

Culture and national identity

The role of culture in constructing
notions of Finnishness

Marja Andersson

The construction of national identity

- Benedict Anderson: national identity as an "imagined community"
 - nationalism does not mean an awakening awareness of already existing nations, but the construction or invention ("imagining") of nations
- national identity as a discourse
- definition of "us" and "them"
- national identities on one hand reflect the needs, hopes and outlooks of ordinary people, on the other hand embody projects of the elite of educating and cultivating the people

Culture and national identity

- national culture consists of cultural institutions, representations and symbols that people can identify with
- strategies in producing a discourse of the nation (Stuart Hall)
 - Producing a narrative of a nation
 - Producing the origins and continuity of a nation
 - Inventing traditions
 - Producing a myth of the founding of the nation
 - Producing the idea of an original and genuine people

The formation of Finnish culture

- Culture in the era of autonomy
(19th century – 1917)
- Culture in the era of the "first republic"
(1917-1945)
- Culture in the era of the "second republic"
(1946-1990)
- Culture in the era of globalisation (1990 -)

The era of autonomy (19th c – 1917)

- the "invention" of Finnish culture and identity
- > a project of producing Finnishness, aiming at producing national unity
- background in a larger movement of nationalism in Europe
- Culture served a twofold role in the construction of a nation: it constructed an image and conveyed a *notion of Finnishness* (the production of a nation); and demonstrated the *existence of a civilized nation* (the formation of a nation-state)

The presentation of a civilized nation through high culture/arts

- the establishment of cultural institutions (museums, theatres, musical academies of arts etc.)
- the production of the Finnish operas, dramatic works, sculptures and paintings
- the description of gentry and important persons and events in Finnish history



The production of Finnishness through culture

- descriptions of *the land* (Finnish nature and geography) and its *people* ("typical" Finnish people and habits)
- representations of ordinary, common people
- an ideal image was constructed of poor, humble, hardworking and Godfearing people
- an image of the mythological *history* of the Finns was constructed through Kalevala and its influence on the arts
- the role of Finnish language became central in literature, theatre, opera etc.

"The land"

- art establishes a strong connection between Finnish mentality and nature
- the construction of national landscapes with symbolic value:
 - descriptions of Finnish nature and landscape in literature and paintings
 - descriptions of places with cultural and historical value



Ferdinand von Wright: Fighting capercaillie



Eero Järnefelt: An autumn landscape from Pielisjärvi

"The people"

- influential examples: "Maamme" ("Our land", a book by Topelius), the characters of Sven Dufva & Paavo from Saarijärvi (poems by Runeberg)
- descriptions of folklore and "typical" Finnish people and habits
- descriptions of different Finnish "tribes"
- a construction of the features of an "unchanging national character"



Sven Dufva (from Z. Topelius' novel)

"The history"

- strong impact of Finnish national epic *Kalevala* (Lönnrot, originally 1835)
- Kalevala helped in producing a myth of the heroic origins of the nation and an idea of an "original" people
- Kalevala and national mythology inspired artists especially during the "golden age" in Finnish arts at the turn of the 20th century



Akseli Gallén-Kallela



The "Finnish maiden"
endangered:
presenting symbolic
images of a nation



Eetu Isto: The attack



Hugo Simberg: The wounded angel

Conflicting images of the people:



an ideal ("Topelian") image



an image of uncivilized "savages"

The construction of Finnishness as a civilizing project

- the production of Finnishness as a civilizing process of the elite, aimed at the common people
- cultural descriptions of the common people also presented the Finns as a backward people, in need of improvement
- culture was used in this process in conveying the values and ideals of the elite to the people
- education, temperance, austerity, diligence and cleanliness were promoted in culture

The era of the "first republic" (1917-1945)

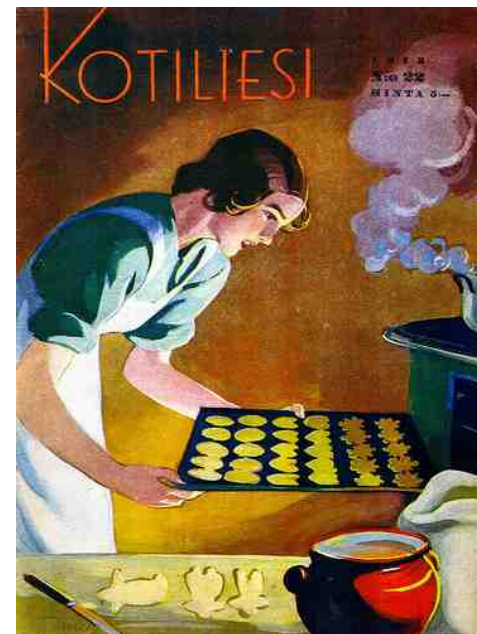
- the era is characterised by patriotic and nationalistic ideals, cultural protectionism and conservative ideology
- the definition of "Finnish culture" was associated with a Lutheran set of values, an agrarian way of life and a Finno-Ugrian cultural heritage
- the slogan of "*home, religion, fatherland*" reflected in culture

"Home"

- the family was depicted as a nuclear family
- members of the family had different roles
- the image of an ideal family represented the hierarchical relationships of society in small scale

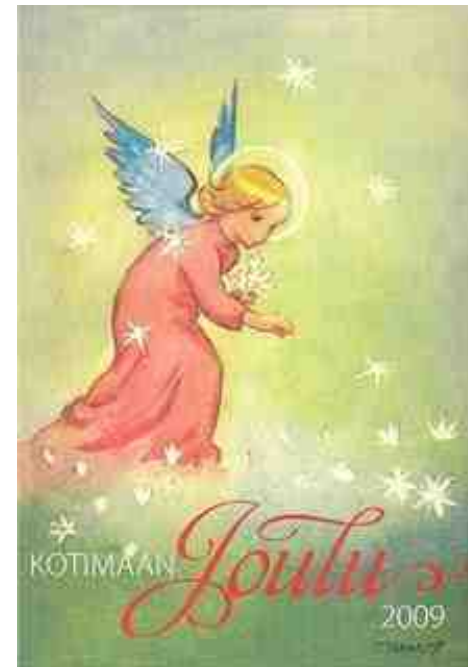
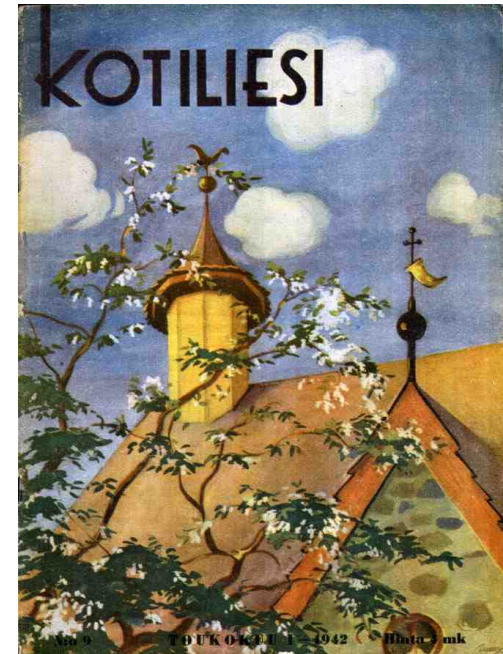


The family Suominen
(The "Finns")



"Religion"

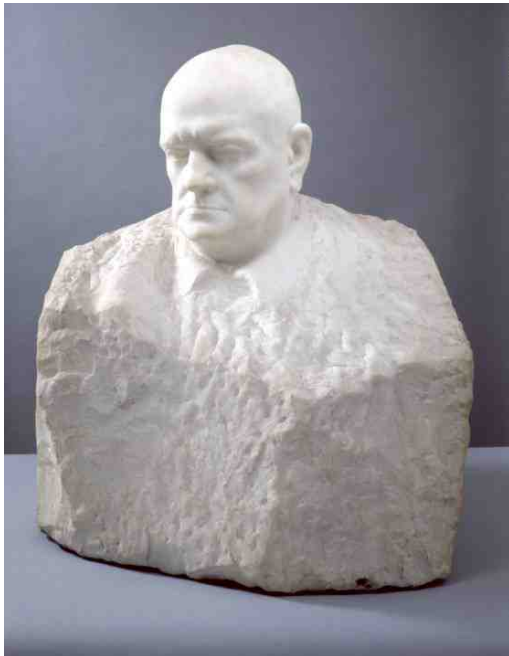
- the church was an important authority, and religion could not be criticized in arts and culture
- religion stood for Lutheranism
- Lutheran values and way of life were often reflected in arts, as well as religious teachings
- the church formed the centre of rural community > the church and religious traditions symbolised traditional community and national unity in arts



Martta
Wendelin

"Fatherland"

- unity of the nation (state) as a central goal
- images of national heroes
- descriptions of agrarian, traditional life and work
- respect for authorities (the army, the state, the school, the church) reflected in arts and culture
- an emphasis on duties, responsibilities, loyalty, discipline



Wäinö Aaltonen: Jean Sibelius



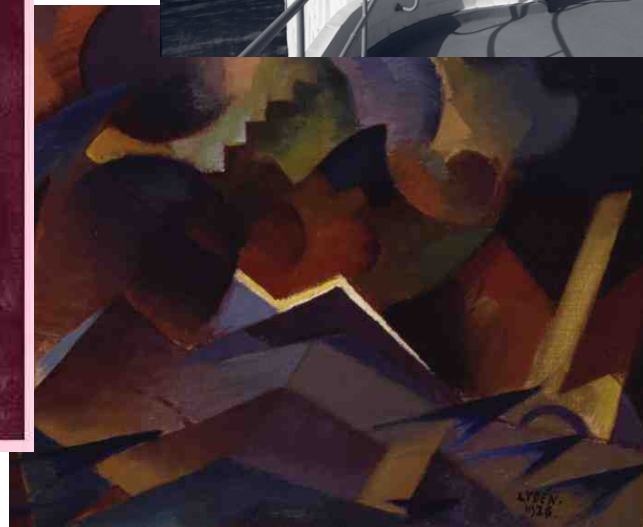
The Niskavuori movies



Eero Järnefelt: Marshal Mannerheim

Emerging modernism

- modernistic tendencies in the cultural life of the 1920's > stylistic features, international influences, liberal attitudes, admiration of new technology and urbanism
- modernism was embraced especially by Swedish-speaking artists
- modernism was fiercely criticized in the 1930's (except for functionalism in architecture)



Cultural unity as a project of the Finnish speaking gentry

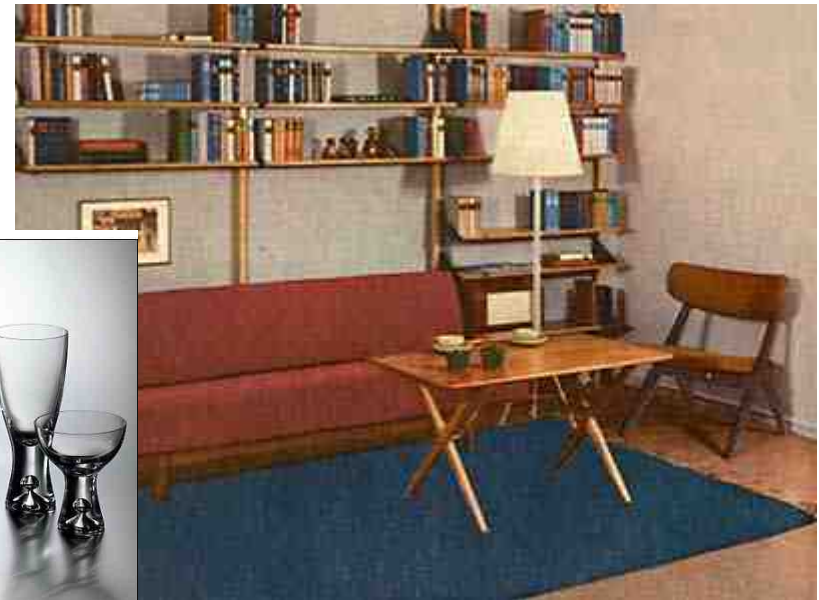
- culture reflected middle-class ideals of self-improvement and patriotism > the marginalization of "unappropriate" forms of culture
- the function of culture was to reinforce a sense of Finnish identity, the unity of the nation and the authority of the state
- the role of Finnish language was emphasized in the 1930's as the definer of Finnishness in arts and culture > language debates/wars

The era of the "second republic" (1945 – 1990)

- the establishment and expansion of the *welfare state* and its central ideals of *democracy* and *emancipation* characterize the era
- cultural influences from abroad > the erosion of cultural protectionism
- an increase in the production and consumption of mass produced cultural artefacts (especially American popular culture)
- changes in Finnish culture and lifestyle (< structural change of Finnish society)
- notions of Finnish culture and identity became more heterogenic

The breakthrough of modernism

- modernism in arts & culture
- The "golden age" of Finnish design
- urbanism and international influences reflected in culture and lifestyle



The breakthrough of popular culture

- sharp increase in the production and consumption of popular culture (comics, journals, records) from the 1950's on
- the rise of television from the late 1950's onwards
- "Americanized" popular culture (movies, music, fashion)
- mass culture caused fears for the corruption of Finnish culture, identity and morals



"Culture wars" in the 1950's

- debates concerning new ideas and ideals in culture
- new ways to describe Finns and a Finnish way of life
- the civilizing project was challenged



Väinö Linna: Tuntematon sotilas
(The unknown soldier)

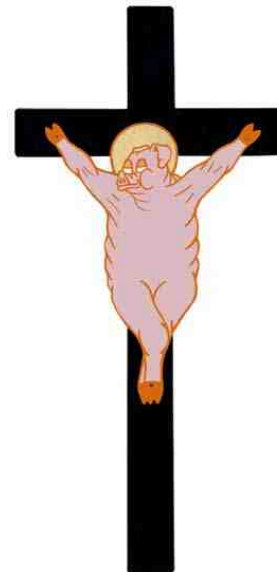


Pekka & Pätkä -movies



The generation conflict

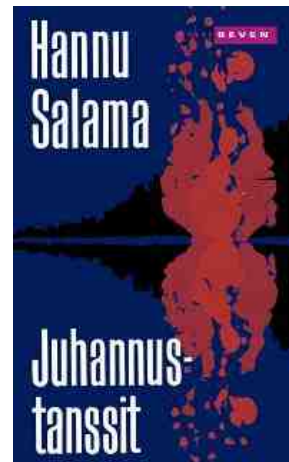
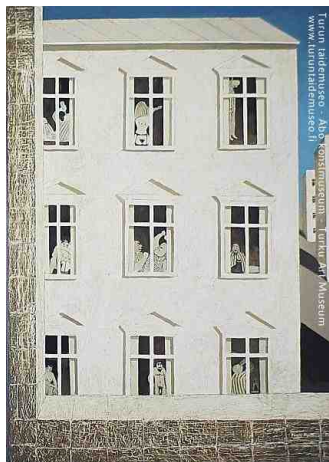
- baby boomers reached their youth in the 1960's
- rapid changes in society and culture in the 1960's (urbanisation, modernisation, industrialisation) > new interpretations of Finnish lifestyle and identity
- differences in "experiential worlds" between the old generations and the young > cultural conflicts/culture wars
- experiential and underground arts, popular culture, performance arts
- criticism of prevailing values



Harro Koskinen

Emancipation and cultural criticism

- ideals of democracy, equality, emancipation of people and freedom of expression penetrated the arts
- art served as an instrument for social criticism
- art focused on the everyday lives of ordinary people
- elitism was severely criticized



The spread of youth culture

- rise in the standard of living in the 1960's > emergence of a commercial youth culture
- influences from abroad were adopted and adapted locally
- differentiation of youth cultures from the 1970's onwards



New cultural representations

- new cultural identities slowly became to be accepted in culture (ethnic identities, working class culture, subcultures, popular culture)
- a growth in cultural diversity and different modes of cultural expression



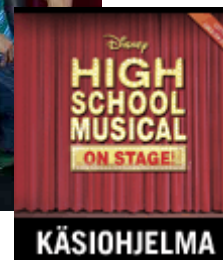
Uuno Turhapuro -movies

The era of globalisation (1990 -)

- the spread of new media (satellite tv, internet etc.) > fast and unrestricted spread of new information and influences
- the *fragmentation* and *diversification* of Finnish culture and identity
- at the same time, commercial values have grown stronger in arts and culture > the "McDonaldisation" of culture (the standardisation of culture)
- What happens to Finnish culture and its characteristic features?

The triumph of foreign culture?

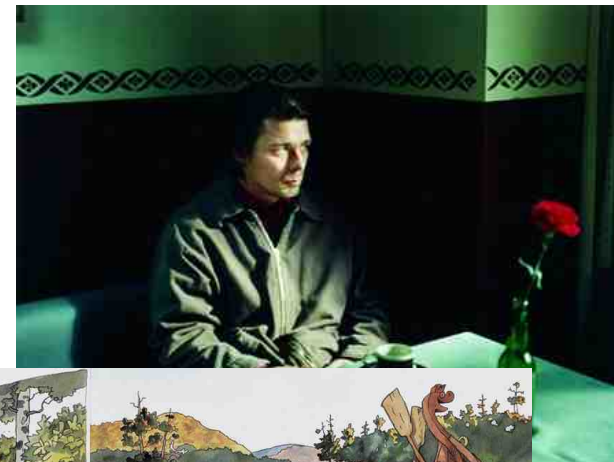
- Does Finnish culture as such exist any longer, or has global culture overcome it?



Features of Finnishness in culture

- Finnish culture contains representations and symbols that Finns can identify with and are familiar with
- foreign influences are not imitated as such, but instead adopted, transformed and adapted in a unique way

Aki Kaurismäki -movies



Juba: Viivi & Wagner -comics



Mauri
Kunnas:
Canine
Kalevala

A broader range of Finnish culture and identities

