, 2007) gives an in-depth view of the band on tour. If the line-up of Kohu-63 was filled with seasoned Finnish hardcore veterans such as Jypi from Kaaos and Poikkeustila, and Lahti, who in the 1980s used to sing in Bastards, in turn, Julian, the tour organiser, confesses that he was not as experienced:

I never thought it was gonna be that much trouble, to do my email every single day and like contact everyone in every town, and they're like: 'Send us their logo'. I don't know, just a lot of shit. It's a lot more than I thought, I've never actually booked a tour. (Ketonen, 2007)

Julian had taken the task of booking the tour because of his fascination with Finnish punk, and although there was good will, the inexperience became rather evident already on the first show in Quebec: only six people paid to get in. Unfazed, Kohu-63 played as if the venue was full. However, the problems were only beginning. Although the Finns were not expecting rock star treatment, the reality of basement shows can be dire – forget hotels and get ready to fall asleep on the floor in the middle of a house party. After 30 years of existence as a band, Kohu-63 is getting their pay from a hat that was passed around, and putting coins together to buy a few beers. Touring can be draining: the constant drinking, the irregular diet, the long drives in a hot car stuffed to the brim and accumulated lack of sleep over weeks are just some of the challenges that Kohu-63 had to face. Under these conditions, adversities may become too much to handle, and the right attitude is needed to withstand the strain. Of course, some cancelled shows naturally go with the picture (Jypi remembers that out of 22 shows 17 or 18 happened), and soon the band members were also doubling as car mechanics.

Kohu-63 arrives in Manhattan, to the legendary ABC no Rio, a venue for oppositional culture existing since 1980, however, Julian has not told the organisers that the band was not travelling with a backline. ‘There are no drums in New York?!’ This was already the third time the band needed to go after a set of drums since Julian had forgotten to inform the organisers. However, this time it seemed that there was no kit to be found. Over a decade later Jypi finds the incident hilarious:

Of fucking course, we are fucking playing, its mandatory: we’ve come this far, there’s a place and we anyhow have some stuff. The second guitar amp was missing; there was a bass amp, and some small guitar amp, and some cymbals. It was kind of fun – me and Pekkanen [the drummer] were fittingly in an ascending drunken buzz – so we went to the courtyard to dumpster dive and dig for some bins: ‘Hey dudes, this is fucking good for a snare!’ (Jypi interview, 2018)

In the car before the gig Jypi is psyching up the crew despite the less-than-ideal conditions, and they agree to just go for it. Lahti explains to the camera that ‘This is gonna be a little whimsical show in the Finnish style’. The camera is entering the venue from the street and going up the stairs through a crowd. In the background you can hear the music pumping, and through the corridor the camera arrives at the concert room where the Finns are playing at full force, full speed, sweaty and shirtless, like there is no tomorrow. The drum set consists of a large round bucket of thick plastic as a kick drum, a metal saucepan as a snare, and some plastic bins and jugs as floor toms, combined with actual cymbals on actual stands and a low plastic garden chair instead of a stool. Instead of two guitarists, the band now has two vocalists; Jypi has compensated for the lack of a second guitar amp by jumping on the second mic. The changes however have no effect on the intensity of the show, if anything, it seems that the rough-and-ready attitude of Kohu-63 has convinced the crowd of their authenticity. Equally sweaty, the people are swirling and pogoing in front of the band (there is no stage). After the gig, Kohu-63 are offered a place to stay by a fan – John is from South America, and his love for Finnish style of hardcore runs deep:

I grew up with this music you know [...] Finnish bands, I started when I was like, maybe like ten, eleven years old – into Kohu-63, I got into Rattus, I got into Kaaos, I got into all these fucking aggressive bands. I love it. I love it cos, you know, these guys were the people that actually made me think the way I think right now, and I love it you know. I have so much energy because of them. I wake up, I listen to some fucking Kohu-63, Rattus, Peruutus, some fucking, you know what I’m saying, some fucking Terveet Kädet, and I’m like ‘Roooooaaarrrr’ I don’t understand what the fuck you are saying, but you know what, in the inside, I know they’re protesting, I know they’re mad about something. (Ketonen, 2007)

To John, who was cooking for the band while he was being interviewed, it was important that he took this opportunity to show his appreciation, never mind he had to work the next morning:

You guys staying in my place, I love it bro, you know, you guys are welcome all the time. I’m waking up in like six hours and I don’t care. You guys can stay and hang out at my place, I don’t give a fuck. Hang out, have fun, eat, destroy my

place. I had a hard time growing up, I have a great time nowadays, so, to all of you guys, I owe something, and right now, I'm actually doing something for the scene you know, something to eat, some place to stay, some good music, some beers, that's all I can say, that's all I can do. (Ketonen, 2007)

The next chapter deals with people like John in different parts of the world. They all have experienced something meaningful and impacting when listening to Finnish hardcore. It has given them something, and now they want to give something back – their vision of Finnish hardcore punk.

7 Ni Originaux, Ni Copies

Even more surprising than the achievements discussed above, such as recognition in foreign zines, counts of releases outside of Finland, and the touring pathways created by the Finnish bands, the most curious outcome of these cultural exchanges are the bands created to pay homage to Finnish hardcore in the following decades. The groups discussed in this chapter all share something in common: they are made up of foreign Finnish hardcore enthusiasts. These individuals know Finnish hardcore better than most Finnish punks and they have been making music that is born out of their passion for the style, adding varied degrees of local elements to their sound. Some of the following evaluations on the ‘Finnishness’ (or the lack of it) in their music are based on a certain *je ne sais quoi* that I as a Finn see in them. Although heavily inspired by Finnish hardcore, and sometimes ‘borrowing’ elements of it rather ruthlessly, most groups in this chapter nevertheless produced a sound of their own – their approach may be called ‘pastiche’, but this largely depends on how the concept of pastiche is viewed.

Both Hoesterey (2001) and Dyer (2007) have produced monographs on the subject, and the former sees pastiche in a wider sense, not as a purposeful ‘stylistic medley’ but as something that in practice lets other influences and circumstances colour the efforts (p. 9). Dyer on the other hand makes a sharper distinction between pastiche proper, which he sees as ‘a kind of aesthetic imitation’, and pasticcio, which is rather ‘a combination of aesthetic elements’ (p. 1), which ‘often aims to look random, to create the feeling of abandonment to diversity, astonishment, surprise, tumult and chaos’ (p. 19). Following Hoesterey’s description, all of the groups in this chapter could be labelled as pastiche, and her observation that ‘postmodern pastiche is about cultural memory and the merging of horizons past and present’ (p. xi) is especially relevant to the discussion at hand.

Furthermore, disagreeing with Jameson who has seen pastiche as a 'neutral practice' or a 'blank parody', Hoesterey recognises it as paying homage, which would also be true of all the groups dealt with in this chapter. However, in Dyer's view, some of the groups would perhaps rather be considered pasticcios, which according to him:

combine more diverse signals than you can take in at one go, which may be underpinned but cannot be contained by elements of rhythm, narrative or design. There is often a sense of spilling over the edges of pattern, of breaking free from the control of narrative, of refusing the boundaries of media and genre. (pp. 19-20)

In some of the groups one can clearly detect this sort of mixture of elements, however, as discussed previously, depending on the listener or the intention of the work, spilling over the edges of the pattern may sometimes be beneficial. Still, Dyer (2007) sees that the criticism passed on from Italian usage of the word meaning a 'muddle' has resulted in pasticcios being criticised as 'derivative, craftless, undisciplined, confusing, indigestible, too much, things thrown in together anyhow, in short, a mess' (p. 20). On the other hand, Dyer cites a defence for pasticcio offered by Venturini: 'I am for messy vitality over obvious unity [...] richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning' (p. 20), and messy vitality certainly would be more fitting for a Finnish hardcore pasticcio than obvious unity.

Dyer also acknowledges Hoesterey's argument that works of postmodern pasticcio are also relevant politically, containing 'emancipatory potential' since they focus on identities that are unconventional and, as such, marginalised (p. 20). Dyer considers the pasticcio forms as products and expressions of 'new, hybrid identities forged in an era of multiple migrations and interacting heterogeneous populations' and as such are 'perhaps the only appropriate vehicle for actual forging of those identities.' (p. 21). Dyer also notes that pasticcio can be seen as intrinsically politically progressive because 'it breaks the boundaries of medium and genre, and refuses decorum and harmony' implying a challenge to 'received wisdom about what is proper, about the way things are supposed to be done,

about what goes with what' (p. 21). While Hoesterey and Dyer agree that there are still some negative connotations related to *pasticcio*, which are shared with *pastiche*, both also seem to want to remove the stigma.

Hoesterey employs a host of other concepts that are relevant to the discussion on (punk) *pastiche/pasticcio*. Hebdige (1979) already drew parallels between punk and *bricolage*, and Hoesterey (2001) reminds us that the concept introduced by Lévi-Strauss sees the *bricoleur* as someone who 'works with what is on hand' and that this 'tinkering' as it is called here, 'can produce brilliant and unforeseen results' (p. 10). Furthermore, Hoesterey notes that *bricolage* is defined by Genette as 'the making of something new out of something old' (p. 10) and hence relevant also to *pastiche* bands although they are not working with physical bits and pieces. *Pastiche* to Hoesterey is also akin to appropriation art which 'stresses the intentionality of the act of borrowing and the historical attitude of the borrower', and the art of refiguration that 'takes formal elements of past styles, and brings them forward into a contemporary context, resulting in sometimes disquieting synthesis of past form and present context' (p. 10). When it comes to the groups in this chapter, this synthesis is in most cases unavoidable, however the intention of the act of borrowing is usually assumed, understood as homage or emulation. In addition, as we will see below, there are some groups to which different terms such as fake, forgery or even hoax could be applied, although, for Dyer (2007) a proper *pastiche* 'is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation' (p. 1).

As Dyer acknowledges, imitation in the widest sense is the foundation of all learning, and art is famously considered an imitation of life. *Pastiche* however, would thus be one step removed from life, since it is an imitation of art, an imitation of an imitation. Dyer sees this as one of the reasons why 'negative associations persist, mainly now in terms of triviality or pointlessness' (p. 9). In addition, because *pastiche* intends that it is

understood by those who, in this case, hear it, a certain amount of familiarity with the work that is being imitated is required. This implies particular competencies from the audience, and in this light pastiche could be seen as elitist, excluding those that do not ‘get’ it. However, as Dyer points out, the snobbery in relation to pastiche ‘does not necessarily overlap with élites as normally socially defined’; in fact, in connection with punk, pastiche could be seen as elitist in reverse, or counter-elitist, excluding the ‘normally socially defined’ elite by referring to knowledge that they most likely will not know or ‘get’ (p. 3). On the other hand, the works discussed in this chapter have a standalone quality that does not necessarily require knowledge of the work that is being imitated, although admittedly this would allow comparisons, because as Dyer (2007) notes, a pastiche often deforms the work it is imitating by selecting, accentuating, exaggerating and concentrating:

The very act of selection deforms the original, makes the trait appear more present and insistent than it was in the original [...] Deformation may also involve working on the traits themselves, accentuating and exaggerating them, and repeating them more frequently than in the original. (pp. 56-57).

Dyer acknowledges that imitation is not the same as reproduction, and implies that a pastiche also transforms the original. This kind of two-way intertextuality is also relevant to the bands in question – the emulation potentially has the power to give new life to the original, or even expose defects in it. Dyer states that a new version may be more or less close to the template of the work being imitated; however, like all imitation it suggests an evaluative attitude: ‘the very act of imitating implies at least that the thing imitated matters enough to warrant imitating’ (p. 35). Both emulation and homage express an admiration towards that which is being imitated, in the hope that some of the inspiration is transmitted to (and through) the work. In fact, when emulating or paying homage to Finnish hardcore, creating music that stirs the same emotions as its predecessors is perhaps more important than following the form or content of the original rigorously.

The groups in this chapter are many, and they come from different parts of the world, from different circumstances, often having no other connection to Finland, or each other, apart from punk. Hoesterey (2001) ends her book by stating that the purpose of art is to disturb and make one think and, in its origins, hardcore displayed these qualities, inserting chaos into the punk system that was becoming obsolete. However, how ‘disturbing’ is a pastiche punk band in the 2020s? Have pastiche punk bands inserted chaos into the system? Dale (2012) discusses the question whether repetition within musical traditions is just ‘handicraft’ and concludes that unless the result is identical (which in the case of music is near impossible), ‘making something to a preconceived pattern’ can be seen as contributing to a tradition, taking that tradition forward and therefore having a meaning. Furthermore, he notes that ‘traditions have no purity in their content and are therefore always in flux’ (p. 75). Dale sees punk in general as a rebirth rather than something of a pure origin: ‘nothing comes from a vacuum, whilst a continuation of a tradition is always also necessarily a beginning’ (p. 213).

7.1 *France: ‘Juominen ystävien kanssa’ (‘The drinking with friends’)*

I slip a tape into the deck and press play, and as I hear the first notes, a surreal feeling of displacement comes to me. I am transported back to a basement in the south of France, beer in hand, singing along to a Frenchman who is screaming from the stage in Finnish. The tape contains a recording of a live show that took place on 24th of October 2019 in Bordeaux at a venue called Void. The opening song ‘Sotaa’ (of Tampere SS) is raging forward and Rakaa Väkiältä, despite having accelerated the already fast song, are more in sync than the band that wrote the song ever was. The group was created exclusively for the event, yet they sound as if they had been playing these songs for years. This is explained partially by the fact that the musicians are no beginners (Gasmask Terror, Ghettö,

Sexplosion, Bombardement, etc.), and in addition, they undoubtedly have also listened to these songs extensively over the years. As the tape rolls on, the band borrows songs from many classic Finnish outfits such as Kaaos, Terveet Kädet and Riistetyt, and the singer's output is spot on song after song. You could even say he is singing the songs more correctly than the Finns themselves! Between the songs the singer thanks the crowd in Finnish. Someone shouts '*Ole hyvä!*', another one goes '*Äpärä!*' The band is turning the venue into a temporary utopia of 1980s Finland – although the near-flawless execution of the songs is a definite give-away.

In the middle of the show I am escorted to a young lady who I'm told is Finnish. I'm greeted with the question '*Mitä vittua?*' ('What the fuck?'). During a break between the songs someone shouts '*Painu vittuun*', telling the band to 'fuck off' in Finnish. She is finding the situation slightly overwhelming: 'What are these guys doing, I mean why?' I explain to her quickly that these people love Finnish hardcore punk. She looks at me in bewilderment which I understand well since I once was just as astonished to find out that there are people abroad who LOVE Finnish punk noises. No time for lengthy explanations, I tell her that the song starting is called '*Jumalan sotilaat*' by a band from Tampere called Bastards, and jump back into the small crowd that is swaying in front of the stage to this frenzied mid-tempo song. Although this might have been the first (and perhaps only) show by Rakaa Väkivalta, it showed the passion with which these French musicians relate to early 1980s Finnish hardcore.

The second band of the evening, and the main reason for my trip, is even more difficult to explain. Dissiped also paid homage to Finnish hardcore, however, they did so through their own wildly mangled compositions inspired by the Finnish sounds. Dedication to their favourite style also resulted in the band singing in Finnish, or at least trying to. The Dissiped show was supposed to end up on side B of the cassette, however, on the occasion

of the show, the record button was not pressed.¹⁷ Shame, since their performance would be impossible to reproduce: as if to compensate for the fit form of Rakaa Väkivalta, Dissipated represented the other end of Finnish hardcore, the drunk and crummy. Fjord, who had begun the day with a healthy dose of cheap rum in his coffee, was in a state that one can only describe as too drunk to play, which however did not stop him from playing and resulted in unique renditions of the guitar parts. Mange on the other hand was too hung over and was struggling to get into the same zone. Stuck somewhere in between, Öni was keeping the show together and somehow even Fjord soldiered through the set despite barely being able to stand up or hold onto his guitar – Kaaotic noise not music indeed! As seen in figures 17 and 18, the influence of Kaaos has been important since the early days of French hardcore, the writing is on the wall, and also under the skin.

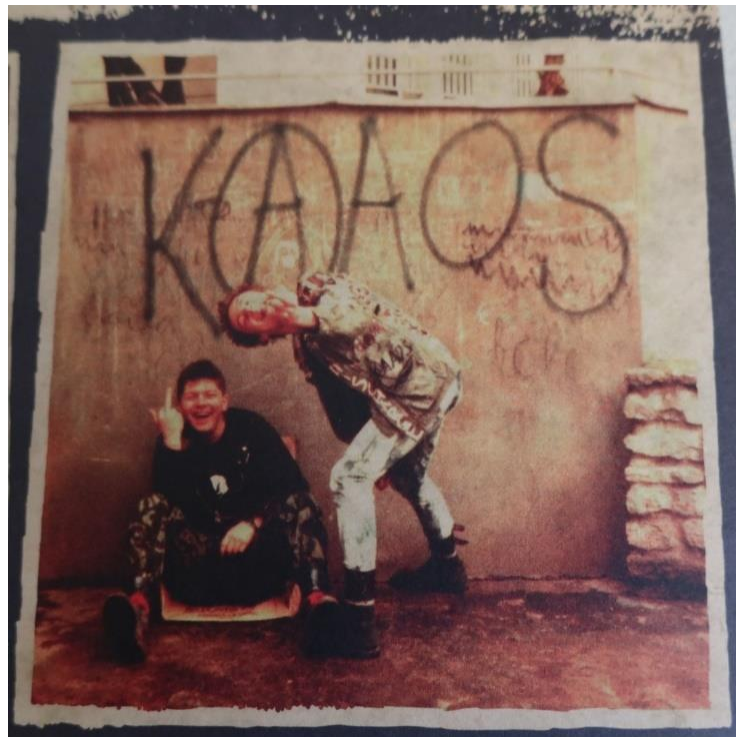


Figure 17: Finnish hardcore was known to French punks already in the 1980s. (source: *Rapt: Thrash War – Discography 1984/1987*, 2018)

¹⁷ Instead the b-side is made up of unreleased outtakes from the Dissipated archives, also including cover versions of Terveet Kädet, Kaaos and Klimax.



Figure 18: While I was preparing for the trip to Bordeaux, Fjord sent me a picture of his Kaaos tattoo.

On the previous evening Dissipated had gathered together at Öni's (b. 1979) place for the interview that was conducted in English. We began discussing their music through my first impressions: that it was DIY punk that, despite the lyrics being in Finnish, did not attempt to arrive at a full-on imitation of the Finnish style. The reason to this was given by Mange (b. 1982): 'Because we are not Finnish. We make French kind of Finnish music, Finnish hardcore'. All members had been avid listeners of Finnish hardcore before forming Dissipated around 2006, with Fjord's (b. 1966) fascination for the style originating already around 1986-87, when a copy of the French pressing of Rattus's EP *Rajoitettu Ydinsota* (Neg-Fx 1986) ended up in his possession.¹⁸ Upon hearing the Rattus EP Fjord remembers immediately liking the sound and the singer, as well as the fact that they were singing in their native language in contrast to the Swedes who tended to sing in English. Öni agrees that also to him, the language attracted his attention (shouting out random Finnish words 'äpärä!', 'kuolema!' always stretching the last vowel). Mange is also quick to agree, adding that despite often not knowing what is sung, he likes how the language sounds. In fact, Öni

¹⁸ Neg Fx had already included Rattus on their international compilation EP *Single Ticket to Paradise* (1985), and would go on to release the French pressing of their LP *Stolen Life* the following year. Other Finnish bands had found exposure in France for example on the compilations on Déflagration Tapes.

confesses that at times he might not even recall the meaning of the lyrics of Dissipated, stressing that remembering the sounds is more important:

Maybe the sense of even what we are saying, maybe it's not the first criteria of importance of everything. I don't know if we have a message, do we have a message? Apart of having fun, boozing. So, the point, you know, you don't understand, but you know it is in line, you feel it or whatever, it corresponds to whatever you like. It is not a problem if you don't understand the lyrics. It is the same not only with Finnish but with other languages, you feel this correspond to the music, the style, whatever, the intention, the energy. But Finnish is very specific. (Dissipated interview, 2019)

As seen also in other examples, the feeling of being on the same side of the fence is transmitted despite the language barrier. For Dissipated, striving to create something that would resonate even if the lyrics are not understood is more crucial than accurate use of grammar. When enquired about the bad Finnish, Öni states that until they met some Finnish people that could help, they were at the mercy of google translate. He stresses that they, as a team, are *trying* to speak Finnish, not necessarily managing. Even if Dissipated inevitably fails to mislead the Finnish native speaker, at the same time their lyrics, for example 'Sekainen' ('Disorderly') are simple enough for the message to come through:

/ Sekainen me soitamme punk /
/ Sekainen me juomme olutta /
/ Sekainen me sotkemme keikat /
/ Sekainen me oleilemme kaduilla /¹⁹

Despite not yet having witnessed the show at the time of the interview, with songs like 'Sekainen' and releases like *Juominen ystävien kanssa* ('The drinking with friends') and *Viva la crapula* ('Long live the hangover'), I knew alcohol played a significant role in Dissipated's music. Informed by the research of Briggs, Gololobov and Ventsel (2016) I also knew that drinking with informants might sometimes be necessary and this seemed like

¹⁹ / Disorderly we play the punk / Disorderly we drink the beers / Disorderly we mess up the gig / Disorderly we hang out on the streets / From Dissipated: *Juominen ystävien kanssa* (Paska Records 2009). Translation from the liner notes.

one of those occasions. After a couple of beers, I enquired about the band's relationship to alcohol and Fjord immediately replied: 'There is plenty of things to say':

FJord: For me alcohol is not a problem, is a solution. Maybe I die too soon but I don't care. I don't care.

Mange: Bullshit. For me it's a fucking problem but we do it.

Lasse: But what's the connection with music and Dissipated?

[...]

Fjord: Yes, we play drunk [live] and when in the cellar [practice room] we drink, it's like a connection with your music.

Öni: We never played sober I think.

Mange: Some time I tried to play sober and...no, it's shit.

Fjord: If I play Dissipated when I don't drink alcohol it is not the same. (Dissipated interview, 2019)

Fjord sees alcohol as an enabler of sorts that also gave his young shy self the necessary strength to face the world. Mange adds that alcohol is not only a way to connect to music ('You never listen to Sorto if you don't know alcohol'), but also a way to connect between the members of the group, as well as with like-minded folk:

We are alcoholics, alcoholic people. I stop doing it for four months in my life, it was cool, and I fall again, drinking, because drinking people is funny. Yea, it's better, you don't care, I like this kind of person: with problems, you're on the street totally drunk, you meet a lot of people totally wasted, I like it for real, you are like Bukowski people. (Dissipated interview, 2019)

For Dissipated, drinking also appears as a common subject for songs, however, singing about drinking may have a more profound purpose than might appear on the surface level, and the attitude carries a message that is more important to Dissipated than paying lip service to political topics. The question is not that the members of Dissipated do not agree with the political side of punk. Öni, who is responsible for the lyrics goes on to explain:

The way we are doing, you say 'oh we don't have political message' or whatever, which is true, but maybe it is true according to the lyrics or whatever, because talking about beers and blaa blaa blaa, ok. Of course, we could have talked about war, but you know you already have this kind, so maybe we just have some kind of lyrics saying we are fun, but the way we are doing the music, the intention, the way we are doing it, to me this is politics. Because we could do a band, you know very serious, but no, the way we are doing it, it's against the normal value, or

whatever, so beyond the lyrics, the words, what we are, the attitude or whatever, I think this is politics. (Dissiped interview, 2019)

This attitude does not mean that the band is not serious, in fact the members of Dissiped see that they, at a time, were very committed to their mission. To the point that they even had developed what could be called Finnish alter-egos, including wearing wigs during concerts. Or would that rather be considered a sign of not being serious? In figure 19 the group is posing in the cover of their debut effort *Tampere 1985*.

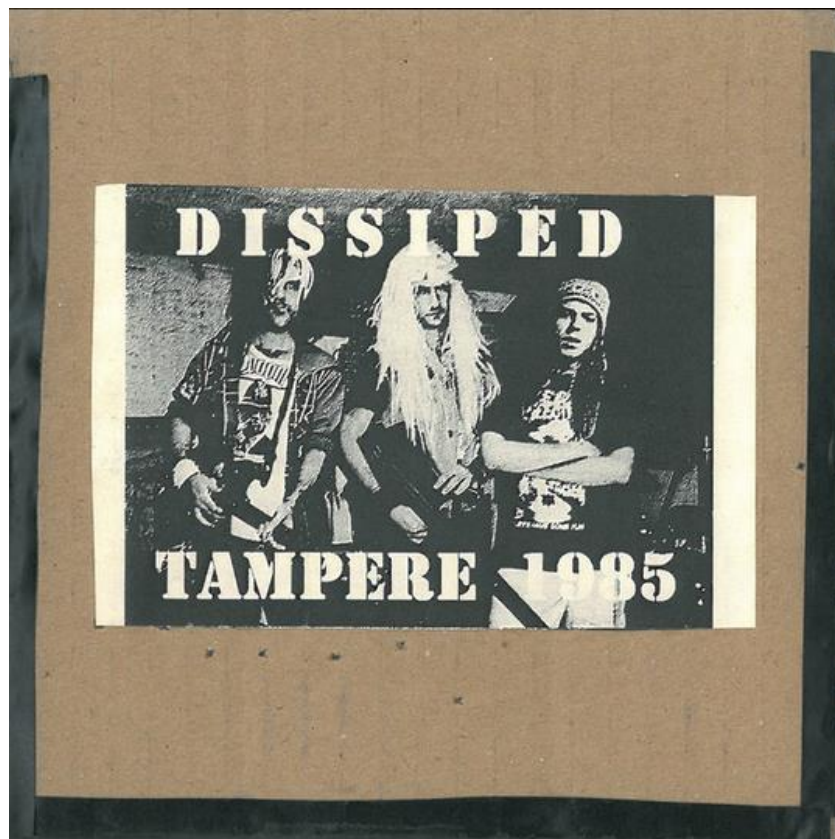


Figure 19: The informed observer might get suspicious about the recording being made in 1985 since Fjord is wearing a t-shirt of the iconic *Police Bastard* EP by UK group Doom that was not released until 1989. (source: *Dissiped: Tampere 1985*, 2007)

Still, even when practicing regularly, the point was never to reach perfection, or as Mange put it: 'We make some songs especially not perfect'. Fjord also rejects a perfect sound, arguing that is not what punk is about for Dissiped. As Mange notes: 'That is why we are punk because we don't know how to play really, nobody learned, or make studies

of music'. Still, as Öni points out, Dissipated would of course be trying their best – it was never the intention to screw up. It seems that for Dissipated there is a delicate balance between dedication on one hand, and a conscient choice to not take punk too seriously on the other. In Finnish hardcore the members of Dissipated had felt a similarly jovial attitude that was also one of the reasons they started liking Finnish bands to begin with.²⁰

Another aspect that to Mange increased his curiosity about Finland was its obscurity: 'For us in France, Finland is something really exotic [...] It's really far, we don't really know. Nobody cares about Finland.' The fact that a place off the beaten path had produced so many excellent punk bands created an interest to experience the country first hand and Dissipated organised a Finland tour in 2009, which however failed to meet their expectations:

Mange: 'For me, I don't come to Finland again.'

[Everyone else laughs]

Mange: 'No seriously. I like Finnish music, but the Finnish people, oh. The country is very beautiful, but people, no, I prefer to go to Spain or I don't know, Czechia, or Malta. No, Finland, maybe because we are Latin people, we love to speak. And [in Finland] we don't meet a lot of people, just, all people just don't speak [...] we make a Finnish band, we go to Finland, it's ok, and who speak to us? Nobody. We make a commitment to play in your fucking country and you don't care. (Dissipated interview, 2019)

What shocked the French visitors was the lack of socialising that made them feel a little unwelcome as the cultural differences were sometimes too great. In Tampere, the people simply disappeared from the venue after they played. In Oulu, Fjord was left dumbfounded after he tried to offer a beer to a local and was rejected. In addition, the Finnish crowds impressed Fjord with their passivity: 'The audience is very strange. They say they like it but they don't move'. When I tried to explain that it sounds like the band had actually had

²⁰ The feeling of camaraderie also led Öni to put together *Laatiminen Äpäröille: Finnish Punk HC Compilation '08*. Inspired by the compilations on Propaganda records, the LP contains 13 Finnish bands along with Dissipated. The compilation demonstrates that the fondness for Finnish punk is not uncommon in France, since Öni's Paska Records ('Shit Records') was joined by seven other French labels to release the album.

a true-to-life experience of Finland, proposing that they imagine what it would be like to live there, Mange immediately reacted: ‘No, no, I choose to be free!’ It seems that Mange had had a taste of the asphyxiating atmosphere that I strongly associate with Finnish social awkwardness – as if everyone would be stuck in a giant elevator.

The cassette tape *Suomipunktribuutista Täydelliseen Rappioon* (Paska Records 2020) – the first tangible result of this research – reveals in its insert that however traumatic the touring experience in Finland seems to have been to Dissipated, nevertheless, the band eventually managed break the ice on their last show in Lahti:

Before a Dissipated gig in Lahti, people gave us many liters (sic) of kilju (home-made alcoholic beverage, made from sugar, yeast, and water. More or less sugar wine). Although our set was supposed to last 25mn (sic), we spent about one hour on stage. (Dissipated liner notes, 2020)

Anointed with kilju, Mange, Fjord and Öni finally connected with the Finnish punks, and as video evidence from the event shows, also the audience was more receptive this time, to the point that the crowd was even moving (something you cannot take for granted when playing in Finland).²¹

In 2019 Dissipated had just returned from an eight-year hiatus to play a few concerts, including the last one described above, after which the band was laid to rest. However, the Finland worship of its members continues in the form of Maho Neytsit (a band covering the material of Finnish group Maho Neitsyt). Dissipated was a tribute to the sounds these Frenchmen had found inspiring, music that was composed to honour their debt to Finnish hardcore, not seeking to replicate the sound but to emulate the feeling of genuineness and spontaneity they had experienced when listening to it. Another important aspect that Dissipated embodies was brought to the table by Yan, who on that night was going to be drumming for Rakaa Väkivalta. He commented that Finnish punk sounds unassuming, as

²¹ DISSIPATED@LAHTI (SUOMI) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGfIiTscK6Y> [last accessed 04.01.2020].

if it was made by children who are playing punk rock for fun, without lofty goals or ulterior motives, and it is this unpretentiousness that, to him, differentiates Finnish hardcore and makes it ‘more punk’ than what was happening in the rest of the occident at the time.

7.2 Sweden: *‘Historia kusessa’* (*‘History in piss’*)

Finnish and Swedish cultures were interconnected long before recorded history. Although historians still debate about the details, it is clear that influences travelled across different peoples that inhabited what is today called Fennoscandia, and the sagas tell of Swedish mythical King Agne making an expedition to Finland already in the 4th century. Finland made part of Sweden until 1809, when the territory was ceded to Russia, becoming the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. Still, even today there are more than a quarter of a million Finns speaking Swedish as their first language. Conversely, during the Second World War, neutral Sweden received tens of thousands of Finnish orphan children, out of whom thousands remained there after the war. Up to this day the Scandinavian countries share a political vision of social-democratic collaboration despite Sweden, Norway and Denmark still clinging to their monarchies. In addition to collaboration, there are also traditional rivalries between the two countries that are sometimes reproduced in the punk scene, as seen in figure 20.



Figure 20: Caricature of rivalry between Finland and Sweden, with the other Scandinavian scenes observing at the side-lines. (source: <http://www.swedishpunkfanzines.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Swefin-Punks.jpg> [last accessed 09.09.2021])

As discussed previously, Vote started selling Swedish records in Finland, and by the same route Finnish hardcore records found their way to Sweden as soon as they were released. Still, the influence of Finnish punk would have been negligible in comparison to the shadow of Discharge which was looming large over the Swedish scene; in fact, some of the first bands considered as Discharge clones are from Sweden. Not only was the music and lyrics of bands like Discharge and Discard modelled after Discharge, but also the ‘Dis’ prefix was adopted, in the same font, as well as black and white images of casualties of war used in the cover art. Therefore, it is not surprising that the phenomenon of bands outside Finland playing in Finnish dates back to the mid-90s in Sweden when a group called Rajoitus (‘Restriction’) from Borås recorded their demo tape ‘Tuomittu epäuskon sortoon’

(‘Condemned to the oppression of disbelief’, published later as ‘Hardcore Attack 1995’ 12”). Although it is curious as to why some Swedish punks would start a project in Finnish, at the same time the explanation is simple: some of the members have Finnish ethnic backgrounds. This explains how the lyrics are written in quasi-correct Finnish, and the near perfect pronunciation of the vocalist. In addition, the nods to Rattus, Terveet Kädet, Kaaos and Uutuus in their discography in form of cover versions further underline the fact that the influences of Rajoitus clearly came from Finland.

However, rather than attempting to reproduce the sound of Finnish bands, Rajoitus developed their own style, although it could be said that even as their style evolved, the mood of the songs remains mostly in line with the Finnish side of hardcore. The editor (2012) of swedishpunkfanzines.com recognises that ‘the Finnish bands were noisier, more filthy and drunker than the Swedish peers’ and the members of Rajoitus seem to have made a similar observation. Especially in their early recordings there is plenty of overall chaos, musical recklessness and off-kilter vocals, and songs such as ‘Osta ja juo’ (‘Buy and booze’) from their debut effort attest to the influence of alcohol:

/ VIINA TEKKEE SUSTAKIN MIEHEN /
/ ÄLÄ MEE ARMEIJAA MEE ALKOON /
// OSTA VIINAA / JUO VIINAA //
/ VIINA ON HYVÄÄ SEI OO PYHÄÄ /
/ HUOMENNA DOKATAAN JA OLLAAN PELTI KIINNI /²²

Despite accentuating and even exaggerating some elements of Finnish hardcore, Rajoitus created their unique blend of contemporary inter-Scandinavian hardcore that mixes ingredients from different styles and different eras of hardcore punk.

In addition to Rajoitus, who have amassed a long list of releases over the years, there are more recent Swedish groups that show that the influence of Finnish bands has not

²² Booze makes you a man / Don’t go to the army / Go and buy alcohol // Buy Booze / Drink booze // Booze is good / It’s great / Tomorrow we booze / Fucked up & passed out / Rajoitus, *Hardcore Attack 1995* (Distortion Records, 1995). Translation from the liner notes.

disappeared over time. Selkäsauna ('a severe beating') is a group that claims to be from Rautalampi, Finland. Selkäsauna rely on DIY production and a rough edge to their musicianship to place themselves firmly in the Finnish camp. From the output of the singer it becomes clear that he has a very good idea of the Finnish language even though it is possible to spot small grammatical errors in the song titles. In a Skype call, Henrik, the guitarist, revealed that the group is actually from Gothenburg and also half of Selkäsauna members have Finnish ancestry. Their debut LP *Pyromaani* is a self-released effort (punk off records, 2017) that is clearly a 'punk for punks' kind of undertaking, with fittingly messed up artwork. As some of the lyrics also indicate, Henrik confirms that also for Selkäsauna alcohol has been one of the inspirations – especially for the younger members. In the Swedish context, a certain amount of drunkenness also seems to be almost a requirement in order to simulate the Finnish feel. From our conversation it also emerged that, although there are other active groups playing in Finnish in Sweden, they do not necessarily form alliances, and while Rajoitus is widely known, Henrik did not know of the existence of another contemporary group, Päästö ('Emission'), also singing in Finnish.

To be fair, Päästö has only one official release: a very limited edition (55 copies) cassette tape on Spela Snabbare records. Päästö hails from Umeå, several hundred kilometres north from Stockholm, and this seems to have influenced even the way they pronounce Finnish, especially in evidence in their song 'En välitä' ('I don't care') in which the personal pronouns are pronounced in dialect ('mie', 'sie'). The band describes itself as an imaginary love child of Cal from Discharge and Jakke from Kaaos, and they have in fact recorded a number of Discharge songs with lyrics translated into Finnish. Evidence from live videos also reveals a greater degree of crumminess in comparison to many Swedish groups – the context seems to have enabled Päästö to have a greater tolerance for amateurism. A noteworthy difference between Päästö and most groups dealt with in this

chapter is the fact that one of their vocalists is female. Although hardcore punk has been often seen as a boys' club, in a paper delivered at KISMIF 2018 in Porto, Portugal, I have argued that in the Finnish context this was not entirely true. Actually, in Finland, the participation of women in Finnish 1970s punk as band members was minimal, and perhaps the only female-fronted group that could be considered punk, Päätt, was more aligned with new wave. With hardcore, women eventually started making an appearance, fronting groups such as Rutto, Pyhäkoulu and Vivisektio. Of course, there was still an overwhelming majority of male scene members in the 1980s, however, today this dynamic has changed to the extent that the participation of women is crucial in all levels and roles in the Finnish scene.

Yet another recent Swedish group to pay homage to the Finnish sound, Varoitut ('Warning'), reinforces the thought that Finnish hardcore continues to be consumed in Sweden. However, what differentiates Varoitut from the rest is that musically, it is much less in line with recognisable Finnish elements. Apart from the language that is at times slightly grammatically clumsy, although never to the point of interfering with understanding, the band's output on *Helvetin Hardcore* (2020) does not indicate any specific tribute to Finnish punk. Even the Kaaos cover version 'Nukke', the clearest sign of Finnish influence, is performed in a way that brings about a rather Swedish feel. On the flipside, which features an earlier demo recording, the semblance of Swedish hardcore is maintained, although the noisier production somewhat lessens the impression. As is evident also from the work of many Finnish groups, the use of language alone does not produce the coveted effect of resemblance to the 1980s Finnish sound.

It is notable that, although Swedish hardcore is influential in Finland, and even learning the language of the former coloniser is still compulsory, the Finnish punks have not been known to start bands that sing in broken Swedish. The few examples of punk

bands singing in Swedish in Finland are usually put together by Swedish-speaking Finns. However, there have been collaborations between the two scenes. Mäksystem sang in Swedish and produced an EP for Fight Records (2001); Ääritila, an ‘all-star’ formation released an EP and two LPs sung in Finnish (between 2003 and 2008); and Herätys, in which a Finn living in Sweden teamed up with local punks, delivered an LP (2010) and two EP’s (2010, 2012) of blistering hardcore with lyrics in Finnish.

The opportunity to sing in Finnish due to a band member that has a notion of the language seems to have been significant when it comes to the Swedish groups. To start learning Finnish from scratch as in the examples of the groups from other countries was not necessary. From the sounds created by the Swedish groups discussed above, it can also be deduced that a certain spontaneity and permissiveness for errors facilitated by intoxication makes part of their vision of Finnish hardcore.

The conversation with Henrik also revealed that although he has listened to, for example, some Japanese groups that sing in Finnish, Selkäsauna’s inspiration comes directly from Finland. In any case, the other pastiche groups had aroused his curiosity, and when I pointed out that there are bands, such as Konepistooli, that are influenced by Finnish hardcore also in Greece, Henrik was interested in hearing them. The following day I received a message containing his reaction:

‘Konepistooli (sic) sounds too perfect. It’s the typical sound of an old punk band doing a comeback record.’

7.3 Greece: *‘Musically trained weird punks’*

Exarcheia in Athens is considered the city’s anarchist neighbourhood, already taken up by the punks as a hangout in the early 1980s after early signs of gentrification had evicted them from Pláka, the other bohemian area in Athens at the time (Kolovos and

Souzas, 2020). When I visited the area in 2018, anti-capitalist graffiti and posters with anarchic themes reinforced the impression of a continued presence of punks in the area. ‘Exarcheia square’ is rather large, and heavily populated by drug dealers, which makes eye contact with strangers slightly uncomfortable. I am here to meet Apostol, the singer and guitar player of Konepistooli (‘Submachine gun’), a Greek band that sings in Finnish. After not seeing anyone who would look like the obvious punk vocalist, I resort to giving him a call. Soon, a slim, regular looking young man in his late twenties is waving to me from across the street – I should have called earlier, I would have never guessed it! Apostol suggests that he take me to a place he likes and we jump in his car. Since he seems eager to cut through the formalities and start discussing punk, I already turn on the recorder while we are gliding through chaotic Athenian traffic. After about a quarter of an hour we park, already deep into the conversation, and continue as we walk towards a rather classy looking Irish pub with an imposing façade.

Apostol is from Kavala, which he calls the ‘Finland of Greece’ in the sense of a high concentration of Finnish punk fans (and the group Kavala SS attests to this claim). His near perfect English, the rather sophisticated Irish pub, as well as the fact that he tells me he is a classically trained musician start making sense when Apostol refers to himself as a ‘spoiled rich kid’:

You can put this in the whole thing, I don’t care, but people are not gonna like it. But I am from a family that is very aristocratic. So, I had a nanny growing up and I spoke English and German and I’m not a gutter punk, I don’t think I seem like a gutter punk. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Coincidentally, even though my chat with Henrik took place after my trip to Greece, the answer to his criticism about Konepistooli’s excessive perfection is already found in the interview with Apostol. He refers to Konepistooli as an ‘academic approach to Finnish punk’, and that he *wants it to be perfect*. Apostol has painstakingly analysed many aspects

of Finnish hardcore, the harmonic, the rhythmic, its connections with Finnish folk music as well as history. The aim is to perfectly emulate, not only the feel, but also the form of Finnish hardcore. However, as I point out the paradox of attempting to play ‘perfect’ Finnish hardcore, Apostol recognises the problem and agrees that mistakes are hard to replicate:

Apostol: That is true. We’re not a band of mistakes, we are a band of trained musicians. So, it’s hard to do that, exactly.

Lasse: Cos in order for the crumminess to be authentic, it can’t be like some calculated mistake, you know.

Apostol: Exactly, and that is the point where all these bands are always gonna have this thing over me. That I am a musician. I can’t do it, whereas they, out of passion and out of playing are doing it, so that is a point that they have – and it’s one of the biggest points that they have and – I miss that. I can never replicate that because I know how to play. (Apostol interview, 2018)

In this sense, crumminess can be seen as a kind of defence mechanism for crude hardcore punk. Even if this is not by design but built into the hardcore aesthetic, in a way it is keeping most ‘real’ musicians at an arm’s length. Still, Apostol does not see the absence of mistakes as a problem for Konepistooli, in fact, he considers that they have achieved a more complete and superior emulation in comparison to other bands singing in Finnish. Although saluting his ‘colleagues’ around the world for their efforts, he sees that none of the bands he is aware of have come as close to the Finnish sound:

Well, I’m gonna sound snobbish, but I think that, well, of course it’s hard, and most of them are just punks. What I mean is ‘just punks’ not ‘musically trained weird punks’. So, to me the fact that they just put a Finnish name and they want to do the vocals in Finnish is enough for me to say ‘bravo’. But if we take it from a very serious point of view, which no one is, because this is not a serious subject but, anyway, let’s say that we do it, well, yes, it doesn’t sound like Finnish punk. (Apostol interview, 2018)

But how did we arrive at this point; how were the ears of a musically educated young man tainted by Finnish noise? After finding rock music at 12 years old, and having honed his ears with Judas Priest and Iron Maiden, Apostol went on discovering new things. Via Motörhead and Pistols he discovered Dead Kennedys, and when seeking something similar

from Europe he found out about Discharge – ‘it was downhill from there’. However, there was a significant moment when Apostol’s search for new sounds brought Finnish punk to his attention:

Räjätää! from Kavala were created by Mitsos and another guy back in 2004-2005. They played some Finnish covers and some of their own songs in Greek. They recorded a demo and played some shows in Greece. It was just a project that some friends made for fun, it doesn’t have a long story, but it was very influential because at some point, a fourteen-fifteen-year-old Apostol picked up this Räjätää! demo. And he’s like who are these guys and what are they doing? And there was like ‘Miks sä haluat tapella’ and fucking ‘Pissaa ja paskaa’ and all that stuff and I’m like ‘ok, let me check these bands out’. So, in a way, without knowing it, I got obsessed with the thing, and it grew on me by the years, to an extent where now I’m going to Finland to record Finnish vocals to a band that’s playing, trying to play, emulate, the complete Rattus sound which is like my favourite thing. (Apostol interview, 2018)

In his own words, Apostol became obsessed with the Finnish bands to the point that he started to learn to play the guitar. He wanted to learn to play like Jake from Rattus, and watched videos of the band in order to understand the exact movements of the plectrum to arrive at the same peculiar strumming style which he refers to as dancey. Overall, Apostol sees melodies and pop sensibility, combined with what he calls ‘clunkiness’ of the drums, as elements that differentiate Finnish hardcore from the rest:

I think the melody is a strong part of it. I think what’s different about Finnish, melodies are very prevalent. The Finnish, when I listen to some of the melodies in the songs, I could say ‘this is a Finnish song’ [...] they sound as if they’ve taken like this very traditional-sounding melody, and put it into, you know, their d-beat drums that are kind of clunky and all over the place, they all were kind of like that. Finnish punk has really clunky drums, I mean the drums are all over the place. They’re like sloppy as hell but sloppy in a good way. They sound as if the guy is just like really passionate about it, he’s playing like very passionately. (Apostol interview, 2018)

While analysing the melodies was less of a problem for Apostol, finding a drummer capable of emulating the ‘passionate’ way the drums are played was a challenge. Apostol auditioned plenty of great drummers that, although technically excellent, could not simulate the feeling and the groove of Finnish hardcore drumming – they were attempting to play too linear.

Still, although Apostol found a line-up he is happy with, Konepistooli live videos reveal another difference between the Finnish punk drummers and the Greek one emulating them: even if the latter may have mastered the groove, he is still playing technically, whereas brute strength would often trample over technique in the case of the former. Moving systematically forward with his detailed analysis, Apostol comments next on the stringed instruments:

The bass is also very important to me in Finnish punk. The bass, it sounds as if the strings were never changed, and it was just, you know, glanglanglang [imitates the sound], it sounds like a fucking African monochord. And it sounds cool. I mean there's differences between bands. And you listen to this chainsaw guitar, you know, that it's just, it's not a chainsaw guitar in a way that it's metal, it's a chainsaw guitar in a way that you know that it's just a fucking practice Peavey amp from the studio that sounds like trash. It sounds cool. I mean one of my favourite records is the first record from Riistetyt, *Valtion vankina*. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Again, even after carefully analysing each element, on the debut album by Konepistooli the strings sound different. Perhaps they forgot to marinade the bass strings, and the studio may have been lacking a Peavey practice amp. Another observation about the record is that although one can hear the influence of Finnish hardcore (and especially Rattus) throughout, at times the riffing ('Ahdistaa', 'Pimeä Tunneli') is entering the territory where 'inspiration' is starting to become imitation.

Finally, although the vocal arrangements in Finnish hardcore also get praise, the element that most clearly differentiates Finnish hardcore from the rest for Apostol, is the language. Although the point he brings out is not exclusive to Finnish, it is pertinent because it bears a connection with the way the Finnish language speaks to Brazilian punks:

A lot of people ask me 'why do you play and listen to music in a language that you don't understand?' And to that I answer, and I think this is quite important: 'when you don't understand what someone is saying, he can say whatever you want him to say'. So, I might listen to some song by Mellakka, and it says what I want it to say, you know. Because I don't understand what it says, well, I didn't understand at first, now I've searched it, I've learned about Finnish and I have kind of, you know, translated all that stuff. But back then it was like 'I'm angry

with my mom, so this song is gonna talk about that' and I'm gonna put it on and it's gonna be like [hums a Mellakka riff] and it's gonna say what I want it to say. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Apostol's approach goes to show how listening to music in a language that you do not understand can free the listener's imagination. On Konepistooli's debut album the lyrics are well written, a result of painstaking work, first written in Greek and translated into English in order to make them understandable to the Finns who assisted with the grammar. Apostol sees this as the 'correct way' of going about the process, as opposed to some bands who do not seem to care whether what they came up with Google translate is accurate. When Apostol showed me his lyrics they were still a work in progress – hardly a spontaneous affair:

I'm gonna sit down [with a Finn] and do a lot of work on this. Because I want the songs to be perfect. [...] I want it to be a homage to Finnish hardcore but in a good way. I want it to be a good Finnish hardcore record that someone from Finland will buy and not say 'this is just a weird Greek band' but like 'this is good, this could be someone from Finland'. And I really want that. That's why I'm going to record the vocals in Finland cos I want the Finnish person to be there and say 'you said it wrong, go again, it's like this and this you know'. (Apostol interview, 2018)

The perfectionist approach led Apostol, not only to travel to Finland in order to have language support readily available, but also to seek out a Finnish studio engineer in Athens. Still, although Apostol's vocals are extremely well pronounced, the native speaker will pick up on some inconsistencies and the written lyrics offer eventual giveaways that make it difficult to trick the Finnish listeners.

While not one to demand excellence from punk bands, I find myself nit-picking on the Konepistooli tracks since Apostol's perfectionist attitude almost invites criticism. When it comes to the recording, the perfectionism has led to an end result where the lyrics are in fact easier to understand than those he is emulating. While the Finnish singer cuts some words in half and tramples over others, Apostol's articulation is always controlled and placed within logical boundaries – no colouring over the lines. Finnish hardcore vocalists

often placed their vocal lines rather ‘unmusically’, while Apostol sounds too formal and complete in comparison. One could say that in the musical sense, almost without exception, the Finns fared ‘worse’ in their vocal performances. But exactly because their singing was less controlled and less understandable, it was more idiosyncratic and angrier, and as a result, more original and impacting. Of course, originality is not what Konepistooli is after, but in relation to Rattus singer Annikki – since Rattus is the main inspiration – the vocals sound controlled and neatly on the mark.

On the Konepistooli album, the excessive amount of learnedness also comes out in the frequent guitar solos, which sometimes, as in the opening track ‘Obaman joululahja’, are more dexterous compared to those that inspired them. If you play, as Apostol refers to it, with ‘passion’, which in the case of hardcore punk is usually understood as treating the strings and the skins violently, it will push you towards the point where you start losing control. While Apostol is clearly very passionate about the subject, and recognises the importance of rough edges, the element is nevertheless missing from the Konepistooli album. Still, another aspect makes it even more difficult to imagine it to have been made by a Finnish band.

The name of the group refers to a very specific submachine gun, model Suomi KP/-31, the so-called ‘Suomi konepistooli’, a light, powerful and reliable weapon which has been given a fair amount of credit for the success of the Finnish army in keeping the Soviet Union at bay during World War II. On one of his trips to Finland, Apostol sought out a real specimen of this legendary firearm for a photoshoot, posing as a soldier in a Finnish forest for the album cover seen in figure 21, while the back cover has a picture of all three members next to a massive Finnish flag seen in figure 22.

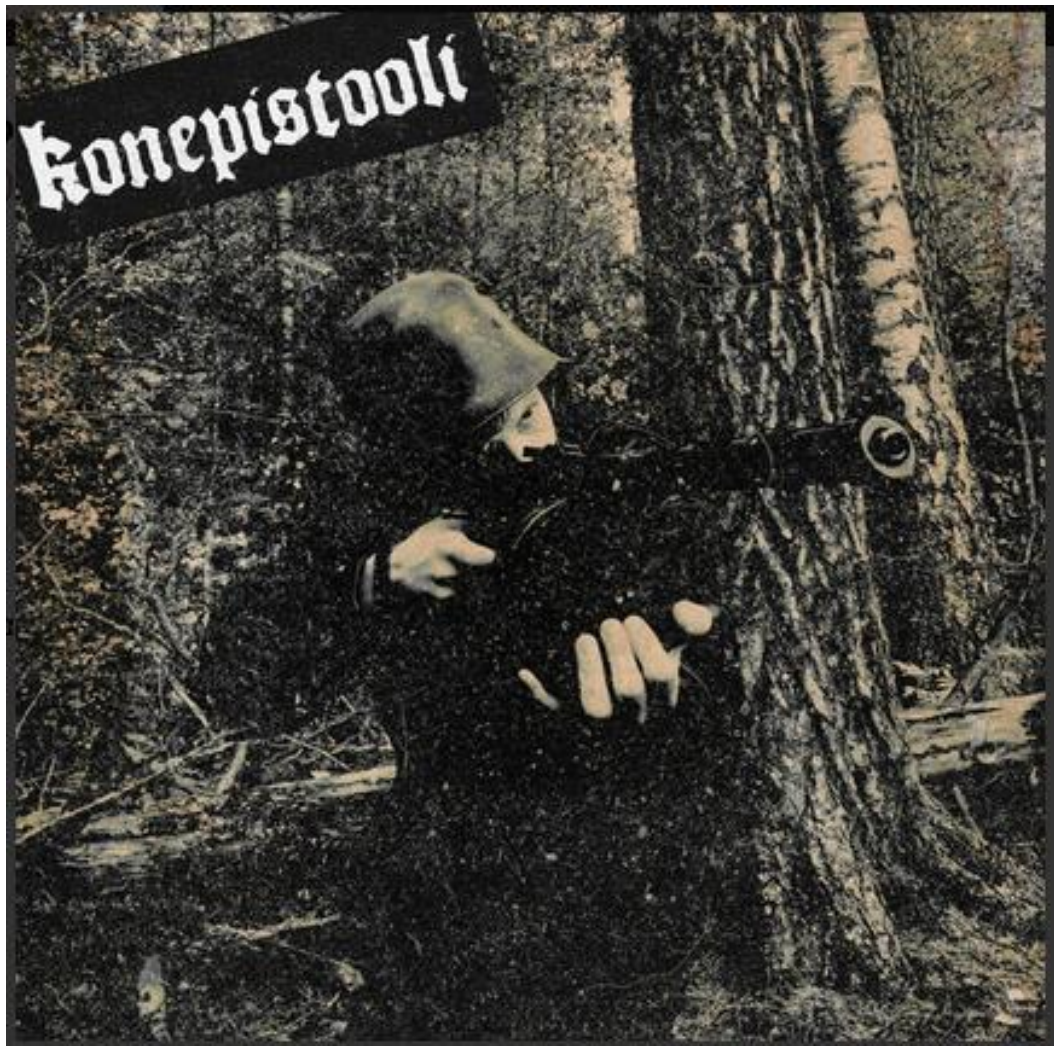


Figure 21: Apostol pointing at the enemy with a Suomi konepistooli. (source: Konepistooli: st, 2019)



Figure 22: Posing next to the flag would not be acceptable for Finnish punks, however, it is an entirely different matter for Greek fennophiles. (source: Konepistooli: st, 2019)

If this was a Finnish band, the punk scene would have repelled it instantly. In addition to the cover, the centre label of the vinyl will challenge the Finnish listener once more with the lion emblem of the Finnish state. Although punk in Finland has an antagonistic relationship to symbols of national pride, it must be kept in mind that these are Greek people using them, and that by idolising Finland they are renouncing their homeland and turning their backs on Greek (punk) traditions. However, that is not the intention. In fact, Apostol sees that Finland and Greece have a lot in common as countries that have suffered great oppression in the course of history, and does not try to hide the fact that the Greek flag

bears a meaning to him. In fact, Apostol recorded the vocals for the album also in Greek, and it was released in two different versions:

There are things I fucking hate about Greece, and when I see people from like, you know, Golden Dawn and stuff like that, those people are complete dorks, in the same way that the Communist party are dorks, they follow the fucking party line and people tell them what they have to do, and they just follow orders for someone else's benefit, and I hate that. But on the other side, I love Greek food, and I really like the Greek temperament, I like the idea that Greece has created, so I don't hate the flag and I'm gonna proudly wear it on my fucking guitar, because it's nothing more than the fact that this is a band from Greece, from the fucking shithole that is called Greece, but it's still my shithole. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Without deeper knowledge of Greek politics, the comparison between the Golden Dawn and the Communist Party of Greece seems slightly unwarranted, still, although admitting to being rather conservative due to his upbringing, Apostol renounces right-wing politics. But he sees also Finnish hardcore as a product of Finnish identity to which he associates a certain darkness that can be felt in the traditional music. Although none of the Finnish interviewees admitted to a secret love of humppa or iskelmä, Apostol's view that the punks were influenced by the traditional styles may be true:

Because these people grew up listening to, you know, Olavi Virta and all that stuff you know, and they had all those influences in the way they tried to write rock riffs, but they wrote something that sounds very, very influenced by eastern melody. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Apostol's obsession with Finnish hardcore made him curious about Finnish traditional music, which he considers to be a unique mix taking the best things from Slavic melancholy, influenced by German classical music and Polish polka, and adding the Finnish humppa element to bring it all together. Apostol claims that a harmonic analysis of Finnish hardcore shows that it has a folkish twist, which, although they may not have understood this themselves, the punks had inside of them.

Another aspect of Finnish culture that Apostol associates with the attitude of Finnish people is the fact that they do not seem to take themselves too seriously. This, to

me as a Finn, seems odd, since I have always thought of Finnish people as stern and serious. However, in the light of the unruliness and naivety of Finnish hardcore punk, the suggestion seems valid. In fact, there is a jollier side to the Finns, which (unfortunately) often only comes out after a few alcoholic drinks. The drinking culture of the Finnish punks connects with not taking yourself too seriously, however to Apostol this was the most challenging part of visiting Finland:

The people there are just complete drunks. Completely drunk out of their ass. [...] And I mean that's what's hard – and I know this is kind of insulting – but that's what's hard for me about the Finns. I love it about the Finns, but I know when I'm gonna go out with Finns, we're gonna talk, we're gonna have fun, but after two hours I'm not gonna be able to talk with anyone. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Although not opposed to alcohol per se (during the interview we both downed two pints of beer), Apostol confesses that he has never been drunk in his life. When I suggest that to the Finns, drinking to the point of passing out is about losing control, and that perhaps there is something about the out-of-control-ness of Finnish punk that appeals to him exactly because it is the opposite of his life-experience, it seems to strike a chord:

I fear it. I fear, fear losing control. I fear it. [...] I've never been out of control in my life. All my life I've been structured, and we have to do the thing, and this and this, and even when I take the Finnish punk I structure it. But they're not structured, they just don't give a shit, and I love that about them. (Apostol interview, 2018)

Paradoxically it is exactly what Apostol loves that he cannot appropriate – the chaos. Still, the Konepistooli LP is full of well written riffs that sound exactly what Apostol describes them to be, the result of an academic approach to writing punk songs inspired by Finnish hardcore. Or as Kämäset Levyt, the label co-releasing the LP describes on their website: 'Real Finnish style sounding more Rattus than Rattus themselves and some riffs sound like they could have been invented by Riistetyt in Kuljun Työväentalo in 80's'. It is true that the riffs, the playing style, song structures and vocal mannerisms are not only well-researched, but clearly a work of passion.

As someone researching punk (how does that still sound so cringey?) I should understand Apostol's approach, and in rational terms I do. Everything he told me makes perfect sense, as do the songs he wrote, but perhaps that is the issue. They appeal to a different part of the brain than the recordings they are meant to emulate. Finnish early 1980s hardcore was far from reasoned out, in fact it was often the opposite. When listening to the Konepistooli LP, I can appreciate their effort, I can see the meticulousness that went into constructing it, but it does not make me feel like I want to turn it up painfully loud and start trashing my apartment! Still, it is a beautiful homage that, especially to the members of Rattus, ought to feel a little surreal. Although the analysis here may have been overly critical, the record is heartfelt and sincere, after all, as the famous axiom attributed to Oscar Wilde states: 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery'.

7.4 *Brazil: Ihmisen Helvetti ('Human Hell')*

Although punk is predominantly an urban culture, there are also elements of a certain neo-Luddism that in addition to mistrust of new technologies and clinging to printed zines and vinyl (Arto interview, 2017), is manifested in a longing for an existence out of the 'system'. Within punk, perhaps the clearest evidence of this are its anarcho-primitivist factions that long for a return to the pre-industrial 'feral' state of life, however, the Finnish hardcore punks' primitivism was most evident in their music. Etherington (2017), speaking of primitivism in literature, sees it as an 'aesthetic project formed in reaction to the zenith of imperialist expansion at the start of the twentieth century' (p. xi). He describes it as a reaction to the geographically totalized capitalist system by dissenting spirits who, through their art, attempted to rekindle the primitive modes of existence lost in this transformation. Even though primitivism has been considered a Western phenomenon – the West projecting its primitivist fantasies into non-Western 'others' – there were also primitivists like

Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade who were critical of the impact of Western modernity on local cultures. De Andrade had visited Europe, but preferred to return to Brazil, commenting that: 'If there is anything I brought from my trips to Europe between two wars it was Brazil itself' (Quoted in Fonseca, 1987). In fact, in Etherington's (2017) view, it was in the peripheries that primitivism thrived:

The primitivist project was not restricted to Western artists, which is to say, those situated in or near the metropolitan centers of the capitalist world-system. It was an aesthetic mode taken up across its span. Indeed, artists from colonized peripheral societies were the ones who most keenly felt the loss of unalienated social worlds, and it was they who most energetically pursued an aesthetics of immediacy. (pp. xi-xii)

However, Etherington sees that the peripheral position itself sometimes works against primitive works, as if primitivism would only become an artform when practiced by those in the centre:

The idea that primitivism was only an ideological projection of those from the center of empire has meant that its most powerful expressions in the peripheries either have been overlooked or miscast as second order appropriations. However vexed, primitivism holds an important place in the utopian memory of attempts to negate the social logic of globalizing capital. (p. xiii)

Within punk, its most genuine expressions of primitivism are found in the peripheries, and although they are overlooked by most, at the same time, peripheral primitive punk rarities from countries such as Brazil are held in high esteem amongst European and North American collectors. However, when it comes to wider recognition, the primitive extremity functions as a defence mechanism against excessive popularity, maintaining the underground status.

When I lived in Brazil after the turn of the century I got up close and personal with local punks to the point where I would not only share the stage, but also head lice with some of them. Along the way I met many people without whom I would not be writing this thesis today. From the teenage street punks high on *loló*, to the politically correct vegan

straight edgers, they all seemed to know something about Finnish hardcore, and upon finding out I am Finnish they always had a number of curiosities to ask about. I met people whose Kaaos shirts were hanging by a few threads, saw Finnish bands featured in numerous zines, discovered labels making Finnish re-releases, home-made patches of obscure groups. Who listens to Hylkiö in Finland? One of the Brazilian re-releases was a CD pressing of *Skitsofrenia* by Riistetyt on Usina de Sangue Records from São Paulo. The release was distributed in the south of Brazil by another one-man operation, and Renan, the man behind Terröten Records often appeared at my door with a bottle of whiskey, demanding to listen to *Skitsofrenia*. Of course, he had many chances to listen to it with other friends, as I'm sure he did, but he wanted to listen to it with a Finn. We would turn it up loud, and Renan would get up from his chair and start gesticulating wildly, singing along to the choruses, soaking in every note and cherishing every beat with his fist in the air. When the record ended, he wanted to listen to it again, louder.

The love of Brazilian punks for Finnish hardcore seems boundless. However, since the connections between Finnish and Brazilian punks was the topic of my master's dissertation, the subject will be given a mere update in this chapter. Since then, in addition to Helvetin Viemärit ('Sewers of Hell') already featured in the earlier work, another band invoking the Finnish word for 'hell' has appeared in the Brazilian scene: Ihmisen Helveti ('Human Hell'). Although the reference to Brazil as 'hell' is fitting in many ways, it is also known as the land of great contrasts. In the place where I was staying, far in the outskirts of greater São Paulo where pockets of nature are starting to appear, the chaos of the city seemed far away. Surrounded by geese and chickens that were prancing around the yard, I interviewed Daykine (b. 1995), the band's vocalist and a second-generation Finnish hardcore fan:

My dad he was a punk and my mom a headbanger, I was born with the influence of old bands, right [...] but I wasn't really a fan of punk or even hardcore, I sided more with my mother, listening to metal and classic rock. My dad wanted to influence me but I did not understand, I said that I didn't like it because there were no solos like in Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. One day he told me 'I'm tired, when you'll turn 14 you'll start listening to this, and then I want to see if you won't like it'.²³ (Daykine interview, 2016)

Sadly, Daykine's father never got to see his son turn into a punk rocker but passed away before this could happen, however, his prophecy was right: 'Said and done, I started listening at 13. He always told me that if I were to start listening, the first local album that I had to listen to was Kaos 64 and I listened to it, and, dude, I fell in love.' The records were already there, and Daykine started indulging. Soon he had developed a love for Finnish hardcore, with a particular fondness for Terveet Kädet, also due to the recommendation of his father:

I listen to Finnish hardcore every day, I won't say 'today I'll listen to this'. No, I listen to it every day. It already became a habit, because it's such a strong influence. Of all the global scenes that there is, Finland, the Finnish scene is my favourite. The bands are sensational. My dad used to tell me that I had to start listening to Finnish stuff with Terveet Kädet. The first album I listened to was *The Horse*, and that in a way opened up my heart and I said: 'Man, what is this? This is, man, this is the most beautiful thing I've ever heard'. And I kept on listening to more albums, researching about other bands, but when I listened to Terveet, man, the emotion was really massive. (Daykine interview, 2016)

The fact that Daykine mentions *The Horse*, 1985 album from the phase when Terveet Kädet was singing in English, is significant, because the appeal of Finnish language is absent. Although Läjä's arcane vocal performance mangles any language almost beyond recognition, still, it was not the vocals that Daykine highlights:

Man, it's many things, it's difficult to say, but what caught my attention the most is the obscure way of making music you know. At least in *The Horse* album I see it very much. It's more obscure, like more of a brutish thing. And another thing that I think is very, very crazy is like, man, how can such a noisy band be from such a calm place? It's so silent, man, that's what is sensational to me. (Daykine interview, 2016)

²³ The interviews in this section have been translated from Portuguese by the author.

When Daykine speaks of the calmness of Tornio, near the Swedish border in northern Finland where Terveet Kädet originates from, he speaks with the authority of someone who knows what he is talking about. In his late teens, Daykine started saving up in order to make a pilgrimage to the home town of the group he loves:

It was the first time that I travelled man, to Europe, it was like a wonderful experience for me. Man, I worked two years straight to be able to travel to Finland, and like I don't regret it, not even for a second [...] It was worth the effort, each day a new experience, it was sensational, I felt like a child, the smile didn't leave my face for a second. (Daykine interview, 2016)

However, on his return to Brazil, Daykine had felt himself sinking into depression. Although the experience had been overwhelmingly positive, at the same time, it was hard to accept being back in a very different reality in Brazil. One way of coping with the culture shock was to turn the frustration and anxiety into songs for Ihmisen Helvetti. These songs became the group's *Eka Demo* cassette that was released on a German label (Argh.fuck.kill., 2017). Comprised of a drummer, a guitarist and Daykine as the singer, the group produced a sound that conjures images of the cold north despite not attempting to emulate Finnish hardcore. Especially Daykine's vocals, drenched in reverb and not always entirely understandable, are clearly influenced by Finnish singers. Before travelling, Daykine had already practiced the language and the positive reactions he received when using Finnish words gave him confidence to write lyrics in Finnish.

I had first met Daykine when his pilgrimage took him to the Puntala Rock in 2015. By this point it had already become commonplace to meet Brazilian punks on a pilgrimage at the festival. This is also how I first got to know Robertinho (b. 1978), another Brazilian Finnish punk fan. I caught up with Robertinho in Barcelona, in a squatted house overlooking the city from the hill of El Carmel, to talk about his experiences with Finnish punk and Finnish punks. Already on his first trip to Finland, Robertinho had the chance to meet many of his Finnish heroes at Puntala Rock and was impressed by the humility he

encountered. He appreciated the fact that although the bands are legendary, the members are not interested in status and their attitude only made Robertinho respect them even more. One encounter, despite not turning out entirely how he imagined, had remained especially vivid in his memory. On his first trip to Finland, after the festival he had a chance to go to Tampere and catch a show by Kuolleet Kukat ('Dead Flowers'), a post-Kaaos project of their vocalist Jakke. Robertinho's Finnish friend Jenni had mentioned that the show ought to be great, as long as Jakke is not too drunk. Like a fly on the wall, Robertinho was observing the show, soaking in the influences:

A guy came in, all dressed in black, older, with long black hair, black all over, which to me seemed like a post-punk visual, a bit gothic, and I said to myself: 'ah, this guy must be Jakke'. Jakke was always like a bit half-punk, half-goth, and I thought 'he's a bit older now, more like, not wearing all that visual'. And the guy stood there all serious, not drinking or anything and I thought 'it's him, he is not drinking so he endures the show', right. So, Jenni came to me and told me 'come here I'll introduce you to Jakke' and she took me in the direction of this guy, and I told myself: 'see, I knew that this guy was Jakke'. When we arrived close, from behind him a guy appears like 'röööärrrgghh', with a hairdo like this [makes a gesture with hands indicating that it was all over the place], he looked like Janis Joplin! (Robertinho interview, 2018)

Unsurprisingly, Jakke was too drunk to communicate, and this naturally made me curious about how he fared on stage:

Afterwards, the show was a spectacle, right, man, he was really drunk, he could not stay on his feet. And the band was playing, everyone very sharp, a massive fucking sound, and him like that. Some people were getting on stage to pick him up. Then some guy stayed on and sang a song, another one got up and sang and so on. And he stayed there, a little lost, but when he picked up the microphone and sang, [...] what he sang wasn't much, but when he sang, that voice which [takes a deep breath], it cuts, right, it kills, opens you up, right, zzzwiff, from top to bottom. It was one of those gigs. Brutal. It was a great gig, no matter how like drunk he was, that was a great gig, fucking good. It was unforgettable, this one I remember to this day. It really marked. (Robertinho interview, 2018)

Perhaps to most people, and even to many punks, the spectacle of Kuolleet Kukat would not have had the same impact, however, the Finnish bands represent something special for Robertinho. They have also influenced his own musical projects like the São Paulo group

Septicemia that would play a number of Finnish cover songs, as well as their own song 'Kesytetyt' written in Finnish, and Gattus (a clear homage to Rattus, although in this case there was less musical evidence of Finnish influence) that operated in Barcelona.

As for many Brazilians, Robertinho's introduction to Finnish punk had come through the Brazilian pressings on New Face Records. *Black God* by Terveet Kädet (New Face 1985) was his first encounter: 'I went nuts, I said "geez", a language from hell that I could not understand at all and such a violent sound'. And from there on it went, the next was Rattus, *Uskonto On Vaara* (New Face 1984), and the curiosity just kept growing. Robertinho goes on listing his Finnish influences, starting from the obvious, and arriving to the obscure ones like Sekaannus, Terrori and Purkaus:

Terveet Kädet for having been the first band that I listened to, they have their place, dunno, it stayed in my memory, like it really became the band closest to my heart. Not because they played super good, because there were other bands that played even better than them right. [...] An aggressive sound, and a different sound, that voice of Läjä's, it was brutal, it sounded like, dunno man, like a voice of a chicken, you know [laughing], a chicken singing, dunno. But it was brutal. (Robertinho interview, 2018)

From the chicken analogy onwards, the discussion became about rawness. Robertinho highlighted Kuolema's violent feel, and I asked what happens when you listen to this type of sounds:

Goosebumps, man, right, it's like energy, like a dirty racket, and these guys were do-it-yourself, right, they didn't care about like a good recording, quality, dude, it was like: 'we are punks and us, we are recording, and fuck off', right. But they were good, despite being dirty and badly recorded, there was, right, there was something original there, right, man, as much in Kuolema as in Sekunda. Those Sekunda recordings as well, they were really badly recorded but it's something that makes you curious, I said to myself: 'gosh what a strange band' right, man [laughs]. Badly recorded, you hear it really low, but dammit, dunno what makes us like these bands right? (Robertinho interview, 2018)

It was through this kind of penchant for obscurity that Robertinho was able to impress the Finns on his visits. Knowing the underrated hardcore bands revealed Robertinho's level of dedication, that in effect he must be mad about Finnish hardcore to be liking even these

horribly mangled bands. Knowing (and liking) Sekunda somehow presupposes a longer trajectory in punk.

There is a fairly large community of Brazilian punks in Barcelona, and I was able to talk to another Finnish punk fanatic. We sat down in a stretch of grass near the *Arc de Triomf* and Fumaça (b. 1974) began to tell me how also his fascination for the Finnish bands started with Terveet Kädet and *Black God*: ‘It put my whole head into disarray, man, I went nuts. That’s it, I went nuts: “I want a Mohican” – I started to tear my clothes.’ In Belo Horizonte where Fumaça was born there already was a following for Finnish punk, and he started to duplicate cassettes that he got from the older punks. Over the following years Fumaça developed an intense relationship with the Finnish sounds: ‘Really that kind of a profound love, till today man, when I see that there is a new band from Finland I get curious’. Although the fascination is ongoing and also extended to contemporary groups, Fumaça sees the early 1980s as a magical period:

Even today there is good stuff, but that period, I was still a kid right, but I can say from what I know from that period, man, it was magical. Man, these guys [...] were magicians, they transmitted something really beautiful. A very beautiful energy you know. It caused a discomfort in your heart. I really felt the need to scream, or to put on some messed up clothes and go out to face everyone, you know, and look people in the eye with a grimacing look and say ‘brother, it’s all a mess, this has to change’. (Fumaça interview, 2018)

Despite looking at the world from completely opposite point of view geographically, Fumaça felt that the Finnish bands were disseminating a message that fit also to his reality, and he sensed the rage and frustration in the voices of the Finnish singers. Without knowing too much about Finland, he imagined a country that was cold, depressive and dark, and this added to the charm of Finnish bands – the distance was actually bringing them closer. He kept imagining how these bands were even able to play in the extreme conditions:

Man, how did they manage to do that? I always had imagined that it was constantly snowing, and the guys playing, and the snow on the roof trembling and falling down from the loudness. The decibels were super extreme, the guys

playing, saying all those things that they were saying, and the snow falling. The sound was so strong that it was cleaning the snow from the roof. (Fumaça interview, 2018)

Even after visiting Finland in the summer, the image stays with him. It belongs to a time when Finnish hardcore also inspired him to take his first steps as a musician. Fumaça says that he started playing drums after hearing Finnish punk, and he learned the only way available: ‘the hard way’ (*‘na tora’*). Stydy, the drummer of Riistetyt, was especially influential:

It was because of the Finns that I wanted to play drums. That was the inspiration, I can tell you that the first inspiration was when I listened to *Skitsofrenia* of Riistetyt [...] ‘I want to put a band together, I want to play this’. I started straight away attempting to play fast, and I screwed myself over, ah, dude, it’s not easy. If you listen to *Skitsofrenia*, *Valtion Vankina*, man, he really had his own take, this one is unique right. You can see a lot of bands trying to do the same and not managing. (Fumaça interview, 2018)

After moving to Barcelona, Fumaça met a Finnish punk and saw an opportunity to pay homage to the style that had given him so much. Together with his friends from South America who shared a fondness for Finnish hardcore (Oscar from Venezuela and a fellow Brazilian Pablo) they took the opportunity to put together a band to play in the Finnish style. Their Finnish singer, Jukka, came up with the name Hyvää Yötä (‘Good Night’ in reference to Musta Paraati) – Fumaça had always found the umlauts fascinating and this name had plenty of them.

The group recorded one demo, seen in figure 23, and played a handful of shows before disbanding. However, the project spawned another one, Krusifiksi, also in Finnish, and this time with a Polish drummer and an added Finnish member, Vellu. The influences for Krusifiksi were 1990s Finnish bands such as Força Macabra,²⁴ Uutuus and Epäjärjestys

²⁴ Força Macabra, a group that has been performing in the Portuguese language in Finland since the early 1990s, is an important early example of hardcore punk pastiche, however their example has already been discussed in my MA dissertation (Ullvén, 2016).

and the band also recorded one demo. Although Fumaça enjoyed playing with the Finns, it was difficult to maintain the bands in the long run:

I can tell you that most of our bands ended because of the drunkenness of the Finns. These guys can't keep it together. I'd say 'bro, let's practice well!' 'Sure'. And when the guys arrive, an hour before they are already all 'ööörrrhhh' [...] But I don't mean that it was bad, it was fucking good playing with them, it was good, I liked it a lot. (Fumaça interview, 2018)



Figure 23: Detail of Fumaça's art for Hyvää Yötä. (source: Hyvää Yötä demo, 2012)

Fumaça's testimony shows that the connection between alcohol and Finnish punk has remained strong, to the point that sometimes drinking seems to have been the primary objective and making music secondary, as with some of the 1980s groups (Maho Neitsyt being the most infamous). More importantly however, the examples of Fumaça's groups (as well as projects like Riisteterror) demonstrate how Finnish hardcore has also functioned as an ice breaker and mediator between and within cultures, with people finding common ground through their fondness for similar noises.

7.5 *Japan: 'Raw is better'*

Japan already had a punk culture in the 1970s, and the Japanese group SS is one of those bands that speaks in favour of the theory that hardcore was built into punk from the outset. Although SS did not produce any studio recordings during the 1970s, their fast and aggressive sound that was captured on a live recording from 1979 shows that punk was already finding harsher expressions than those of Middle Class or Black Flag. In fact, Japanese hardcore, that also went on to test the limits of what can be considered sonically pleasant, is another example of a peripheral variation on the theme of hardcore that has managed to garner a significant reputation globally.

The Finnish and Japanese scenes had started to collaborate already in the 1980s, for example, through a split EP between Euthanasia from Finland and Macrofarge from Japan (MCR, 1989). Soon after the turn of the decade into the 1990s, the Finnish scene strengthened its ties with Japanese groups and similar split records started to come out rather frequently. For example, the Finnish punks Selfish excelled in this regard, putting out split releases with three Japanese groups: Disclose, Crude and Liberate. In addition, the predilection for similar noise had already spawned musical projects paying homage to Japanese sounds in Finland, one early example being the *Demon Priest* EP by 集団自殺 ('Syudan Jisatsu' meaning 'Mass Suicide'). This recording from 1991 is made in such a convincingly Japanese style that rumours of legendary Japanese punk vocalist Sakevi's (G.I.S.M.) participation still persist. However, from listening to the EP it should be clear that the vocalist is an impostor (although quite a talented one), and the recording can be filed under Finnish pastiches of Japanese hardcore. Another project that actually blended the line-up between the two scenes happened when a Finn recorded in Japan with local punks, resulting in the 7" split EP between Insane Youth AD Wild Things and Crucified by the Kä-Kami (Dan-Doh Records, 1999).

The demo tape *Cryptic Life Reality* by Finnish group Shiro (seen in figure 24) is another outcome of the cultural exchanges between Finland and Japan that reinforces the impression that Japanese hardcore was being widely consumed in the Finnish scene in the 1990s. Amongst Japanese hardcore bands, perhaps to facilitate comprehension by listeners overseas, singing in the vernacular has been rather rare and instead, many groups have chosen to sing in English, despite (usually) not mastering the language. On their demo tape, Shiro (apart from covering songs by Japanese groups Disclose, Deadlock and Collapse Society) emulates this aspect of Japanese hardcore by expressing themselves in deliberately challenged English as seen in figure 25. In addition, the soundscape is uncompromising and crude, characteristic of many Japanese underground hardcore acts of the 1990s. The pastiche created by Shiro seems to have been a rather successful one, not in terms of popularity, but when it comes to believability, as the popular info site Discogs (which recognises Syudan Jisatsu as Finnish) still lists them as a group from Japan.

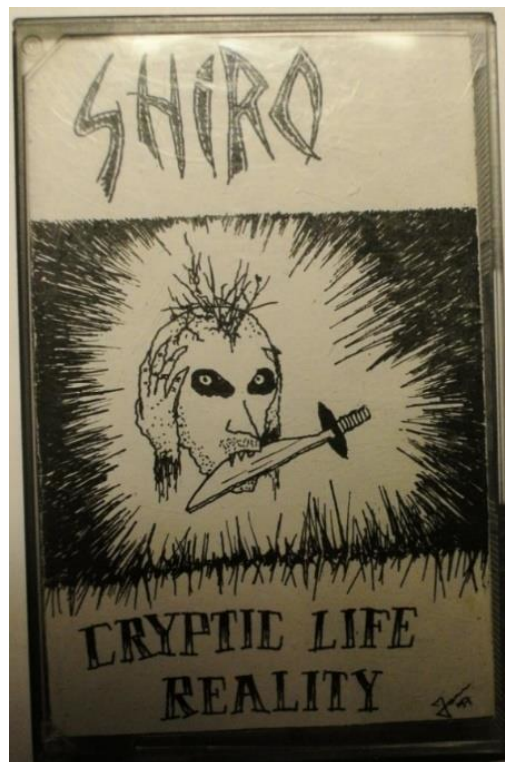


Figure 24: Shiro Cassette. (Source: Shiro: *Cryptic Life Reality*, 1997)

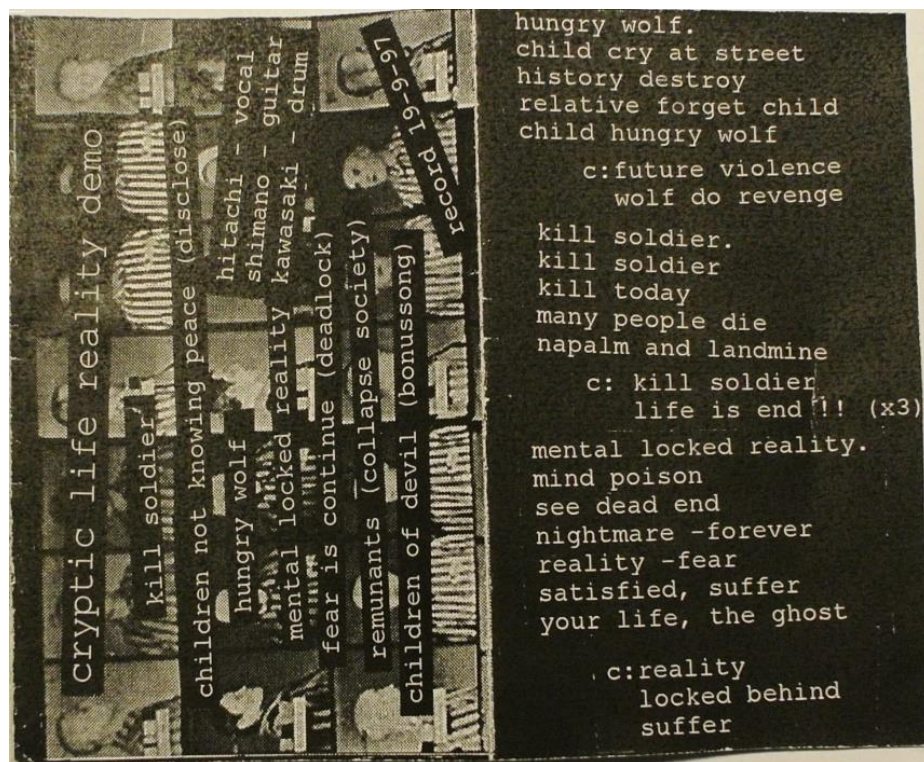


Figure 25: Shiro was using incorrect English grammar intentionally to evoke the feeling of 'Japanese' hardcore. (source: Shiro: *Cryptic Life Reality*, 1997)

When embarking on this research project I had lofty ideas about a field trip to Japan. However, as the funding applications were coming back negative, I started to contact possible interviewees online – interviews on Skype, or even via email would have to suffice. But I had underestimated the cultural differences as well as the language barrier, and all my interview requests were met with complete silence. Perhaps some of the contacts were old, and the bands long since defunct. Others almost certainly did not reply because of language issues. Some may have had a healthy mistrust of academia. Still, the complete stone wall that I hit caught me off guard. In my experience of communicating with the punks around the world, the feeling of being on 'the same side of the fence' had always been enough to get the conversation started.

Luckily, there is no shortage of Japanese bands singing in Finnish, and analysing their material easily fills a sub-chapter. Even if analysis of minute differences between

hardcore bands is less important to this research than the opinions of the people that made the music, I set out to build an image of Japanese fascination with Finnish hardcore by listening to the bands created to ‘clone’ or pay homage to the Finnish sounds. In general, in the context of Japanese hardcore, emulating the bands that influenced the musicians seems to have been a common practice, with the local conditions naturally colouring the efforts. As briefly mentioned in chapter two, perhaps the most famous group to pledge allegiance to Discharge (on a global scale) is Disclose from Japan – they took the blueprint and developed the ideas into something even more ferocious, pushing the envelope of piercing guitar sounds. In addition, apart from many groups paying homage to Discharge, the Japanese scene has produced other groups that have instead chosen to emulate more marginal sounds. For some examples, Frigöra, was already making hardcore in Swedish in the mid-1990s (just as did Förtvivlan more recently) and Isterismo in turn has focussed on singing in Italian. However (apart from the obvious impact of UK and US punk) it seems that the Finnish scene has received the most homages of this sort.

One of the early examples of Japanese bands attempting to sing in Finnish is by a group called Äpärät (‘Bastards’) from Yokohama. Although a group called Äpärät already existed in Finland in the 1980s (and I’m not referring to Bastards), the Japanese group adopted the same moniker (also not to be confused with Aparat from Sweden or Apärä from Mexico City). On their 1998 self-released demo tape there is only one song in Finnish: ‘Runkkarit’ (‘Wankers’). Their split 7” with Effigy (Forest Records, 2001) contains three songs in Finnish, as well as two in Swedish, which is understood by the song titles since no essential difference can be noted between the songs in Finnish and the songs in Swedish. The fast and chaotic hardcore of Äpärät is clearly not an emulation but could be better understood as a homage to Scandinavian hardcore.

Moving into the 2000s there is a spike in Japanese bands singing in Finnish. Perhaps the best-known of these groups is Poikkeus ('Exception') from Osaka. After a self-released rehearsal tape in 2002, the group recorded their eponymous 7" EP (Crust War, 2003) which clearly is their claim to fame. For the release, Poikkeus imitated the cover art and logo (figure 26) from *Skitsofrenia* by Riistetyt (figure 27), however musically this EP sounds more Kaaos-inspired, although yet other influences are lurking into the sound which also has a distinctly Japanese feel. In any case, the EP is impassioned from the first note and even the slow burner 'Ansa' ('Trap') keeps the intensity high. The language of the vocal performance sounds like invented Finnish, and although it is hard to distinguish a single word, it nevertheless lives up to the Finnish standard in furious delivery.



Figure 26: Poikkeus cover art is heavily influenced by Riistetyt. (source: Poikkeus: st, 2003)



Figure 27: The cover art of *Skitsofrenia* by Riistetyt that influenced Poikkeus. (source: Riistetyt: *Skitsofrenia*, 1983)

Although not boasting of a wide discography, the music of Poikkeus was influential enough to merit a re-press of their classic EP with added demo and live tracks as *Sympatia Paholainen* LP (Distort Reality, 2014). This record includes a band history (written by drummer Take-Cimex) that reveals a group of young unruly punks. Their singer Hiroshi was only 16 when the group started: ‘he was dressing up exactly like Jakke, singer of the finnish gods KAAOS! Needless to say I was heavily into KAAOS & other early finnish raw punk in those days.’ Another detail confirmed by the liner notes is the disregard for correct use of the Finnish language (or English for that matter) evident in the band further misspelling the already incorrect title:

The title 'SYMPATIA PAHOLINEN' (means Sympathy For The Devil) supposed to be the title of our st ep but we forgot to write it down on the sleeve and was also claimed by Otto from SELFISH/FORCA MACABRA that such a finnish language doesn't exist....But now we fxcking don't care we like this passionate & brainless title (fits to our image doesn't it? Aaargh).

Poikkeus was not especially long-lived and after the EP they soon folded. Some ten years later the band re-formed, with a fresh line-up fortified with Finland fanatics that already had taken part in other projects referencing Finland.

Laukaus ('Gunshot') from Kobe was active around the same time, producing a somewhat wider discography consisting of 5 *song kasetti*, a live tape, two 7" Eps and a 12". On their *Mikä on tuolla? 7"* (Distort Label Records, 2002) the sound and the song-writing are clearly aiming at 1980s Finnishness, and even the tempo is held back from getting ultra-fast not to ruin the picture. The reckless bass playing reinforces the impression and gives the music a sense of danger. The output of the vocalist is outstanding in its interpretation of the anguished sound of Finnish singers, and characteristic stretching of the last syllable of each vocal line is especially evident in 'En Halua Enempää Vapautta'. Overall the singer's grasp of Finnish leaves the impression that he has made a significant effort to study the Finnish vocalists, as well as the diction and tonality of the language, even if understanding what is being sung becomes difficult without a lyric sheet. In addition, for example the waltz intro to 'Valta' captures the playfulness of Finnish punk which is evident also in *Ollaan punk nuorisoo 12"* ('We Are Punk Youth'), which was recorded in a few hours and evokes the feeling of childlike enthusiasm.

The case of Varaus S.S. ('Charge S.S.') clearly demonstrates how highlighting the rawness is of great importance when attempting to recreate the Finnish hardcore sound. After first listening to their 'best of' compilation *2003-2007 (RIP) 10"* (NARM Discos and Konton Crasher, 2011) it felt like fast and chaotic but somewhat generic Japanese hardcore supposedly sung in Finnish (the vocals are mostly covered by distorted guitar noise).

Although the track ‘Sota’ already stood out as perhaps the most Finnish-sounding, not least because the chorus simply states ‘Ei sotaa’ (‘No war’), it was not until I heard the version of the song from their first demo that I was convinced that this is indeed Finland worship of the first order. The older version sounds like it could be from one of the Propaganda samplers: the sound is more primitive, the pace slower and the vocals are high in the mix which makes their use of Finnish evident. The guitar feeds back violently, however when the riff starts, its sound is wonderfully underproduced, leaving plenty of room for the bass. An interview by their label (Narm Discos, 2011) reveals that, apart from the obvious reference to Varaus, also Kaaos and Riistetyt were major inspirations for the group, and provides a telling detail which may explain how the band managed to mimic the rawness of their predecessors: ‘Well, most of time we didn't bring own instruments to practices or even gigs, we got drunk and borrowd (sic) someone's...’ In their case the lack of practice combined with drunkenness and a devil-may-care attitude, at least initially, worked in the group’s favour.

The cover art of the Varaus S.S. 10” reveals another group, Kuolevainen (‘Mortal’), by including a picture of their only existing recording: a split tape between the two bands that I was only able to locate as a digital copy.²⁵ However, it is an interesting contribution: Kuolevainen is convincingly crummy, at times with almost a Sortoesque quality, where the drummer sounds like the adrenaline (and maybe also the alcohol) is kicking in. The opening track references Kaaos by taking the drum fill from ‘Vaihtoehto’ on loan (the same one ‘borrowed’ by Kaaos from SSD). The bass playing is also admirably intense, focusing on a rough go-ahead energy at the cost of precision. Also, the vocalists of Kuolevainen have studied the desperate tone of the Finns and at least some choruses

²⁵ Kuolevainen & Varaus S.S. split (2005) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrJoR47DhDU> [last accessed 02.04.2021].

(‘Roskaa ja paskaa / Kaikki on paskaa’) are also understandable despite the furious delivery.

Seen in figure 28, the singer of Haava (‘Wound’) has *Pohjasakka* and *Aivoproteesi* written on the back of his leather jacket, which shows a deeper knowledge of the subject of Finnish punk, both being excellent but fairly underrated bands. Having first released a demo cassette, Haava produced another two 7” records, all of them in Finnish; however, akin to bands like Poikkeus, their sound lets also modern influences creep in. One modern trait is playing faster than the 1980s bands, which gives the music a more contemporary feel. With this in view, on their *Totaalinen Haava* the slowest track ‘Miksi tehdä uudelleen’ is the one that most clearly shows the Finnish influence. ‘Maailman loppu’ also references the drum fill from ‘Vaihtoehto’, a song which seems to have resonated throughout the punk world. The insert features the lyrics only in Japanese, but with concentrated effort it is possible to understand phrases like ‘maailma on täynnä vihaa’, and the vocal mannerisms of Finnish hardcore have clearly been closely studied.



Figure 28: The back of the leather jacket of the singer of Haava. (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsohK2EuFNk> [last accessed: 16.09.2021])

Folkeiis is yet another group from the same era with a similar idea. Their debut 7” *Hell Kaaos Night* is indeed pleasantly chaotic to the point where the listener’s brain is forced to fill in the gaps and organise the sound. The band uses Finnish rather randomly and, as in other examples, the vocals stretch the last syllable of the phrases. ‘Vittu maailmassa’ (‘Fuck in the world’) is an example of creative mistranslations that result in unintentional comedy, accidentally combining two words in an unexpected way that unfortunately does not translate very well. To an even greater extent than Haava, their sound is drenched in distortion which somewhat homogenises the music and masks the elements that would emphasise its Finnishness. The speed is that of modern hardcore and therefore, also in this case, the mid-tempo song ‘Likaiset Kädet’ is the most Finnish sounding of the release. High-intensity hardcore which nevertheless sounds rather Japanese, Folkeiis is clearly a pasticcio of different elements not limited to influences from Finnish and Japanese hardcore, but also incorporating elements of metal.

While listing these Japanese groups and analysing their minute differences could be done in much more detail, for the task at hand it is more important to note that although the bands described above are all vouching for Finnish hardcore, they do not form a separate or unified scene or style, but (apart from the collaboration between Varaus S.S. and Kuolevainen) are making their pastiches, homages, emulations and clones independently of each other. They do not form a community of Finnish punk lovers in Japan that together would be analysing and replicating the Finnish sounds, and although (for example) sonically the Poikkeus EP seems to have influenced some of the later bands, the connection is not clear. Although mentioning the above groups is important to illustrate the high level of influence that the Finnish scene has had on the Japanese one, fortunately, in the end, this was not the only way of discussing Finnish hardcore in the Japanese context.

After giving up hope on interviews with Japanese punks, I was finally rewarded with a response when Takahiro, the guitar player and singer of Solpäätos, answered my interview request. The group released their first songs in 2011 and is still active today after producing a steady flow of releases. Their sound relies less on distortion than some of their scene colleagues and this also leaves plenty of room in the soundscape for the vocals. The singing is dynamic: the screams are often toned down to favour articulation and are taken to extremes only at times for effect, making the use of Finnish apparent. There is also a notable attempt at creating guitar melodies that resemble the Finnish ones, as in the opening track of *Robotti* EP (Hardcore Survives, 2014). Apologising many times for his broken English, Takahiro, who was 33 when interviewed, told me about how shocking and exciting it was to see a Sex Pistols video at 14 years of age. At the time, he had been a bored teenager and punk had given him ‘light’ and most importantly, friends. Finnish punk he had found at 19, when he picked up *Totaalinen Kaaos* from a local recycling shop and the aspects that immediately caught his attention were the language, originality, and melody. There are so many Finnish groups he likes that it is difficult to name favourites, however, Appendix, Lama, Pohjasakka, Destruktiions and Ratsia get a special mention, explaining why the sound of the band is a tad less raw and slightly more melodic. The name Solpäätos makes no sense in Finnish, and in fact, Takahiro informs me that although he uses dictionaries and the internet to write lyrics, the band name is a coined word and that he ‘does not want to make sense’. Concern mixes with hope when Takahiro laments the lack of young punks in Japan, although he believes that the few that there are have enough passion for punk in Japan to still have a way forward. I was grateful for Takahiro’s reply, even if it served to confirm why the connection had been hard to establish in the first place and reminded me of the limits of online ethnography. However, there was yet another direct contact waiting to happen.

A Finnish friend put me in touch with Keiichi (b. 1975), or Keijo, as he is known in Finland. Keijo greets me in Finnish when he answers my Skype call in Sagamihara, in the greater Tokyo area. He tells me he first heard Finnish hardcore in 1993, and at the time Finnish records were available at inexpensive prices in some second-hand stores. Keijo explains that Finnish music became very special to him, and his early influences include Kaaos, Cadgers, Bastards, the *Russia Bombs Finland* compilation and the Propaganda bands in general. One of the reasons behind his fascination was the language which to him sometimes sounds like Japanese, even though, in addition to both being agglutinative, the two languages should have nearly nothing in common.

Keijo had discovered Japanese punk through seeing bands like Cobra and Laughin' Nose on local TV. His group Conclude had started singing in English and Japanese, but after their first demo Finnish started taking over (he remembers first singing in Finnish in 1994). Keijo was accessing Finnish through his contacts in Finland, for example, he was learning the language from a cassette tape into which a Finnish friend had recorded the right pronunciation for his lyrics (which often speak of animal liberation). Keijo could not remember how he got the idea to sing in Finnish, but in hindsight he attributes the choice to his lack of English skills:

Conclude first time singing in English and Japanese. But my English skills is shit. So, if sing English or Finnish, same for me, both are difficult. Sounds good, the Finnish language, so no singing in English but few songs only English. (Keijo interview, 2018)

From listening to the raw hardcore of Conclude it was clear that whatever the singing language was, neither the inaccessibility of a language nor the grammar mistakes were going to stop Keijo and his band mates from making noise. This led me to attempt to describe the concept of crumminess and I told Keijo that he should know what I mean since Conclude is very crummy:

[Laughs] Very raw [...] too much, too much mistakes always. [...] We don't practice too much because play better if one practice. Conclude not too much practice, always, from old time. So, everyone possible to play more technical play but we don't play that style. Raw is better. Understand? (Keijo interview, 2018)

Rawness in this case means something visceral and unspoiled, and the early works of Conclude sound especially and extremely crummy. This comes out not only in the vulnerable nature of the musicianship, but also in the haphazard production. The early recordings were done directly on a cassette at a regular practice studio, but even Conclude's later material made in real studios sounds like time was of the essence, as it usually is for truly underground bands not seeking the backing of record labels. Keijo is a firm believer in do-it-yourself, preferring to distribute his music hand to hand, and for this purpose he has created Reset Not Equal Zero Records. The label exists not only to release the music of Conclude, but also to release and distribute bands he likes in small CDr pressings, usually of 100 copies (the releases of RNEZ are mostly of Finnish and Swedish groups). Low cost recording and duplication enables Keijo to keep control of his music, as can be heard from a live recording of a Conclude show in Turku, when during a mid-show drum pedal fixing break a voice speaking in Finnish appears on the PA:

Apparently here we have demos of this Japanese band for free, believe it or not. You can come and get them if you're interested. And get your lyric sheets here. If anyone has the chance or interest, throw some change into the bag, some alms or something. (in Conclude: *Kaikki On Paskaa*, K.Tuotanto, 1997)

Distributing one's music on occasion for free is a powerful anti-capitalist statement which underlines Keijo's view of the non-profit nature of the band and the label. However, the practice is not very sustainable if you want to keep the label going. In fact, Keijo's music productions are not only non-profit, but the opposite: 'Only debt, debt, debt. [...] Always use my money and release, and no good sales.' Keijo works in order to sustain his publishing activities, and both his DIY attitude towards music and his love for Finnish punk

come out also in his professional life – he is self-employed and even his company name is a reference to Finnish hardcore.

Apart from some shows in Finland, Conclude managed to play also in Sweden, Germany and the UK on their 1997 tour, at a time when it was not yet common for Japanese punk groups to tour in Europe. Conclude returned to Finland in 1999, this time in order to record in an authentically Finnish way and Keijo published the result as *Made in Finland* EP. Although the production is more modern, on the EP in question the influence of early Terveet Kädet is evident, mostly in the spirit of spontaneity and unpretentiousness. In the EP *Kalma*, it comes out even more, not only in form of covers (total of four on a 7”), but also in their own songs, in Keijo’s vocal performance, as well as in the production. In its simplicity and rawness Conclude’s sound brings to mind the same honesty commented on the section on France – it sounds like children making sounds without musical vanity (and having fun doing it). Conclude’s sincere, vulnerable and playful qualities catch these aspects of Finnish hardcore perhaps better than any of the groups in this section. At its best, Conclude truly embodies the spirit of their progenitors, a pastiche that is successful in reproducing a similar feeling to that generated by the original.

Keijo’s love for Finnish hardcore and his adventures in Finland spawned yet another musical project, this time a collaboration with the Finns in the form of Häväistys, in which Keijo teamed up with members of Finnish groups Wind of Pain (the name is a reference to an album by Japanese group Bastard), Oheisvasara and Epäjärjestys. In Häväistys, Keijo gave up the vocal duties to a Finn, instead playing bass. The group produced a number of recordings in the early 2000s however their music is more metal-influenced and therefore not as pertinent to the task at hand. Always continuing to forge international contacts, Keijo reveals he has a recent band project that is more relevant to our discussion. Although he does not explain how such a band came to exist, Keijo’s yelps

and shrieks can now also be heard in the *Lesson 1* tape (War Cloud Records) of Malaysian group Haista Paska!

7.6 *Malaysia and Singapore: 'Maailman tuskaa' ('Weltschmerz')*

Listed as appearing under the pseudonym K, the vocal style of the Haista Paska! (literally 'Smell Shit!' commonly used in Finland to tell someone off) singer is unmistakably Keijo's. As a heavily distorted guitar is playing a two-chord intro riff, K utters something indecipherable in Finnish followed by a distinct 'Paskaa! Perkele!' before the song bursts into a fast beat and K goes into his trademark howling. If the recording is shrouded in distortion, overall the band is shrouded in mystery. The cassette states that the music was 'recorded on earth' by K, Ay, Zoo and H, and the lyrics, which are clearly the work of a non-native speaker, are provided only in the original Finnish. Although the lyrics are very serious, dealing with supporting the weight of the world, the less-than-perfect Finnish also results in some unintentional mistranslations, resulting in a mix of conflicting feelings. An example of this is the song 'Kuolema' which clearly deals with the death of a loved person. However, the chorus of the song states 'Kolot muistoja minun mielen valtionvarainministeriö' which translates to 'Dents memories the finance ministry of my mind', seemingly a tragic encounter with Google translate rather than a creative mistranslation (although arguably sometimes moments that impede comprehension can provoke though). Musically Haista Paska! operates in the pasticcio territory, resulting in punk music from 'earth' where different influences collide and pulsate together.

However, homages to Finnish punk in Malaysia can be traced further back. Although Appärratus are perhaps more focussed on Sweden, they also have recorded songs in Finnish such as 'Täyden voiman hardcore äpärrä' ('Full power hardcore bastard') included on their *Härdcore Religion!* LP (Shogun Records, 2009), seen in figure 29.

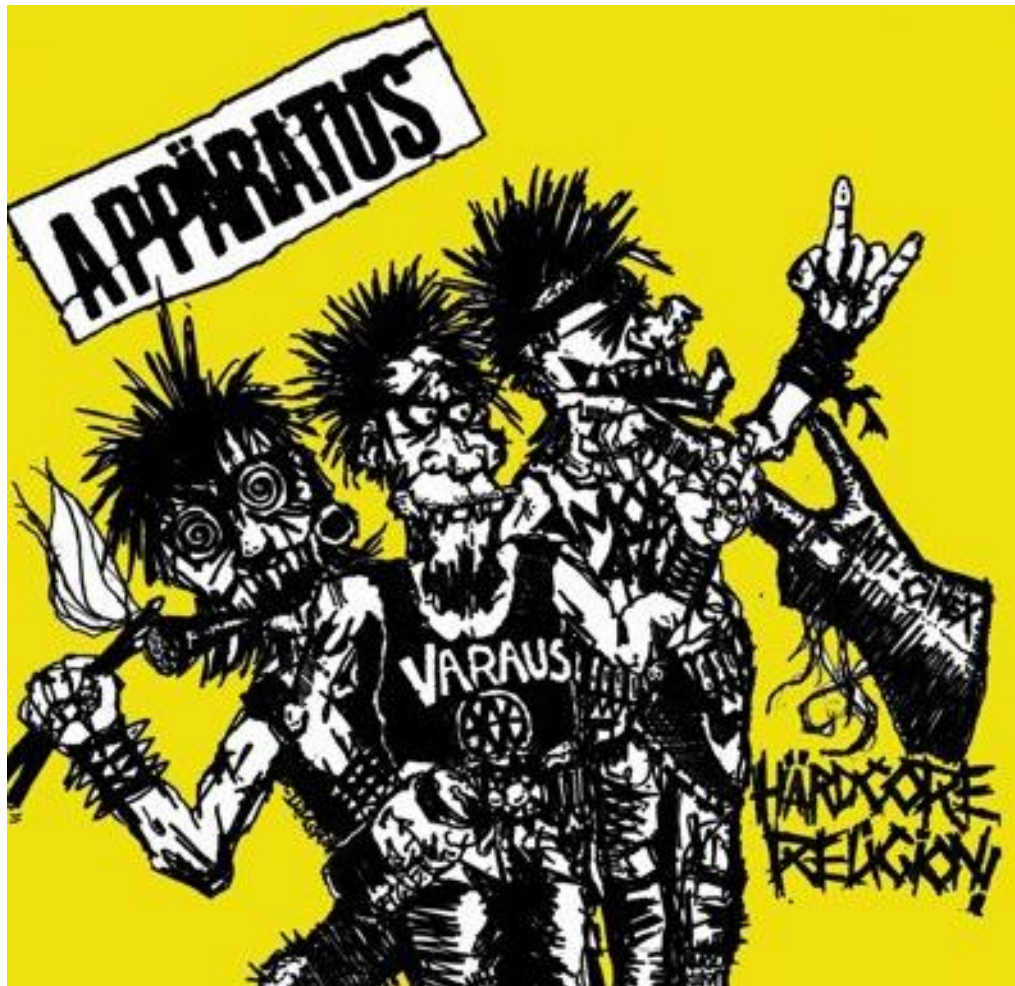


Figure 29: Both Finland (Varaus) and Sweden (Anti-Cimex & Mob 47) are referenced in Appäratuus cover art. (source: Appäratuus: Härdcore Religion, 2009)

Appäratuus also offers another curious outcome of Finnish punk worship for having recorded their version of ‘Tuomittu epäuskon sortoon’ by Rajoitus – perhaps the first Finnish hardcore clone to record a version of another. With this in view, Appäratuus could be considered to belong to a second generation of Finnish hardcore copycats.

Although Appäratuus have several overseas vinyl releases, the Malaysian scene relies strongly on cassettes. The tape of a live recording of Appäratuus in Finland (Sickhead Records 2018) shows their appreciation for Finnish hardcore in a heartfelt homage in the liner notes by their guitarist and vocalist Wölfskin: ‘After 18 years of APPARÄTUS existence..finally we made it in Finland. Such a long fucking journey..indeed. Hangout with

Finnish local legends was absolute amazing memories..but playing with KUOLLEET SANKARIT (A)-mighty KAAOS was fucking SURREAL!!!’ Kuolleet Sankarit was a Kaaos tribute band with former members in the line-up, as close to the real thing as possible since Jakke’s demise, making it a special occasion for the Malaysian Finnish punk fans.²⁶ Malaysian tape labels have also been active in publishing Finnish bands, with predominantly new Finnish groups marking a presence, which indicates a growing connection between the two scenes.²⁷ In fact, Appäratu was not even the first Malaysian hardcore band to play in Finland in 2018. In July of the same year, another band with unorthodox use of umlauts in their name, Bräincëll, played in Puntala Rock. The mere presence of bands like Appäratu and Bräincëll in Finland speaks for the strength of Malaysian hardcore.

For some undisclosed reason Dunn (2016) uses Malaysia as an example of the disparities that still exist in the global punk scene, assuming that as any reader would be browsing through his book there would most likely be an American or European band on tour in Malaysia, but seeing the contrary as highly unlikely. However, the example of Malaysian bands touring Finland mere two years after the release of Dunn’s book seems to indicate that either his assumption was inaccurate or that things are rapidly changing. If the year 2018 is taken as an example, it would be safe to assume that, percentually speaking, a greater number of Malaysian bands made it to Finland in comparison to the American hardcore groups. In fact, Puntala rock that year did not host a single band from the States. In addition, as seen in figure 30, Tuhoon Tuomitut, the only Finnish group that I know of that has taken the trip in the opposite direction did so only in early 2020.

²⁶ In addition to Kaaos, Jari ‘Jakke’ Hallikainen (1965-2007) sang in the groups Kuolleet Kukat and Positive Negative.

²⁷ In addition to the Appäratu and Kuolleet Sankarit live tape, Sickhead Records has published also cassette releases of Maailmanloppu and Kohti Tuhoa. Other labels from Malaysia releasing Finnish punk include Crysis Records, Bullwhip Records, Blood of War Records, Black Konflik Records and Hardcore Hell.



Figure 30: Tour poster of Finnish group Tuhoon Tuomitut. (source: https://i0.wp.com/loudhacker.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/TUHOON_TOUR2.jpg?w=704&ssl=1 [last accessed. 09.09.2021])

There are other examples of Finnish influences in Malaysia, however also in the following cases the line between Finland and Sweden seems to be getting blurred. Skitsöfrenia, despite their name referring to Riistetyt, and evidence of live material in the form of a Bastards cover revealing their Finnish influences, with releases such as *Totally Swedish* and *Ställä Inför Rätta*, Swedish hardcore seems to have been the main influence. Bombräd has songs in both Swedish and Finnish, however the songs on their 2016 cassette are clearly more influenced by Swedish bands. In the case of Synkkyys ('Bleakness'), although the band name is in Finnish, the music on their *Hellish View* tape, sung in English, is clearly more inspired by Swedish hardcore, although here crumminess evokes the Finnish feel. In any case, the blurring together of Swedish and Finnish influences is

common also elsewhere, and similarly, even this subchapter lumps the two different realities of Malaysia and Singapore together.

In Singapore, local punk has existed since the 1980s despite restrictive measures from the government (Liew and Williams, 2021), and the example of Singaporean punk relevant to our chapter is a band called Vaarallinen. The group released all of their material (a cassette album, a single sided flexi, and a split 7" with Last Chaos) between 2012-13, and all of their songs are in Finnish. However, when listening to their *Hautausmaa* 7" flexi, the first impression is that the band is not attempting to sound Finnish, but the use of the language is but one element adding to their pasticcio. The flawless performance gives *Hautausmaa* a rather professional feel which is reinforced by the competent production. The vocals are high on reverb, making understanding them difficult, and it is only after accompanying the songs with the lyric sheet that one hears that the singer is actually singing in Finnish. Although a very enjoyable listening experience, the flexi produces a slightly different effect with its rocking riffs, smooth leads and rolling rhythms in comparison to the more angular Finnish groove. Most songs by Vaarallinen are also significantly faster than the music of 1980s Finnish groups, however, it is only natural that 30 years down the line hardcore punks would have mastered their craft, building on the efforts of their ancestors. Still, the only moment in their discography when Vaarallinen actually resemble a Finnish band is on 'Mediakontrolli', a slower and darker track that ends their excellent self-titled tape.

If their music sounds less Finnish than it could, the lyrics, when read, come across as if they were written by a native speaker. However, on the recordings, the vocal delivery instantly reveals that the reason why the lyrics are well-written cannot be the singer's flawless Finnish. In fact, in some songs it is difficult to make the connection between the text and what is being sung. I attempted to contact the band several times, unsuccessfully,

and the quality of the lyrics remained a mystery until my next interviewee Matt (b. 1982) could inform me that the singer simply sends his lyrics to Finland to be translated. Matt's group Hävittäjät had played on the same bill with Vaarallinen and he had attempted to speak Finnish to their vocalist – to no avail.

7.7 Australia: 'Toivoton huutaa' ('The hopeless is screaming')

On their album *The Price of Progress* (Reactor Records, 1985) Melbourne group Vicious Circle features a cover of Terveet Kädet's 'Outo Maa', showing that Finnish hardcore had reached Australia rather early on. Hävittäjät is also based in Melbourne where Matt, their singer, picks up my Skype call. The band is currently active and has been crafting their sound for a number of years, their first release being a tape from 2012, followed by a self-titled 7" EP (Hardcore Victim, 2014), and culminating on their 12" *Hätätila* (Kämäset Levyt and Hardcore Victim, 2018). The 12" starts ominously with a sound of a warning siren, and as the group breaks into the first song their intention is clear: straightforward hardcore punk sung in Finnish. The sound is expertly produced: the band sounds powerful, but never to the point where the quality of the production would turn on itself, and the playing style contributes to the delicate balance of rawness and refinement. The bass rumbles at the limit of the picking speed, never losing power, but not without its roughness intact. The guitar is buzzing with a sharp edge, however not dominating the sound, only taking over during leads that are fittingly short and simplistic. The drummer has a strong beat filled with physical energy that mixes with just enough skill to keep the course steady. Finally, the vocals are commanding but understandable, and the singing sounds less-than-sober-sensed, giving the recording its final touch of Finnishness:

We're not into like straight emulating the thing, there's stuff in there that kind of veers away of it, but always with kind of that sound in mind. Although we just

wrote a song that [...] is straight up an emulation [...] of a Tampere SS song. There's a bit of that, but we're not about trying to sound like a '82 Tampere band, we're trying to do our thing within the confines of like, the sound we wanna have. (Matt interview, 2019)

Although Matt loves Finnish punk and even knows Finnish fairly well, he was not the one to come up with the idea for the band. He was asked to join the band by other Finnish hardcore fans who wanted to pay homage to the style but had no knowledge of the language. This surprises me, since I had thought that Matt as the Finnish speaker must have been the driving force behind the project, and leads me to enquire about how common is it to find Australian punks that know and like Finnish hardcore:

Common enough, there are quite a number of people who are into it, and like, maybe not as like their favourite genre but as one of their favourite genres. But these two guys (his bandmates), it's like their favourite, and myself as well. [...] but yes, it's quite common, definitely most people who are into hardcore punk, crust punk – hardcore punk is generally referred to as crust in Australia, it's a thing that doesn't happen anywhere else – amongst the crusties like most people would listen to at least some Finnish punk. (Matt interview, 2019)

The fact that Finnish hardcore is familiar to the Australian punks potentially makes them more open to the music of Hävittäjät:

There are a few people over here who know some of our songs – all the lyrics – and there are a lot of people who learn the choruses and sing along to the choruses. 'Hävittäjät', 'Vitun Vittu', 'Aina', those are the big sing-along songs that, you know, there's always like a little group of people at the front, you know, going 'Aina!' or whatever. (Matt interview, 2019)

The image of Australian punks singing along to Matt's broken Finnish is intriguing to imagination, and witnessing this strange ritual on their live videos reminds me of the utopia created in Bourdeaux by Rakaa Väkivalta and Dissiped. Again, the fact that the people that listen to their music do not understand Finnish does not come off as a hinderance, more like a potential asset. Matt confesses that he sometimes even moulds Finnish to his purposes, because the listeners will not understand him anyway:

My audience is not generally Finnish people. Nearly every one that I play to is never going to have any idea of what I'm saying. [...] it's more important that it sounds good, that it fits the vocal pattern that I want. [...] Like I drop endings that should be there or I'll leave out a word because it doesn't fit lyrically, and if I was singing in English I wouldn't do that, I'd find some way to make it work, but if it sounds good, then that's more important to me. [...] I might pronounce 'vittu' 'vitun' or 'tota' 'totta', you know, the vocal structure that I want, and you can do that and it sounds, at least to a non-Finnish person it sounds authentic enough. (Matt interview, 2019)

Matt feels entitled to let incorrect Finnish slip in even knowingly, because he also knows that he is still doing a better job in writing Finnish than most foreign vocalists trying to do the same. To get to this point Matt has an advantage, already years ago his fascination with Finnish hardcore had led him to actually study the language at a community college. However, he does not get to practice very often and therefore his lyrics, though understandable, are still endearingly sloppy. Even when choosing the band name, which literally means 'Destroyers', Matt and his band mates were not aware that to the Finns, 'Hävittäjä' is a particular kind of destroyer and the band name actually translates to 'Fighter Planes'. Despite the misgivings, it is evident that Matt has dedicated vast amounts of effort, not only to learning the language, but also to reflecting on its use for the purposes of hardcore punk:

That's something I've thought about, in terms of what I like about the language, the fact that you have the short and long vowels so it's very rhythmic, and there's a lot of hard consonants. And there's a lot of good words for punk lyric-making, you know, like 'valtaa' and 'sotaa'. 'Vittu' is great, 'vittu' is a great word and it's got that long consonant, right, so it's 'Vit-tu' it goes like fucking perfectly with like the rhythm of punk music. So, anything that has that, you know, double t, double p or whatever can go really well with d-beat. So, like Finnish lyrics, Finnish vocals go really well with d-beat punk music because of the rhythmic, you might not notice when you're speaking, but it is a really rhythmic language. (Matt interview, 2019)

Apart from the stretched-out vowels at the end of the words, which seems to be the trait that most bands in this chapter use constantly, to Matt, the rhythm of the language in general makes it fitting for the purpose. In addition, although there are obvious grammatical mistakes in Matt's lyrics, his pronunciation is so convincing that I had no problems

believing a false rumour that he has Finnish ancestry. Perhaps this is because it defies reason that someone would go through the painstaking work of learning Finnish from scratch just because of their love for Finnish punk. Speaking Finnish is still obviously a weird and obscure thing that differentiates him from other Australian punks, and singing in a band in Finnish made his fascination publicly known, which in turn has widened his knowledge of Finnish culture in general:

I've come across a lot of stuff because everyone knows that I speak some Finnish, I'm interested in Finnish stuff, the band sings in Finnish, so anytime someone else comes across a Finnish thing, something from Finland, they'll always recommend it to me. [...] The films started as a way to improve my Finnish basically, and get practice [...] I'd watch movies in Finnish, left the subtitles on, tried watching with the subtitles off, usually failed. But I love Aki Kaurismäki. I love that like dry as fuck Finnish humour, and that movie, what's the one where they try to get to Eira? (Matt interview, 2019)

Here Matt goes into a sincere explanation about how much he likes *Calamari Union* (1985), however, his knowledge of Finnish culture isn't limited to Kaurismäki movies. In fact, it is through (punk and popular) culture that Matt has constructed his image of Finland as he has never actually had the chance to visit in person.

7.8 *The United States: 'Kuluttava kone' ('A consuming machine')*

As seen in chapter six, the scene in the US had also welcomed the Finnish sounds early on, and the recommendation was passed on to the subsequent punk generations. Although Australian by birth, Matt actually grew up in Massachusetts where his family had moved in 1988 and he admits to still having a Boston accent. Matt had gotten into punk through the *X-Files*:

One episode there is a kid who is wearing a Vandals t-shirt. At the end of the episode they play 'Live Fast Diarrhea' which is like probably the only good song

they ever had, but it was, you know, fast, and I saw it like ‘fuck yea this is cool’ and then decided to look for punk music.²⁸ (Matt interview, 2019)

At the time Matt’s father was a scientist at MIT and therefore he considers himself to have been ‘lucky enough to have the internet’ before it was common. The search for music was already possible through IRC chat channels where you could meet enthusiasts hosting private file servers. Eventually, Matt bumped into a guy from the Netherlands who was sharing all kinds of Finnish punk and Uutuus, also for being a more contemporary band, became his new favourite alongside Rattus. To him, compared to American hardcore, the Finnish bands sounded like real punk:

I mean if you picture the people playing it, Finnish hardcore you can picture a bunch of punks playing it, American hardcore they’re a bunch of fuckin dudes in like sports jerseys with maybe sXe tattooed on the back of the hand. (Matt interview, 2019)

Matt recognises that there is a Finnish sound but cannot pinpoint whether it was the result of the equipment they were using at the time, the influence of bands they were listening to or even of Finnish traditional music, all aspects that he speculates on:

It sounds drunk, it sounds like the people playing it – it’s much more chaotic. I was about to say it does not take itself so seriously, but I’m not sure how to put it. It’s not pretentious, like, especially some American hardcore and punk. (Matt interview, 2019)

It is true that the Finnish bands also generally strike me as unassuming, as if they would treat playing in a punk band as a ‘no big deal’, not only when compared to the American bands, but even in comparison to the Swedish groups. Matt sees the difference between Finnish and Swedish hardcore in the amount of effort put into the recording process. To him the difference boils down to simply spending more time in the studio searching for a good take, or just keeping whatever comes out the first time. It is evident that the Swedish

²⁸ *X-Files* season 3 episode 3 ‘D.P.O.’ aired September 26 1996.

bands made more of an effort, which was absent in Finnish punk; however, to him, Finnish punk was better for it. Again, a vision of a carefree attitude supported by a healthy dose of alcohol is the image that is conjured up in Matt's mind when, for example, thinking of the way the Finnish drummers tackled the hardcore rhythm:

You can picture the d-beat, even when it's tight, you can picture the d-beat like a drunk stumbling or something, that's what I think of when I think of a good but sloppy d-beat. It's got that hint of sloppiness to it, like they're slightly off kilter. Probably like they're drunk, and they're trying to play the d-beat on time, but, you know, they're just that little bit off. (Matt interview, 2019)

Matt recognises the beauty in clumsiness that makes one feel sympathy for the musicians, and I proceed to test his Finnish skills by bringing out the word *kämänen*. Although he doesn't know the word he immediately understands the concept (after all the *Hävittäjät 12*" was released by *Kämäset Levyt*) and suggests the words 'shoddy' and 'sloppy' for a good translation. To him it is a quality that cannot be improved on or it will be lost entirely:

If the band is a sloppy band, if the band has the *kämänen*, and then polished, it's like polishing a turd. It's, you don't wanna do it, it's perfect as it is. It's like, I don't know, it's like taking a fine wine and running it through a fucking filter or something. (Matt interview, 2019)

When continuing the conversation, we agree that even some of the aspects considered essential for a proper musical performance, like tuning, are sometimes absent from certain Finnish hardcore recordings, however, even in this case they may be better for it. What might have been an accident turned these recordings into something unique, precisely because it was not intentional:

They might have not known how to tune. That was usually the case with a lot of those bands that they like, you know, the first record they haven't figured out the instruments yet. That's probably, you know, where all the *kämänen* comes from. (Matt interview, 2019)

I also assumed Matt would understand the concept because of the band he started in his late teens. The group was called *Kirottu* ('Cursed') and on the 2004 7" EP *Eloton maailma*

(*'Lifeless world'*) they operate in the shoddy, sloppy and crummy territory, both musically as well as lyrically. As a whole there seems to be no systematic attempt to copy the Finnish sound, but the attitude of making a record and not giving a damn about the blemishes gives the EP a familiar touch. 'Isänmaanystävät' ending side A is a successfully raw ordeal with a limping mid-tempo groove. The image of Finnishness is reinforced by the crudely drawn crucified punk with a Maho Neitsyt t-shirt on the cover, as well as the train-wreck-ish guitar solo in 'Uskonto on raiskaus'. Again, there is a spill-over between different Scandinavian influences: Kirottu members clearly were also fans of Swedish hardcore since Wolfpack and Anti-Cimex are present in the cover art in the form of t-shirts and there is also a visible Mob 47 tattoo. However, attempting to emulate the sound of these Swedish bands would have perhaps set the bar rather high for the level of musical ability in evidence on the recording. Still, in retrospect, Matt sees that even the Finnish hardcore influences could have showed more:

Listening to that record now, not that I have, I probably haven't listened to that in like ten years, but from what I can think now it probably has less Finnish influence than I would have wanted it to have. I wanted it to sound more like Kaaos/Riistetyt. Probably that was because a couple of the band members listened to a lot of American hardcore; I hate, I fucking hate American hardcore, but, yea so I think that that definitely had an influence when they wrote the songs. (Matt interview, 2019)

When Matt says he hates American hardcore, although it does not provoke such a passionate reaction from me, I can still relate. Of course, it is impossible to put all American bands into one neat bag, however, as I've grown older and become more conscious of the bombardment of American culture I had to endure as a child through Finnish media, I now also tend to find American punk less exciting. Imagining potential reasons as to why someone living in the US would take a stance against local hardcore, I find myself thinking it could also have been about wanting to be obscure – you can differentiate yourself from the rest by listening to distinct sounds:

Yea there was a few layers of that, in America there's the punk scene, and a lot of people just listen to American stuff, and there was the subset of people who like were just into like Discharge and British stuff and European stuff, and there was a further subset of those, it was like five people, who were into Finnish punk. I mean there was an aspect of that, people would have like maybe called it snobbery, and I don't think it was that. You know that thing that 'I'm more obscure than you'. But it was more about like, trying to find something that didn't bore me – and that stuff never bored me. (Matt interview, 2019)

Although the aspect of being 'more obscure than you' also factors in the appeal, to Matt, his fondness for Finnish hardcore is about the music that, to this day, maintains its freshness. If there is elitism, it is elitism from below. The main thing is how the music makes you feel.

Not all Finnish punk fans go out of their way to learn Finnish, and in the US scene there are bands that have found other ways to pay homage. More recent groups like Korrosive from Oakland, CA, have clearly and consciously drank from the same rotten pool as the Finns, and in addition to their sound, Korrosive are underlining their influences by naming some of their releases in Finnish. Vihan Rytmi, from Las Vegas, NV, have taken their name from an album by Finnish group Painajainen and written a Finnish song 'Lopettakaa Eläinkokeet' ('Stop animal experiments') for their *Taistele Vastaan* cassette, even if their sound is clearly more influenced by later developments in hyper-speed hardcore. Similarly, Taisto, from Lansing, MI, despite having a Finnish name and token Finnish songs 'Loputon Kylmä' ('Endless cold') and 'Ihmiset Tuhotaan' ('People will be destroyed') wrote music that is quite different from the stereotypical Finnish sound. In their case, rather than being mad Finnish hardcore enthusiasts, the reason behind the name turned out to be the Finnish grandmother of the bass-player.²⁹

Still, there are more punk groups in the States that perform in Finnish, and one way to have the vocals in Finnish without knowing the language, as in the case of Barcelona

²⁹ Michigan is the state where most Finns that migrated to North America settled, with Minnesota having a similarly large concentration of Finnish immigrants.

groups Hyvää Yötä and Krusifiksi, is to collaborate with a Finn. One such project, Mustalainen ('Gypsy') came about when three American Finnish punk aficionados teamed up with a Finnish tourist. The resulting cassette *Totaalinen vitun Mustalainen* contains four original songs and a cover of Terveet Kädet, and the band successfully conjures the playful characteristic of Finnish hardcore by its crude-sounding practice room recording feel. Even some of the banter between the songs was maintained in the final product to effectively emphasise the carefree spontaneity. Although the Mustalainen tape sounds like the least effort was put into the project in comparison to other bands featured in this chapter, there is something authentic about this straightforwardness.

There is yet another facet of paying homage to Finland: creating a false Finnish identity. A group called Ümlaut claim in the liner notes of their 6" EP entitled simply *Finland* (Crimethinc., 1999) that 'Ümlaut is a transient band and can be found in various squats and shelters throughout Finland' and that the recording was made at (the imaginary) Valhalla Sound in Helsinki (in another inter-Scandinavian spill-over). Although musically there is little evidence of the influence of Finnish sounds, the band continues to cling to their Finnish identity also on their follow-up LP *Havoc Wreakers* (Combat Rock Industry, 2001).

If Ümlaut merely claims a false Finnish identity, another group conceived around the same time also made significant musical efforts in order to legitimise their sound. Hoysterey (2001) has made the following differentiation between fake and forgery: 'whereas fake claims to be by a known, usually celebrated person, a forgery offers itself as a work by someone previously unknown: thus, the fake imitates a well-known artist, whereas the forgery invents an artist' (p. 28). Following this description, the story behind *Elämä on painajaista* ('Life is a nightmare') by Väkivaltaa! fulfils the criteria of a full-blown forgery, consisting of ten short blasts of Finnish hardcore devised by three American

punks with the aid of a Finnish vocalist. The insert, a black and white collage folded in the style of 1980s Finnish hardcore releases includes modified images of actual gig posters from the era with the group's name squeezed in. Also included is the story of the band which claims that they operated in 1983-86, the final nail to their coffin having been a moose that some members crashed into on their way to a reunion gig in 1987. This only perhaps added to the believability, 'truth' sometimes being stranger than fiction:

Väkivaltaa! is not as known as couple of other bands from Rauma... Those other bands were Mellakka ja Pohjasakka and they have some 7" out so that's maybe the reason they are more well known. They were kind of big brothers for us, though we recorded our demo before they recorded their 7"s. (Väkivaltaa! liner notes)

In a claim to authenticity the band reminds the readers that they got there even before the more legendary Rauma punks, and in a similar vein goes on to state the band's motivation as having to 'get serious' after seeing the Finnish bands they liked either disappear or turn into crap. If the story is well-framed and the artwork convincing, so is the music that backs up their statement. Operating in a territory of noisy no-nonsense hardcore punk, the band ends up sounding almost too good to be true, but just about spontaneous enough not to shatter the illusion. Stuart confirms that the forgery indeed was authentic enough to fool even the initiated (also evoking a hoax element):

When the Väkivaltaa! record came out I knew what the band was, but at first, they tried to pretend like it was an old band and they definitely convinced some people. And what was funny was that I sent a copy to Kawakami from Disclose, and I didn't tell him it was a new band, and he was like really into it and he was like 'holy shit, like this, this is like really, you know d-beat raw punk from Finland, like this must be like the first Finnish band to like play d-beat like this' and whatever. And I was like, 'no, no, it's not the first' I just kind of answered in this kind of way that I didn't really tell him. He was like 'no it's the first, like this is amazing', you know, like this discovery. So finally, I just felt like I had to tell him the truth, so I told him and he thought it was funny. [...] But it's different now, it's like you're not trying to trick anybody, you're just playing in this style, and it's a good style but, I don't know, are there people in Finland making like 1983 Finnish style hardcore now? It's like only people in New York or Brazil or whatever. (Stuart interview, 2020)

Stuart's relevant question is difficult to answer, even though there are bands in Finland inspired by the local sounds of the 1980s. At the same time, many of the 1980s groups have returned, and appropriating their sound in the Finnish context simply feels like something one should not do (unless you are 15 and drunk on kilju). On the other hand, current Finnish bands, even mediocre ones, that do give the impression of building on the local tradition have gotten unconditional praise for evoking the coveted feeling of 'Finnishness'. Although some purists want to hear the same sound mimicked over and over, since groups like Rajoitus were formed nearly three decades ago, it has to be admitted that a Finnish pastiche band is hardly a fresh idea in the 2020s.

To my knowledge, the latest band to release a punk recording in Finnish outside of Finland is in fact from New York. They are called Sirkka and their debut cassette *Kuluttava Kone* ('A Consuming Machine') is good – it sounds as if the members of Varaus and Pyhäkoulu would have been trapped inside the practice room for weeks, and after running out of beer were forced to work on their songs sober to pass the time. The lyrics of the title track carry a powerful statement in slightly clumsy but very understandable Finnish:

TEE ISESTÄSI HYÖDYLLINEN: KULUTTAVA KONE, NÄLKÄ
MUKAVUUDESTA JA LUOTTOKORTIT. TIEDÄ ARVOSI JA PAIKKASI.
MITÄ SE MAKSAA? OLEMME HÄVIÄMÄSSÄ TAISTELUN KOSKA
PELAAMME PELIÄ.³⁰

The anti-consumerist stance of the song is clear and layered: while blaming capitalist greed, on another level it places part of the responsibility on individual choices. It is clear that the 'consuming machine' is not only the system, but also the individual cogs in the machine. The song also manages to convey the urgency of the issue, and captures not only the

³⁰ MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL: A CONSUMING MACHINE, HUNGRY FOR COMFORT AND CREDIT CARDS. KNOW YOUR WORTH OR KNOW YOUR PLACE. WHAT DOES IT COST? WE ARE LOSING THE FIGHT BECAUSE WE ARE PLAYING THE GAME. Translation from the liner notes.

economic meaning of the verb ‘kuluttaa’, but also the other senses that the word implies in Finnish: to wear out, eat away, drain, erode, decay.

Sirkka has only two members who were both present on a Skype call, Kuda (30 at the time), who wrote all the songs and played all the instruments on the tape answered from New York while Sanja (age 32), responsible for the lyrics and vocals was speaking from Berlin. I mentioned that their tape sounds very crafted, but contrary to other examples, still gives the impression that it is better for it, as if this time deliberation has triumphed over spontaneity:

Kuda: Between the prior band falling apart, and this band trying to find a four-person line-up, I had a lot of time to work on the songs and just re-write them, trash it, write it again, trash that, write it again. By the time we recorded it, some of the songs had been written for over two years. [...] I had a lot of time to think about it, that’s all. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

From listening to their tape, I knew that Sanja had a very good idea of Finnish, although I had picked up on a foreign accent and some flawed Finnish, so I knew she wasn’t a native speaker. Therefore, I was surprised when she told me ‘I’m Finnish’. Although Sanja has never lived in Finland, she has a double nationality due to her mother being Finnish. However, it was not Sanja’s initiative that started the band, but rather Kuda’s fascination with hardcore punk in general, and the Finnish variety in particular.

When asked about what they knew about their colleagues singing in Finnish around the world, Kuda tells me that he grew up in the same town as Matt, and Kirottu actually played on one of the first punk shows he ever attended. Kuda has also been accompanying Matt’s subsequent efforts (he swears that a Boston accent can be detected in Matt’s Finnish on the Hävittäjät record) and Sanja reveals that Hävittäjät actually was very inspirational for Sirkka: ‘That was the band that he told me, or showed me like “what if we did a band like this?” and played it for me and I was like “holy shit, this rips, we have to do that”’. Therefore, Sirkka could be considered to belong to a third generation of foreign Finnish

hardcore.³¹ However, Members of Sirkka are not experts in Finnish hardcore clones, in fact, Kuda had thought that Rajoitus is actually Finnish – the bulk of their inspiration comes directly from Finnish groups. If in Sanja's case the connection to Finland was rather obvious, what was it about the Finnish noise that had caught Kuda's attention?

It's certainly unique. Why? That's difficult to put into words. [...] I mean the song-writing was slightly more complex than, you know, perhaps UK hardcore at the same time. You know, they pushed it to an extreme, as did American bands, as did Swedish bands, I mean other than that I feel like they took a lot from Chaos UK. Like, the trebly guitar, the bumbly-rumbly bass. It was always a contrast between the nearly inaudible guitar versus the very audible bass. I feel like nearly, uhm, a large amount of Finnish hardcore bands took the recording sound they wanted, I feel like directly from the first two Chaos UK 12"'s, also the Disorder EPs, I feel like that had a major influence as opposed to, you know, Sweden or America or whatever. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

Another thing that Kuda mentions are the bizarre, crazy vocals and Sanja makes the same observation about the language as others have, that there are advantages to singing hardcore in Finnish: 'it's a very vowel heavy language, so it's easier to like, I don't know, rip on some long A's or whatever, you know, it's just a bit more, it sort of lends itself to the style.' Growing up in suburban California, Sanja did not come across anyone who would have been into Scandinavian punk, but after moving to New York she realised it was 'a thing' and started to discover more about Finnish bands. She acknowledges how much easier the younger punk generations have it when it comes to discovering new music:

Sanja: It's crazy to think about those bands existing and forming in different pockets of the world, or even different pockets of Finland, when there was no such thing as like social media, you know, people would just see like a snippet of something or hear a record and then go and make it you know. Whereas now I feel like anybody can go and be like oh there's this and this band on Youtube and then sort of network.

Kuda: That's what I do. It's nice, convenient. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

³¹ Bands like Rajoitus and Conclude started the first wave in the 1990s; Kirottu, Poikkeus and others from the early 2000s could be seen as the second generation; Sirkka in turn, with direct influence of bands from the second wave would thus make part of the third one.

Despite the convenience of discovering new music online, Kuda also sees the importance of the availability of Finnish records in physical formats – it was through the re-releases on Havoc Records that he was introduced to Finnish hardcore. In his eyes, the label can take a lot of credit for passing Finnish punk down to the younger punk generations in the US:

Honestly I feel like ever since Havoc Records did those re-issues in the late-90s and early 2000s, since then it has not seemed – I mean I was not even into punk at the time – it did not seem that marginalised at all, it seemed like fairly accessible and yea, it's like very interesting and intriguing but it has always been, always felt just as accessible in the States as any band from the UK, or, you name it. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

Kuda does not see Finnish punk as something marginalised in the States, but as being as well-known as any other foreign scene. But how does the distance in time and space affect the experience of the music itself? And how much does Finland being an obscure place play into liking the sound?

Sanja: Well, Finland to me is not an obscure place, so I guess that's sort of it. I mean any time like, I'm not a sports person, I'm not any sort of thing, but if like it's ice hockey, and Finland is playing, then of course 'now I'm an ice hockey fan cos Finland is playing'. It's sort of the same thing in punk, I'm like 'Oh it's a band from Finland, fuck yea'. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

Of course, to Sanja, Finland is not a strange place. However, the fact that she has never lived there allows a certain non-nationalist fennophilia similar to that of the Greek punks of Konepistooli. For Kuda, although he also feels that aggressive chaotic music is not dependent on place, he admits that punk music from an obscure country made it that much more interesting:

Kuda: Especially when I was younger that's what made foreign punk and hardcore attractive was the unknown. I guess like anything else. Curiosity of, I don't know, being from here I guess American hardcore, while it's great, it's not like curious in the same way. (Sirkka interview, 2020)

In addition to paying homage, creating curiosity may have been one further motive for some of the groups discussed in this chapter to sing in Finnish. However, who is singing,

where and when makes a difference, and in addition, it also matters where the record is being listened to, when and by whom. While cultural objects gain new meanings during the process of consumption, and the same Kaaos song may have had different meanings to people in different eras and cultures, on the other hand the intentions of Finnish hardcore bands are often correctly intuited despite the differences. However, the ‘Finland freaks’ dealt with in this chapter do not form a global community or have a unified voice, they exist only as a construction of Finnish punks who are astonished with the enthusiasm with which some foreigners consume the sounds from their home scene. Although punks that are ‘Finland freaks’ can be found everywhere, from a social aspect, they do not exist – they are individuals who respond to the same music in a similar way. However, there clearly are some qualities in Finnish hardcore that can be appreciated across cultures and the sound speaks to punks in different political, cultural and social contexts. It is a form of expression that can be understood despite differences, and despite language barriers.³²

7.9 *Future nostalgia*

The richly elaborated past seems more familiar than the geographically remote, in some respects even more than our own nearby present; the here and now lacks the felt density and completeness of what time has filtered and ordered.

- David Lowenthal (2015, p. 3)

In some form or other, all groups discussed in this chapter present a certain historical nostalgia. Without wanting to discredit their efforts, it could also be argued that this sort of longing is not exactly true to the original idea of punk, although, as we know,

³² Apologies to the scenes that were not mentioned in this chapter but also host counts of punks that share the same fondness for Finnish hardcore as those featured in this chapter. Personally, I have met punks from many other European countries that take Finnish hardcore just as seriously. Punks from Latin American countries in general seem to have a peculiar gusto for it. On the homepage of Rattus there is a photo gallery of Rattus tattoos, and in this regard Mexican punks seem to rival even the Brazilian love for the band.

the idea has always been in a state of flux. However, as seen in chapters four and five, imitating earlier works was also a popular approach to songwriting in the Finnish context. Vote was pointing his judgemental finger at the Finnish hardcore bands for copying any fashion that originated in the UK and of course he was right: Discharge, Disorder, Chaos UK and many others certainly informed the Finnish sound. Therefore, also in this sense, the practice of emulating the Finnish bands could be seen as a continuation of a tradition. The bands described above are curious re-presentations of 'Finnishness', usually by people whose notions of it are coloured by cultural and geographical distance as well as distance in time. Therefore, the nostalgia is not only historical, but often it is also a longing for a place that is unknown. The majority of the interviewees did not discover Finnish culture first and Finnish hardcore second, but the other way around, it was punk that put Finland on their maps.

Nostalgia is often seen in terms of a longing for a phase of life that has gone by (usually childhood or youth), for a place (often a homeland), as a longing to re-live a significant event, or for communities or ideologies that formerly gave life meaning and content (Grönholm and Paalumäki, 2015). According to Grönholm and Paalumäki nostalgic longing is also a distinctly modern and Western sentiment, however, some of the groups in this chapter seem to indicate that nostalgia is not necessarily geographically or culturally bound. In the context of this chapter historical nostalgia manifests itself just as strongly in the global peripheries; the spiritual homeland for some Asian and South-American punks seems to have been Finland around 1983.

Nostalgia in this context is for an imagined reality, a moment and a place when punk was supposedly at its punkest, but the illusion is not necessarily shared by those who were there. They can see how much more organised, more capable and more conscious the punk scene is today. Arto rejects nostalgia and sees the current Finnish scene as an

improvement from the 1980s one, which many idealise and glorify, seeing it as a golden era of sorts:

There they are dead wrong! If the person in question is older, has time like blurred their memory? Or if the people in question are younger then it is clear that they did not live through the 80s cos they don't understand how it was. Of course, it was a more exciting time than now to be a punk. Like the sartorial element and such caused scorn in the people – if you went to sit in a cafeteria with your studs you probably got more stares. But there was also a lot of shit in the 80s and like when you think about how many more gigs there are for example – back then the gigs were scarce in Finland. And foreign bands playing here were rare as shit and now there are more of them coming to play in a month than there were in a year in the 80s. And there are more records coming out, the whole thing is working better – like this DIY thing works well – punks organise shows and tours, and release records, not depending on some publisher. Dunno, there's so much. Gigs are, uhm, better organised, bands are not only those that come on stage to stumble and howl after two bottles of Sorbus. I guess it would be nice to see one of those for a change, a band like that, but if they're all like that there's nothing to idealise or to miss in my opinion. (Arto interview, 2017)

A further difference between now and the early 1980s that Arto sees as evident is the quality of punk writing:

The lyrics have changed, just think how little effort was needed in the 80s when many bands got away with just making some 'war is horrible' kind of lyrics. In the zines the questions were like 'war?' 'police?' and then there was a scribble 'yea, Kake got a fine for urinating in public. we're not going to the army' or even 'Pera is in the army right now' or something like that. Think about it, nowadays the crowd is so much sharper, the whole ordeal is sharper. And the internationality is also another important aspect, like it already was, but now it is like even smoother. (Arto interview, 2017)

Arto continues to list his grievances with punk nostalgia by pointing out how much more sensible the punk scene is today. Also aware of the fact that the conscientisation and intellectualisation of punk have been at the expense of unpredictability, Arto points out that he does not want anyone fighting at the shows or groping women even if this would make things more unpredictable: 'In the crowd there were quite a bit of unpleasant folks in the 80s, they are rarer these days, like in my opinion today you can be surer that the person is nice if they are punk'. Although not in disagreement with Arto's comment, and still believing in the niceness of punks, in the light of recent developments regarding #punktoo

(Räty, 2018), it must be admitted that even the current Finnish punk scene has concealed a great deal of ugliness behind a façade of political correctness. On the other hand, it is the evolution of the punk ethos (and the niceness of punks) that enables this discussion, that still needs to take place in many other (musical) scenes. Although it is beyond the scope of this research to further address #punktoo, the important and necessary discussion that is unfolding as a result needs to continue and expand.

Arto's rejection of nostalgia is well-founded and he delivers powerful points explaining his rationale for rejecting it. Still, as Donaghey (2020) has pointed out, the nostalgia aspect in punk has become increasingly relevant at least since the mid-1990s when the commercial potential of punk nostalgia was noted by Pistols and others. Lowenthal (2015) has taken note of the nostalgia business stating: 'If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia has made it "the foreign country with the healthiest tourist trade of all"' (p. 4). While it is true that punk nostalgia has its monetary value – as attested to by massive reunion festivals and countless re-releases – on the other hand, none of the groups in this chapter are motivated by financial gain. While punk nostalgia has been a commercial success, it has not always been as successful musically (see the reaction of the Finnish audience to the come-back concert of the Sex Pistols described in Arnold, 1997). A great number of bands long past their prime have taken the stage in sometimes cringey and often hopeless attempts to re-live their youth in front of (former) punk fans that are attempting to do the same.

As Donaghey makes clear, punk nostalgia is not only about the music, but also about the experience, and therefore the come-back shows coincided with a wave of punk-related memoirs. Donaghey (2020) demonstrates how this is in fact very anti-punk, since in its essence punk shunned nostalgia, and that 'rejection of nostalgia is a truer reflection of punk's founding ethos than punk-as-history nostalgia'. As we have seen in connection

with Finnish hardcore, even earlier punk was written off as ‘shit’, making hardcore in its origins even less nostalgic. Nevertheless, Donaghey’s (2020) claim that punk nostalgia ‘appeals to those that have lost contact with the lived experience of the punk movement’ does not quite sum up the entire picture; in fact, as has been discussed throughout this chapter, many punks that are very much in contact with punk in their daily lived experience are still longing for its near-mythical past.

As mentioned in passing, many Finnish hardcore bands have made a come-back, going through essentially the same process as some of the ‘dinosaurs’ of the first wave of punk, although for different motives, since even with the increase of their underground fame the ‘filthy lucre’ is still unthinkable for such a niche style. In addition, the audiences of the reunion tours of Finnish hardcore bands are usually not filled with middle-aged home-owners on a nostalgia trip. In fact, often the majority of the audience are young punks, most of whom were not even born when these bands were around for the first time. What to make of nostalgia for a past that they never experienced in the first place? Although the idea is contradictory, Bonello Rutter Giappone (2018) points out that it is perhaps not so uncommon by quoting Bonnett’s observation: ‘nostalgia for other people’s pasts appears to be as common-place as nostalgia for one’s own’ (p. 72). But how does one emulate something they did not experience, and why? Again, Bonello Rutter Giappone (2018, p. 73) provides a helpful comment by quoting a passage by Linda Hutcheon:

It is the very pastness of the past, its inaccessibility, that likely accounts for a large part of nostalgia’s power—for both conservatives and radicals alike. This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealised through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an ‘historical inversion’: the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past.

Is it the case, then, that the punk scene, never satisfied with the present, is forced to dwell in the past? Although Bonello Rutter Giappone (2018) identifies elements of nostalgia

already at the outset of punk, for example in the works of Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks and The Jam, she also recognises that nostalgia is not compatible with punk's original idea: 'nostalgia was never an option; at least not one that could be readily admitted. [...] it did indeed appear that no "punk" could cast a sentimentalised backward glance, without ceasing to be punk' (p. 69). Ile recognises this contradiction in himself, and also in the wider punk scene: 'The punks mocked the rockers like: "you're deifying stars from the fucking fifties", but now we are at the same fucking junction, fucking digging some fucking shifts from the 80s or late 70s' (Ile interview, 2018). But even so, differing from Arto's anti-nostalgia, Ile still longs for bygone days: 'I'm pissed off with the modern times, I want back!' Ile sees the decadence and stagnation in clinging to the past, but at the same time, he does not want to adapt to the changes, he still refuses to use the internet, and dreams of returning to bygone days. Greene (2016) has in fact seen nostalgia as a kind of dream-space:

Nostalgia, we presume, is about a desire to go home. This particular idea of home is defined less in terms of a place than as an entry point into a dream space that magically transports us to another time. That time is a moment in the past when things seemed more familiar, a time worthy of recollection and distinct recognition, a moment when things were, in some basic sense, simply 'better' than they are now. Nostalgia, then, is both a judgement on the present and a prejudice against it, a temporary condition of temporal estrangement based on longing for something that is objectively gone but still subjectively recoverable. (p. 142)

Taking the myriad of new styles that punk is constantly reworking into account, it seems clear that the subculture is capable of renewal. Therefore, it is a valid explanation that the nostalgia could be a form of judgement on the present and a prejudice against it, and as such, also a question of criticising these new styles and perhaps the modernity at large. According to Moore (2010), punk is still responding to post-modernity:

A post-modern crisis of representation is apparent in myriad changes in social life, where it has become increasingly difficult to know where the sign/image/identity/simulation ends and the meaning/reality/self/object begins:

art and architecture become a pastiche of recycled styles; identity and language become not simply the means but the ends of political struggle; philosophers and scientists reflect on the constructed nature of their claims to truth; literary theorists deconstruct intertextual discourses rather than uncover the meaning of the text; popular culture becomes ironically self-referential; and youth cultures create style from retro objects and fashion. (p. 13)

It is a plausible assumption that the collapse of old systems of belief and ways of life has left a void that leaves us longing for a past when everything was not yet relative. However, as this chapter has shown, even though subsequent punk generations have been drawing some of their power from the efforts of their ancestors, the sincerity of their adoration reflects the dedication to their lived experience of punk in the here and now. The homages to Finnish hardcore discussed in this chapter show that it is not a dead style but continues to resonate, and these groups are amplifying this resonance through their permutations.

8 The primal scream of Finnish hardcore

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main

- John Donne, *Meditation XVII* (1959, p. 109)

Every individual is multicultural; cultures are not monolithic islands but criss-crossed alluvial plains.

- Tzvetan Todorov (2010, p. 54)

Before the concept of globalisation existed, the process was already ongoing and the notion of the interconnectedness of world cultures evident. Cultural influences, including musical ones, travelled across continents without regard to borders and although the flows of culture may already have been lopsided, it is clear that they have not been a one-way street. What then does the example of Finnish hardcore tell us about global flows of culture? Some years ago, I had entitled a conference speech about the voice in Finnish hardcore ‘The Universal Language of the Primal Scream’ and had not, as of yet, begun to doubt the use of the word universal in the title. Luckily, I did not have to defend the potentially indefensible choice of words. What had made sense was that everyone will react to a ferocious scream no matter where they are from and on one hand it is true: even repulsion is a reaction. But if most react by fleeing, some by fighting, and only a small minority react favourably, this hardly means that the primal screams of Finnish hardcore could be labelled as a universal language. Still, to some of us, independent of where we are from, it is important to possess this kind of sonic resource that, along with adrenaline, releases pent up emotions as well as signalling that there are others that feel the same anxieties. However, the aesthetic of Finnish hardcore punk is beyond what most would consider a pleasurable listening experience – universal in this sense would perhaps be The

Beatles or Beyonce, not Bastards or to an even lesser extent Bayonet. However, to some extent, Finnish hardcore does transcend borders, finding listeners across different cultures. On the one hand, the story of 1980s Finnish hardcore and the existence of bands featured in chapter seven counter O'Connor's (2002) critique of theories of hybrid cultures. However, at the same time, they show that as O'Connor suggested, the centre/periphery divide still exists within the global punk scene. After all, there are disparities in opportunities, popularity and distribution, and even one of the appeals of Finnish hardcore has been its exotic nature.

Even if the dilemma of hybrid cultures versus the centre/periphery divide is not solved by examining the flows of Finnish punk, from some of the examples discussed in this work it can be concluded that the trajectories of subcultural expansion are not necessarily subject to the same narratives as mainstream cultures under globalisation. Having said that, although underground punk is not force-fed by the culture industry and the interest in it is voluntary, in Regev's (2015) view it still makes part of the pop-rockization process. Punk seems to have thrived under globalisation, and its often-anti-nationalist attitude potentially makes it even more dangerous to local traditions (although on a much smaller scale). Still, there is also resistance to the musical influences of the culture industry in the anti-music stance of the more extreme forms of punk. In fact, one of the underlying commonalities between punks on a global scale would be the idea of making or listening to music that is contesting something. Despite all the internal dissent and tension that have moulded many of the local scenes, there is paradoxically an incredible amount of unity in the punk macrocosm; at the heart of the global DIY hardcore punk scene there is trust and mutual respect that enables co-operation. At its best, punk can be seen as an incredible multifunctional network of friends, acquaintances and strangers that rely on and help each other based on a gut feeling that they are 'on the same side of the fence'

(Suren, 2015). On the other hand, punks are conscious of the fact, blatant to common sense, that the globalisation process could, and should be handled better, resulting in less destruction and more equality.

Although there still are many disparities, punk is perhaps at its truest when it is having to overcome difficulties. Both the overly inclusive vision that Eyerman saw in Erik Hannerz's *Performing Punk*, and O'Connor's observations about a clear centre/periphery divide (backed up by Dunn in *Global Punk*) seem insufficient to fully address the complex cultural flows within the global punk scene. A formulation by Dines, Gordon & Guerra (2019) takes into consideration the ebb and flow of relevance of different scenes, describing the manifestations of punk as a consequence of: 'networks existing through decades of uneven flows among music distribution, tape trading, friendships, and touring bands that fleetingly appear as scenes rise and fall with membership demographics' (p. 11). In this sense Finnish hardcore has overachieved. The bands from the golden era of early 1980s have maintained their relevance, and new Finnish hardcore groups (partially as a result) have managed to make their way against the stream to the core. Furthermore, the permutations echoing Finnish hardcore are being imported back to Finland in form of records, live videos and concert tours. These unusual developments, which are still ongoing, show how within the global punk scene the flows of culture can take unforeseen trajectories.

Punk's regional flavours are many, and from what to the uninitiated might sound like similar bursts of anger and distortion, the hardcore punk enthusiast will detect a myriad of differences. First, the Finnish hardcore punks adapted the idea of playing as fast as possible that they took from the American bands to meet with the roughness of the Dischargesque visions of war and the Disorderesque recklessness, the Finnish language, their particular circumstances and the musical traditions they grew up with, into a

recognisable sound. Consequently, their version of hardcore has been adapted to other realities and has blended with local influences in the following decades. Dines, Gordon and Guerra (2019) note how ‘punk culture has been assimilated into host countries yet clearly reflects their cultural, linguistic, social, and aesthetic practices’, and in addition remark how these new punk styles have explanatory value for understanding ‘how and in what ways new punk styles developed in Japan, Scandinavia, Latin America, etc. in turn influence and shape contemporary Western punk cultures’ (p. 16). The fact that a semi-peripheral scene such as the Finnish one has become well-known in the centre clearly reinforces this argument, and speaks to the interconnectedness of global punk. Dines, Guerra and Gordon (2019) conclude that the dissemination of local punk cultures into the global scene ‘is certainly not a one-way core of the peripheral process of punk cultural transmission’ (p. 16), and this notion connects seamlessly with what has been discussed along this work. In addition, it is helpful when attempting to understand how it has been possible for Finnish hardcore to gain a global following – even if this following is marginal.

However, rather than speaking of globalisation and Finnish hardcore, it is perhaps more correct to use Ulf Hannerz’s (1996) term ‘transnational’, which he sees as a ‘more humble’ description that is more adequate for describing ‘phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share the characteristic of not being contained within a state’ (p. 6). Fittingly for punk culture, which often disregards or even seeks to abolish borders through its activities, the term transnational according to Hannerz ‘also makes the point that many of the linkages in question are not “international,” in the strict sense of involving nations – actually, states – as corporate actors’ (p. 6). For Hannerz, the transnational arena can be comprised of diverse individuals, groups or movements and this makes the term more adequate for describing the global spread of punk. If the example of Finnish hardcore punk gives an alternative view of cultural flows that cannot be entirely

explained by logics of globalisation, then what are its transnational qualities, the reasons behind its sustained cross-cultural appeal?

From my discussion on Finnish hardcore several aspects that contribute to its appeal can be derived. Despite its obsession with war, many recognise its joviality, and see in it an almost childlike playfulness that transmits a feeling of spontaneity and a carefree approach to musicianship. Children are oblivious of rules, and even when they understand them they often do not respect them. In this unruliness there is also something liberating to adults who maintain this childlike attitude to song-writing and performance. At the same time, the music created with this attitude in mind has a greater possibility of maintaining a certain freshness, innocence and vulnerability that are recognisable across cultures. These qualities connect with the failures and imperfections in the music and by analogy, underline the imperfections of human existence. In addition, the speed of the music emphasised its chaotic nature even more; playing at the limits of their capabilities, the musicians were more vulnerable to error. However, the moment was of burning urgency – there was no time to waste, no time to perfect the results.

The imperfections were sometimes accentuated by intoxication, another transnational aspect of the style; punks have been known for their fondness for alcohol and their disregard for the conventions for its consumption (Gololobov and Garifzyanova, 2019). Even though the relationship to alcohol is hinted at in several passages, a more detailed look on the topic is being reserved for a chapter in a forthcoming punk reader (Ullvén, 2021). Raippa (2002, pp. 117-122) briefly dealt with alcohol in her thesis and concludes that even though alcohol consumption is typical of Finnish youth in general, in comparison with other subcultures, the punks emphasise and celebrate it even more. Despite drinking in Finland being wide-spread and frequent, abstinence from alcohol and drugs in the form of straight edge only began in the late 1980s, and even at the peak of

straight edge in the 1990s, the numbers of punks that abstained as a result were much fewer in comparison to, for example, the US (Moore, 2010; Similä & Vuorela, 2015). Even if the Finnish punks sometimes took drinking to extremes, alcohol consumption is something that unites much of the global punk scene, and therefore the drunkenness of the Finns would have been relatable to many punks in different parts of the world.

Although not limited to Finnish hardcore in particular, even if it takes the primitivism a step further than some Western contemporaries, the crudeness of its primal screams reaches out to and connects us with our primitive past. The grunts and shrieks expressing anxiety and despair would have been understandable even to Neanderthals, and can be sympathized with or repelled despite the language barrier. As noted by many interviewees and fans of hardcore, the sound of the Finnish language seems to fit especially well in the musical wilderness that is punk. For example, when the interest abroad led some of the Finnish hardcore groups to believe they should make songs in English to reach audiences abroad more directly, the attempt backfired and the albums that the groups recorded in English are usually not considered as noteworthy as their output in Finnish.

The urgency of hardcore was driven by another sentiment that resonated across cultures: the fear of war. This fear was felt particularly strong in places that were still struggling with the trauma of WWII, or in the US context more recent conflicts like the war in Vietnam, and in Finland the proximity of the Soviet Union made the Cold War especially frightening. The fear also drove other sentiments: to some it was a reason for politicisation, to others an excuse to live like there was no tomorrow. To the latter, the nuclear anxiety resulted in self-destructive habits, usually alcohol abuse, and the end of times thematic was sometimes taken to serious levels in personal life, accentuating the aspects of apocalyptic seriousness in the music. Even if punk has functioned as an excuse for untimely self-annihilation, at the same time some achieved an immortality of sorts through the short

bursts of anger pressed on pieces of vinyl (and consequently copied on thousands of cassettes and eventually digitized into online servers).

Especially in chapter five, the discussion perhaps overemphasised the imperfections in Finnish hardcore, and in the spirit of reconciliation it is necessary to highlight, as many interviewees in chapter seven have, that some of the Finnish hardcore groups also impressed with their musical chops. Many groups combine extremity with skill and the capacity to play exceedingly fast tempos. There is evolution in the work of each band, and where the high points lie is a matter of individual preference: some choose the unruliness of Cadgers (pre-Riistetyt) while others appreciate the tightness of *Skitsofrenia* (or even prefer Pyhät Nuket). Production-wise some of the bands also stand out positively in comparison to their contemporaries abroad. Besides, the fully analogue recordings of the early 1980s make the sounds captured by today's digital technologies sound somewhat sterile – another thing to be nostalgic about. To add to the qualities, there was a significant number of hardcore bands if you think in terms of per capita, and many of them managed to get their records released early on when the hardcore moment was at its peak and the hardcore canon had not yet been well-established.

Together with the moment and the quality and quantity of the music, there was availability and exposure in the right measure: Finnish records were not too obscure to get hold of, but unpopular and exotic enough to generate interest amongst those who were searching for something more marginal than the exponents of the larger scenes. Finland's remote geographic location, combined with the lack of information about the country, added to the surprise that punk culture was so firmly rooted in the frozen soil of the North. Indeed, Finland is cold and dark during the winter, and undoubtedly the climate had left its mark in the music, and the fact that vast areas of the country had simply nothing to do for teenagers during the dragging winter months contributed an extra ingredient of northern

madness to the mix. But how did these bands manage to disseminate their music into the scenes abroad from such an out-of-the-way starting point?

The hardcore scene was inter-, or transnational, since the very beginning, and the grassroots communication with different punk scenes was one of the ways in which the style differentiated itself. In practice, as discussed in chapter six, the Finnish noises spread into the global scene in various ways. While it is impossible even to estimate the numbers of copied cassettes in circulation, tape-trading between individual punks was extremely important for the transmission of Finnish hardcore. Many post packages circulated in both directions, also exposing the Finnish punks to new influences from abroad. In combination, the zine writers, many of whom were also tape-traders, started writing about Finnish records, and publishing reports about the Finnish scene. Some of the Finnish labels such as Propaganda Records and P.Tuotanto were also very active in releasing and distributing records, and in addition, eventually labels in different parts of the world took an interest in releasing local pressings of Finnish hardcore. Yet another vehicle for taking the music to audiences abroad were the pioneering concert tours, first in Europe, and eventually globally. But what kind of responses did these noise exports inspire abroad?

The most obvious result has been the number of individual punks that have become connoisseurs of the music, some amassing impressive collections of Finnish hardcore records and related paraphernalia that few Finns can boast of. Another response that overlaps with the question of how Finnish noises spread are the labels that have embraced Finnish hardcore. In this regard, the German and US scenes have been most noteworthy due to greater economic possibilities at their disposal. However, also the output of Brazilian labels is significant: even though the economic odds were stacked against them, already in the 1980s they found ways and means to invest in the noises that had inspired them.



Figure 31: Max Cavalera of Sepultura, one of the illustrious fans of Finnish hardcore, has continued to promote the style and shows that it has been noted even outside the realm of punk. This time Riistetyt gets the honourable mention. (source: <https://artists.spotify.com/songwriter/7KCEQqo1QmqNDXn432VEXD> [last accessed 09.09.2021])

Those fond of the style have also found other ways to pay homage to the Finnish sounds: by writing about them, organising concerts and tours for Finnish bands, covering Finnish songs with their own groups or making references to Finland in song and album titles, band logos or sartorial details (as seen in figure 31). Finally, the most extreme cases of celebrating Finnish hardcore have resulted in foreign musicians writing songs that resemble the Finnish style, or even learning the language in order to write lyrics and sing in Finnish to arrive at an even more complete emulation of the sound. Despite the fact that hardcore in the Finnish context, to a large extent, was already a copy, its contribution to the sound of global hardcore has been more significant than anyone could have imagined at the time.

Although studying the transformation of punk rock into hardcore is a task for another research project, the examples of Finnish bands seem to suggest that the style was developing in a harsher direction in different parts of the world simultaneously. Even if the

beginnings of hardcore are usually traced to the US, in the UK many bands were starting to accelerate and primitivize their sound around the same time, and similar processes were happening in different punk scenes around the world. Stuart sees that hardcore was inbuilt in punk from the start:

The argument would be: you have punk, it becomes more mellow and transforms into new wave, there is an immediate watering down process and a commercialisation process. So, there is also an immediate reaction to it which is to say 'we're going to do the pure form of it', and that dynamic of reaction against watering down propels hardcore punk because hardcore punk is necessarily just like 'we're gonna be more aggressive, more rough, more, you know, intense, whatever'. So, it's kind of built in from the get go with punk, almost natural. The dynamic that creates hardcore punk is built into punk from the beginning, right. Because it has this tendency to return to its core but in the process, it reinvents the core constantly. (Stuart interview, 2020)

Stuart suggested that Terveet Kädet would be one of these bands that, if you think hardcore punk spreads from centre to periphery, are hard to explain. Indeed, they appear so early on that it is difficult to imagine that they would already have been influenced by hardcore bands from the centre. Dines, Gordon and Guerra (2019) attribute the influence of Discharge on the Scandinavian scenes to their tours in the early 1980s (Discharge played in Helsinki in 1983), and this would indeed support the idea that hardcore was developing in many places simultaneously. However, by this time the Finnish hardcore scene had already been well-established and the influence of Discharge and others had in fact been more immediate. Recent biography of Terveet Kädet singer Läjä (Vuori, 2018) reveals that, although the band had already created their early material, right before they had the chance to make their first record – a three-track single-sided 7" clocking at two minutes – Discharge turned their conceptions of punk upside down. They chopped off everything extra from their songs, resulting in the short bursts of anger heard on *Rock laahausta vastaan* (1980), and by their self-titled 7" (1981), the influence of Discharge can already be heard in the song-writing. Although the story of Terveet Kädet confirms the influence

of Discharge early on, there are other examples that speak to the theory of development of hardcore simultaneously in different locations, and more specifically, in the fringes of the global scene. If SS from Japan was exceedingly rough in 1979, Hairowls from Tampere, as evidenced by a live recording from 1978, were experimenting with sounds that make the early hardcore bands from California sound like The Beach Boys.³³ Although undoubtedly the Finnish bands from the early 1980s were directly influenced by groups from the centre, on the other hand, the speed with which hardcore took off implies a readiness – the Finns took to the new style eagerly and in an instant, as if it would have been a natural occurrence.

Furthermore, if one examines the flows of hardcore in the centres, there is evidence that locally the style spread from the peripheries to the core. Although from the Finnish point of view Washington D.C. can hardly be considered a backwater, Ian MacKaye saw their local scene as remote from those in the bigger cities, yet they considered themselves hardcore punks already, before the term was well-established:

In DC, we called ourselves ‘hardcore’ to distinguish between us and the Sid Vicious kind. We were ‘hardcore’ punks; we weren’t into the fashion as much as we were into the approach and intensity and urgency. I’ve put a lot of thought to this – even before D.O.A.’s Hardcore 81 record, we’d begun to make a distinction that we were more hard-core. That’s how we came up with ‘harDCore’ – a play on the word. It was just zeitgeist or serendipity that we all felt the same way. (quoted in Blush, 2010, p. 151)

Although hardcore punk is often rightfully seen as a reaction of teen-age punks who found punk rock boring and were disappointed with new wave, it can also be seen as a reaction of the periphery to the fashionable sounds from the centre. D.O.A. was from Vancouver, and in the US, places like Washington D.C. and Boston, although hardly small towns compared to Tornio, outshone New York. Even the California hardcore bands that have been credited for inventing the style were from the fringes of the greater Los Angeles area.

³³ The Hairowls, ‘Särkee, Särkee’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kohUp4j87_4 (last accessed 25.08.2021).

In the UK82 context, the exponents of hardcore (also referred to as street punk) were from outside of London: Stoke-on-Trent was the home of Discharge, and bands such as Chaos UK and Disorder were from Bristol.

In Finland, although the capital Helsinki naturally had the largest audience and most concerts, the Tampere hardcore scene was clearly the most active when it came to producing bands and records. In fact, even infinitely smaller towns produced more iconic hardcore bands than Helsinki and to foreign listeners, Rattus from Vilppula and Terveet Kädet from Tornio seem to have been the bands that stood out the most, although to some Kaaos and Riistetyt from Tampere are the most esteemed. The latter two had a sound that resembled their influences more closely, whereas the former two, working tucked away in the countryside, created more idiosyncratic approaches that did not always impress the audiences in the bigger cities. In addition to these groups, the early-to-mid 1980s Finnish hardcore scene produced a wide variety of bands across the country that managed to document their vital expressions of teen-age angst.

However, as discussed in chapter four, inside Finland there were internal tensions: evidence of rivalries between Tampere and Helsinki can be found in the zines, and in turn some of the countryside bands suffered prejudice from the punks in the centres. Rattus for one opened the show for The Exploited in Tampere and was not-so-well received: *Ulo* #12 reports the crowd chanting 'Rattus vittuun' ('Rattus fuck off') before their show, and once they started playing, the Tampere punks began spitting on them, a practice that was no longer common in the 1980s although the first UK bands had been regularly covered in the spit of the audience. In *Kaaos* #6 the response of Rattus was to consider the punks in Tampere as 'fashion punks' and the interview states that: 'we don't need anyone to pat us on the back. we prefer the mass-crowd beats us up than comes to kiss our asses' (p. 13). The experience of rejection only made Rattus try harder, not to win the 'mass-crowd' over

but to bulldoze them with their wall of sound. In Saastamoinen (2007), Tomppa from Rattus refers to the feeling of having something to prove in the shows back in the day, which he associates with the fact that they hailed from far outside of the punk metropolises. In part, the tensions and the lack of recognition in the local scene drove Rattus to project its music outside of Finland, and the same applies to Terveet Kädet who in *Kaaos* #8 are referred to as the band that ‘the Finnish punks hate and the Americans love’.

However, when it comes to relationships between scenes from different countries the dynamic is different. The punks in the peripheries have embraced sounds and visitors from the centre, and similarly, those in the centre have been equally sympathetic towards the peripheries; as noted previously by Söderholm (1987), the field of hardcore punk is more egalitarian than most musical fields. At its best there is harmony, not rivalry, between the centre and the peripheries, where both complement each other and contribute to an ongoing evolution of a tradition, achieving something which more professional styles of music cannot: a way of using the interconnectedness of the world to mutual benefit, not one-sided exploitation. Families also fight, and the narcissism of small differences can often be detected in the punk scene, however, the global punk family also recognises each other’s efforts and their underlying commonalities. Although throughout this work I have avoided reading too much politics into the activities of Finnish hardcore bands, this interconnectedness with other punk scenes and doing-it-yourself together to reach common goals (even if these goals are not easily defined) outside of the neoliberal agenda, is one of the most tangibly political aspect of the global punk scene.

Although criticisms about politics being a sort of elephant in the room throughout this work may be justified, on the other hand, the choice to give less room to the politics and more to the music is derived from the work of the groups under discussion. Even if most of the lyrics of the Finnish bands were political in nature, and political significance

can be seen even in the sound itself, their critique was much less intellectual and raw in comparison to British anarcho punk. The opposition to war and visions of destruction took centre stage in the work of many groups, to the extent that it seems to have been a convenient way to escape from taking deeper political probes. On the other hand, the delivery is so strong, loaded with genuinely anguished and unhinged raw punk feeling, that it implies a personal connection to the message. However, even the fact that the foreign listeners of Finnish hardcore were not able to decipher the message, speaks to the importance of the music. The ideas of frustration and protest were transmitted by the sounds of the voices of Finnish singers, and this approach has been followed by the bands discussed in chapter seven, after all, they are writing in a language that they have not mastered. In the light of intellectualisation and politicization of punk this can even be seen as a statement, as in the case of Dissipated – a return to a more anti-intellectual stance.

When Kaaos stated that Nazis and Communists are both ‘shit’ it was to express a disillusionment with politics in general. In this sense anarchy meant anti-politics, however their drummer Poko also emphasised the influence of British anarcho bands. In the absence of an anarcho scene of their own, Kaaos (and other Finnish bands) amalgamated some of its ideas into their message and the circled ‘A’ in their band emblem stood for more than just chaos and destruction. As seen in figure 32, the circled ‘A’, in this case perhaps more likely a reference to Kaaos than to anarchist philosophies, appears also in the art of many bands featured in chapter seven.

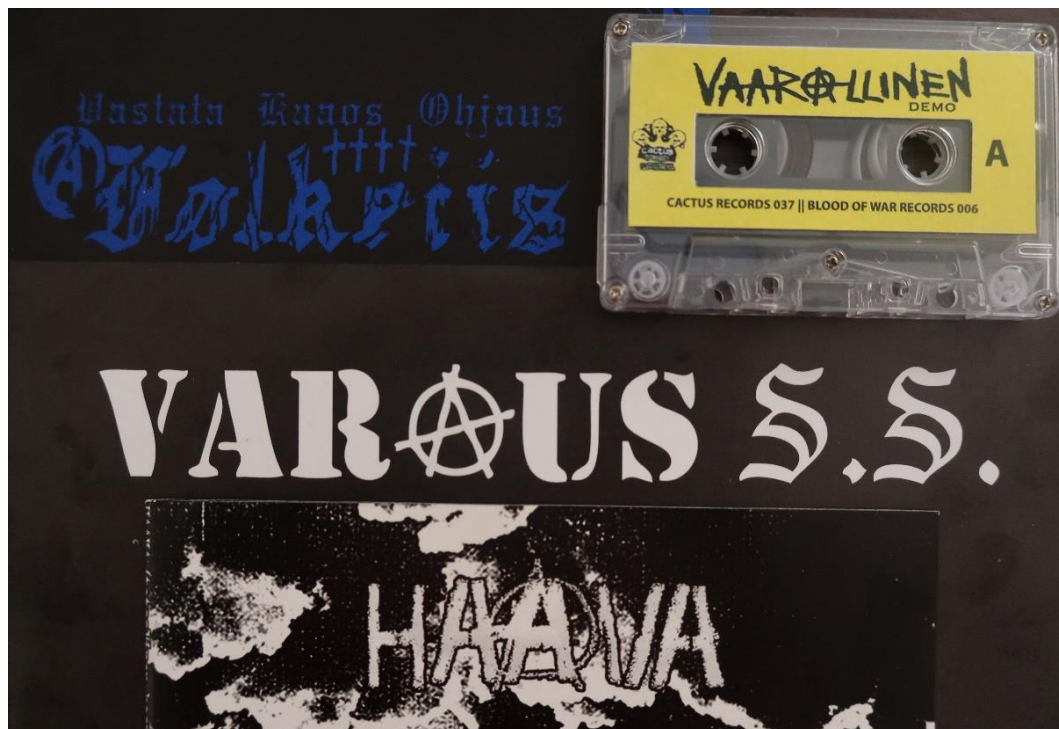


Figure 32: Many of the Finnish pastiche bands used the circled A in their logos. (source: Folkeiis, Haava, Varaus S.S. and Vaarallinen releases)

Overall, even if the anarchy referred to is not necessarily the same as the political philosophy, one of the few underlying commonalities for punks of different eras has been the idea of protest and resistance to what they saw as evil. With the advantage of hindsight, Vic Bondi from the American group Articles of Faith has described a continuum:

You're not connecting here to something that started with hardcore. I thought it was at the time, I did think it was year zero. But the hippies had it too, the beats had it, the labor unionists had it, before them the Paris communalists had it. I mean, this goes back a long way in history, it goes back to people who recognize that their capacity to be free depends upon their capacity to say no to evil when they encounter it. (quoted in Blush, 2010, p. 584)

Even if there are differences of opinion about what constitutes evil and how to refuse it, this search for freedom has remained as one of punk's main goals. Within Finnish hardcore, evil was often personified by war, although politicians, the state (and the police as its watchdogs) and the church also get mentioned. Another freedom that the Finnish hardcore

punks were claiming was the freedom to play as they saw fit, and it was mostly the musical freedom that made the Finnish bands stand out, and still does, as it gains new listeners with every punk generation.

There are, however, significant differences between the punk of today and the punk of the 1980s, the music and the ideas have ricocheted in different directions. The original raw politics of anger and dissatisfaction were developed and expanded and, perhaps as a result, a part of the punk scene has started to look back to its unsophisticated beginnings nostalgically. Personal interest in the unsophisticatedness of the early 1980s hardcore is a further reason why I have opted for less exposure for the later developments in these exchanges, and given more focus to the early stages. However, the treatment is still partial, and the hope is that it would push others (especially those more knowledgeable for having ‘been there’) to take the time to recollect and reflect on these interesting times, even if it is to disagree with what has been said in the pages above.

Of course, there are shortcomings in this work that cannot be justified or excused by merely pointing out that deficiencies are an important part of the subject matter. One potential criticism could be that the work fails to categorize the subject sufficiently. However, for example the discussion on whether we should be addressing the movements of punk culture as ‘indieglobalisation’, ‘cultural hybridity’, ‘transnationality’, ‘glocalisation’ or something else is similar to the question of whether to call punk a ‘post-subculture’, a ‘youth culture’ or a ‘neo-tribe’, and, in agreement with Furness (2012), the time spent in analysing these differences correlates inversely with the ‘punkness’ of the research.

Another possible critique, partially resulting from the above attitude, could be that post-subcultural theory has not been given due consideration. Convincing arguments have been made against the CCCS approach already before the post-subculturalist challenge,

however, as even the post-subculturalists admit (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003), no new orthodoxy has taken the place of subculture. Despite the flaws of subcultural theory, for the current work, subculture still remains the more applicable term. Greene (2012) sees the mistakes of the subculturalists, less in the way that they approached the question, although this was also problematic, but more importantly in how they answered their own queries. Do subcultures carry the potential to overthrow the capitalist machine, to provoke a *real* systemic rupture? Of course not. However, does that mean they express no potential for change and their resistance amounts to a mere ‘ritual’? For many subjects of this study, punk is a life-long commitment which underlines their disagreement with the ‘system’. As Greene (2012) points out, subcultures represent ‘the fact that power could never complete itself’ (p. 578) – the subcultures that are truly ‘sub’ always remain beyond the system’s grip. Even if it is a utopic goal for punk to overthrow a government, let alone an entire political ideology, Greene sees punk offering tools to *underfuck the system* in daily material practices. This attitude is central to DIY punk and has enabled many a punk over generations to live alternative (and arguably more meaningful) existences in the midst of a rotten system that they cannot overthrow. The tyranny of the system only reinforces their voices – it becomes their *raison d’être*.

While the CCCS approach may have overpoliticised subcultures, Bell (2013) sees that the post-subculturalists in turn have underpoliticised them. There is inherent political power in the hardcore punk sound, as well as in its DIY stance, something the post-subculturalists claim has evaporated as subcultural membership became a depthless ‘stylistic game’ without ideological commitment (Muggleton, 1997). Even if the concepts of cultural hybridity, fluidity and overlap may now characterise some styles that would have formerly been filed under subculture, when it comes to DIY punk, the assumptions of the post-subculturalists seem to take us further away from a working model for analysis.

Replacing ‘subculture’ with alternative terms such as ‘subchannels’ or ‘temporary substream networks’, mentioned by Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003), helps very little when attempting to understand punk. Although today there may be more overlap between punk and other subcultures, and punks who expand their subcultural choice to other styles, on the other hand, many punks and some of the interviewees of this work have no interest in other styles of music. Furthermore, even if the groups discussed in chapter seven contain an element of pastiche, their work is worlds away from market-assembled simulacra. Despite being permutations of Finnish hardcore, permutations of a permutation, some of these groups at the same time strive for originality, authenticity and stylistic innovation, aspects that according to Muggleton (1997) do not have meaning or value for the post-subculturalist. It is not the task of this work to evaluate the merits of post-subcultural theory as a whole, however, perhaps its problematic application to punk means that punk is an exception – Clark (2003) has even referred to it as the ‘last subculture’.

Bell (2013) argues that subculture can still have a positive contribution, as long as it ‘takes cognisance of the limitations of the CCCS subculture theory’ and ‘accounts for the multiple referents of power in contemporary society and the diffuse, complex and non-linear ways that youth subcultures produce to respond to such realities’ (p. 11). Although not specifically addressing punk, Bell offers ways in which the concept of subculture could be improved that make sense from the point of view of punk. For one, Bell sees that the dominant capitalist ideology of consumption plays an important role in the processes of subcultural identification, not as a sign of the weakening of resistance, but in the sense that subcultural consumption and production involve a strong degree of agency. In addition, he maintains that both the CCCS and post-CCCS work on subcultures have failed to address subcultural engagement as a dynamic trajectory. Stahl (2003), having a similar intention, calls for a tasteful renovation of subcultural theory and maintains that it has elided the

process most affected by globalisation, namely ‘the circulation of ideas, texts, styles, and people around the globe’ (p. 28). Stahl (2003) also offers terminology that is closer to the level of the subjects of this work when he speaks of ‘networks, circuits and alliances’ that have created ‘geographically dispersed audiences’ (p. 28). However, to finally answer the question of what to call the interconnected activities of punks on a global scale, even if sounding less academic, referring to them as (sub)cultural exchanges, or simply trades, within the global punk scene ought to sound less odd to the punks. As a result of these trades Finnish hardcore is now enjoyed by a worldwide audience.

As seen in chapter seven, Finnish hardcore still inspires punks to take up instruments, without the fear of failure one might add. The work of many groups discussed in chapter seven underlines the unassumingness of the original idea. At the limit of capabilities one can find a mixture of honesty and rawness, even if on the other hand the concept of crumminess is also changing, and even disappearing. Imperfection is in fact an endangered facet of punk; the sanitisation of music described by Attali (1985) is clearly happening within punk, and the homogenizing tendencies are infiltrating the underground. This development also explains the nostalgia for the rawness of early-1980s punk sounds. Although none of the pastiche bands of the previous chapter play imperfectly on purpose, even if, for example, Conclude deliberately did not practice too much to remain raw, perhaps there is a similar difference between things born, and things made, as Saito suggested in her comparison of Korean peasant’s tea bowls and the tea ware of the Japanese connoisseurs. Still, the bands in chapter seven attest to a demand for the rawness of Finnish hardcore even amongst the later punk generations, and recent groups such as Hyökkäys (‘Attack’) from Basque country reinforce the impression that its crudity continues to be relevant.

The continued relevance of Finnish hardcore has also to do with the state of the world, where the opposition to war and military expenditure sadly continue to be important. Even if the nuclear stockpiles that spread fear amongst the punks in the early 1980s were never used, considering the state of the world and the resources that could have been invested differently, they still killed, and the balance still hangs between peace or annihilation. In its yearbook, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI, 2021) reports that in 2020 military expenditure increased again globally, despite the fact that meanwhile, as Discharge already pointed out four decades ago, half the world is starving and dying of disease. This message was the most relevant idea behind Finnish hardcore, and as long as this development stays on course, there will always be a demand for another war song. In 2020, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved the doomsday clock to 100 seconds to midnight – closer than ever to apocalypse. The reading was maintained in 2021 due to the reluctance to implement measures that would control the use of nuclear weapons. In addition, the scientists refer to new threats to human existence such as the climate crisis and the lethargy of world leaders in responding to it, as well as the internet-driven ‘infodemic’ in which false or misleading information is spread deliberately for political or other aims.

Therefore, although it is still relevant to give out uncomfortable reminders about the futility of war, instead of a nostalgic treatment of the war thematic, it is important that punks react to new challenges as they arise. Stuck at 100 seconds to midnight, time is running out for humanity, and punks are still one of the musical subcultures that best realises this fact. Paradoxically, even if punks often speak of smashing the state, at the same time, they are the ones warning of disaster although in reality, as a diaspora culture, punk could potentially have more readiness to survive in case of a societal collapse. ‘Real’ punks are used to scarceness of resources, lack of personal hygiene, sleeping in the rough,

foraging for food, mending clothing as well as having a scavenger mentality in general. In Penelope Spheeris's documentary *Decline of the Western Civilization III* (1998) a young homeless woman called Spinner (at 13 she used to do a lot of speed and was always 'spun out') describes the resilience of punks:

Spinner: We're the cockroaches man, we're the ones who are gonna live through everything.

Penelope: So, when the world is over, when everything has ended, then there's only gonna be...

Spinner: Punks.

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