

Music/Memory/Memoir (edited by Robert Edgar et al)

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Confessions of Metal and Folk: Remembering and Contextualising the Creative Process

I know that I've been here before

And I swear, sometimes you were with me

In different times we witnessed places

Returning there I'll always find you

(Lord Vicar: 'Accidents', *Gates of Flesh* 2016)

I am an academic with a serious professional relationship to music, both as a researcher and a musician. I wrote my Cultural History PhD (Kärki 2014) on stage designing in arena and stadium environments, trying to capture a cultural history of technological and theatrical change of high end music performance from 1965 to 2013. In this research I was partially relying on first hand performance experience on both small and big stages, and the related music technology. But the link between my academic and artistic careers is deeper than that, as I have knowingly mixed my studies and creative process, in order to find new angles to both. I started this chapter with a lyric fragment from a song I wrote back in 2015.

‘Accidents’ is a heavy metal song, but the song narrative is removed from the most usual clichés – but also a great narrative tradition – of the genre, such as battles, graveyards, evil, death, and destruction. Instead, it is an introspection on how people meet and fall in love, and how that feels both accidental and yet sometimes premeditated. I wanted to touch the old mythical idea of rebirth, found from many religions and cultures. As part of my MA I also studied Comparative Religion, and found a wealth of potential song topics. The song, among other issues – such as cruelty in relationships – touched the idea that the places that feel intuitively meaningful for us, would be manifestations of love from the ‘past lives’. In the microcosmos of a song, anything is possible, and this is how I imagined that kind of ‘meaningful’ place be part of a chain of love and memories that transcend generations and individual memory. Even if there was no such thing as reincarnation – very likely there is no such thing, I remain agnostic – places can still be containers of ‘Cultural Memory’, as defined by Jan Assmann (2008: 109). Perhaps also recorded music can be such container.

As a form of experimental autobiographical anthropology, I will analyse my own creative process through two case studies, in different music styles. I have played guitar since the early 1990s, in bands since mid-1990s, and released my first full length album in 2002. Since then there have been more than 30 releases within a variety of genres, including doom metal, progressive rock, folk, psychedelic pop, and electronic ambient. My bands include heavy metal band Reverend Bizarre (1995–2007, Spinefarm Records/Universal Music), progressive rock band Orne (1997–, Black Widow Records), heavy metal band Lord Vicar (2007–, The Church Within Records), electronic ambient band E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr (2008–, Svart Records), and psychedelic pop band Uhrijuhla (established 2010, I have been their guitar player since 2013, Svart Records). I have also released so far two acoustic folk albums under my own name (2010–, Svart Records). Having toured in most European countries, and USA,

for 15 years, I also have a lot of experience on international live playing. You can find the full discography of my bands at the end of this chapter.

Intimacy, Storytelling, Tradition

Not only has my music career influenced my research, but also my music writing has been influenced by my research career and the methods of critical inquiry I have learned. This hermeneutic and heuristic circle was a starting point to look at and listen to my own songwriting history; the memories, influences, and their impact on creativity. It is actually a really demanding task – I found out while writing this chapter – to go beyond the ‘grand narratives’ that join my own memories together, and try to grasp the individual moments of creativity and realizations about the emergence of something potentially good or interesting in individual moments. My main interest is in the fluctuation between private/intimate, and public/shared.

My music has always been filled with intertextual tributes to my influences, and my lyrical themes come from a multitude of sources, including products of popular culture, books on history and religions, but also the events that shaped my life. I also use my dreams as a creative fuel, as it is the logic of dreams that mixes the different contexts in surprising and surreal ways. This web of meanings is always elusive, as there is a touch of unpredictable associative bridging between different contexts and how I relate and remember them during the songwriting process. The relation of performance and memory can be a fruitful meeting point of cultural historical inquiry, as Peter Burge (2010: 105) claims. Artistic re-enactment and interpretation of the past is certainly something that I am interested in; this works as a

link between tradition and creativity, my musical narratives moving from personal and intimate to widely shared cultural events, symbols, and monuments.

To elaborate this idea further, the two things that are usually intertwined in songwriting are storytelling and confessional intimacy. A songwriter can wear many masks in the act of distancing oneself from the songs' narratives. But at the same time many songwriters also use the songs for introspection. There is a long history for the idea of 'confessionality', from the religious and philosophical thinking of Saint Augustine in his *The Confessions* (written between years 395 and 400, see Saint Augustine 1997) to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's autobiographical work of the same name (1782, see Rousseau 2001), which has been seen as the first major autobiography. But when it comes to music and confessional expression, especially important category of musicians is singer-songwriters. Sung storytelling of course goes back to oral transmission of history, and for example the bardic tradition, but, in its current form it is a North-American tradition:

Singer-songwriters have been seen critically and commercially as a 'movement' within popular music, and the term has been privileged as a distinct category contained within an Anglo-American rock perspective. The music of singer-songwriters has tended to adhere to folk, rock and North-American pop styles, and to include personal or observational concerns in its lyrics. The term can be viewed as aesthetically loaded, as it connotes particular attributes of a performer – such as emotional honesty, intelligence, authenticity and artistic autonomy. The singer-songwriter has also come to be associated with lyrical introspection, confessional songwriting, gentle musical arrangements and an understated performance style. (Strachan & Leonard 2003: 198)

The big question, then, is the amount of honesty in the confessional songwriting. I pour a lot of my insecurities, fears, expectations, sometimes also matters of intimacy, into my lyrics, and to speak directly about what is what exactly, is usually too much to ask. It's basically giving away the 'secret', the felt essence behind the masks of social identities, but also potentially hurt those around you, if you have based some of your narratives to possibly traumatic real life events and personae. But that does not mean there would not be actual felt and, at least to a certain degree, actual honesty in the music. Or, as Joni Mitchell answered to Cameron Crowe in her 1979 interview for *Rolling Stone*, honesty can also be affectively felt in the vocal delivery, thus extending from lyric writing to actual musical performance:

The *Blue* album, there's hardly a dishonest note in the vocals. At that period in my life, I had no personal defenses. I felt like a cellophane wrapper on a pack of cigarettes. I felt like I had absolutely no secrets from the world and I couldn't pretend in my life to be strong. Or to be happy. But the advantage of it in the music was that there were no defenses there either.' (Crowe 1979: unpaginated)

The amount of vulnerability and openness varies, but seems to particularly be a question and measure of artistic integrity, depending on the psychological situation in each phase of artist's life. Some performers seek turmoil in their private life, and then use that as a fuel for creativity. Others try to escape their inner demons, and use music as a form of exorcism, release, therapy. This side of creativity has also been heavily mythologised, both by music journalists and artists themselves. Artistic suffering can also be a mask, a role which is ritually reserved for the 'exceptional', charismatic, sometimes at least seemingly half-crazy people in the music industry.

As a researcher/practitioner I am in dialogical position between musical traditions and the unknown future; there are circulating themes, narratives and intertextual repetitions which anchor me to a tradition, but with the touch of my very own 'persona', the emerging new. But the research side of my work brings more awareness of the cultural history and socio-political conditions of music making. Musically every new artist nowadays stands in the shoulders of giants, and usually also acknowledge this as a necessity. Tradition helps us to stay orientated, the twist of newness keeps us safe from 'yawning boredom'. (Koselleck 2010: 51–52. See also Koselleck 1985: *passim*) How could this process be honestly analysed as part of the musical traditions that the creative work is part of? Is this simply navel gazing, as some of the academic autobiographical work has been criticized to be?

Autoethnography and the Varieties of Memory

According to Harris M. Berger, ethnography used to be understood as something objective, a colonial project with researchers's supreme meta-perspective, where the lives of the informants were nothing but the enactment of cultural scripts. Newer research has opposed this, both for the greater cultural and methodological clarity, but also for the political reasons:

Writing was now seen, not as a transparent media for communicating ideas, but as a historically situated practice whose tropes were implicated in larger power relations. Spurred on by these ideas, a number of scholars explored techniques such as dialogic ethnography, reflexive ethnography, autoethnography, and experimental writing in order to give research participants a greater voice in their representations, flush out

older colonial rhetorics, and acknowledge the partiality and subjectivity of the fieldworker. (Berger 2008: 72)

Some of the needed methodological tools can indeed be found from autoethnography and other even more experimental methods involving the researcher. Within that more closed framework the motivations and methods used in the creative practice, and those used in its observation, occur in the same person's head. Derived from this idea, is the 'Research-Creation' or 'Research-as-Creation' model that Sophie Stévanca and Serge Lacasse (2018) have developed in the context of music research/practice. Usually this means that a practitioner or a group undertakes a commercial or artistic enterprise in collaboration with researchers, in a 'practicetheoretical' setting. (Chapman & Sawchuck 2012: 5; Loveless 2015: 41) This expands from the autoethnographic model, so that the two sets of motivations and methods are embodied in at least two people and the emerging group motivations and methodologies are a negotiated compromise. Most of the band activity works like that anyway, but the conscious element of involving the research makes this really interesting.

In my own creative practice this connection has only become fully realized since 2015, when I started lecturing and giving conference presentations – sometimes also involving live music – on my own compositions, instruments, and playing style. This would be further strengthened, if the planned Research-Creation project, led by Professor John Richardson in University of Turku, would get funding. This would mean, in my case, a full-length album project that would be fully integrated to my academic work. But the connection between what I have studied and how I have written music has been strong ever since I started playing guitar back in early 1990s, especially after I entered University of Turku, in 1997, to study Cultural History. The idea of 'playing' with history has become an integral part of what I do

creatively. But I think the creative mind should also be critical: this kind of practice can lead to anachronisms, uncritical and uninformed use of the past. In this sense I follow historian Raphael Samuel (1994: 429–430, see also Kärki 2014: 35), as he claims that past has become the plaything of the present, a postmodern metafiction which is used as a resource of popular culture, ‘Disneyfied’ theme parks, all kinds of phantasmagoric entertainment. The ultimate example of this would perhaps be *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, which originate from a Disneyland attraction, and milk the historical figures and pirate romanticism in extremely anachronistic and humorously playful way.

To write about my musical activities in relation to my studies is to me a radical version of any research, where the researcher is ‘part and parcel of the setting, context and culture he is trying to understand and represent’. (Brewer 2000: 127) Interestingly enough, Deborah Wong, herself an ethnomusicologist doing autoethnography on taiko-drumming, claims that performing something musically does not yet mean that the scholarly work which follows one’s own musical activity would necessarily be more relevant. Matter of fact she lists possible hazards, such as claiming access to the subjectivity of the composer whose music is being performed, feeling superior because of the playing skills, or that performing would somehow be categorically different from everyday life. Her warning should be taken seriously:

Learning how to make music is an extension of participant-observation research, but it offers specific possibilities distinct from the deep hanging out that we share with anthropologists. Unfortunately, ethnomusicologists sometimes valorize participant music-making in ways that re-enact the problems listed earlier. (Wong 2008: 84)

This danger is certainly vital in my own case, even if I might have the best possible access for my own musical work: a very particular knowledge on my compositions, playing style, influences, and the cultural connections and sometimes intuitive leaps manifesting in my lyrics. As I have chosen to let my music be heard, packaged, distributed, reviewed, and generally experienced by others, I have to be aware of the social implications, the difference between intentions and interpretations. Once artistic work becomes social, it escapes from the ‘author’, it becomes a process of endless interpretations, the cultural play, which can metaphorically be compared to the process of looking into a mirror. Each reflection is different, depending on who is looking, and from what position. (On the notion of play, in the context of interpretation, see Gadamer 1999: 101–102, 139–140; Kärki 2014: 51–53)

If we take this social expansion further, we should think about ‘memory’ as a social container. This is the other side of the coin, the social matrix which can be seen as a deep structure of each culture. Jan Assmann (2008: 109–110, 116–118) differentiates between ‘Communicative Memory’, and ‘Cultural Memory’. The first one of these is autobiographical and social in its nature, attached to the living, embodied memory, and the recent past. ‘Cultural Memory’, then again, is monumental, structural, hierarchical, formulated, mythical, and ceremonial. What are popular music records in this sense? Aleida Assmann (2011: 137) has noted that the human memory co-evolves with the technical progress of media history. Thus the physical records, with their packaging and liner notes included, are indeed carriers of shared cultural heritage, containers of ideas, memories, and creativity. As an example, think of Pink Floyd’s *The Wall* (1979). It contains a conceptual narrative inspired by the personal childhood trauma of Roger Waters, losing his father in WWII, mixed with the powerful ideas on the problems of communication in rock entertainment, totalitarian

aesthetics, and cultural critique. The narrative was then re-enacted and re-packaged in live performances (1980–1981), a film by Alan Parker (1982), and so on. (Kärki 2015: 60–61)

‘Communicative Memory’, then, could be related to both live performances of music, and the recordings, but some records and notable performances just might transcend to the realm of ‘Cultural Memory’. Mainly this is due the reception, reputation, successful narrativisation of the popular culture product. Elvis, The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and the like, are quite possibly canonised to such an extent, that they have become general symbols of an era, the 1960s and 1970s. Festivals like Woodstock (1969), and museums like The Beatles Story (Liverpool), Graceland (Memphis), and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Cleveland) solidify this kind of Classic Rock ‘totem’ building. Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016, bringing popular music lyrics writing to the realm of institutionalised ‘high art’. Most popular music records are, however, bound to have biggest impact within a year of the release, and some are released to small underground scenes only, sometimes reaching long term appreciation within them. I mostly operate in this field, and happily see my own artistic work within the framework of ‘Communicative Memory’.

Aleida Assmann (2010: 35, 37, 41–44, see also Burge 2010: 106) expands this framework with the notion of ‘Collective Memory’, which differentiates from individual memory because of the variety of ‘Social Frames’, and basically offers more variations of Jan Assmann’s ‘Communicative Memory’, also including the monumental ‘Cultural Memory’. The mentioned social frames include ideological, political, and cultural elements, and, even if they offer long-term memory systems, are not permanently fixed. According to Aleida Assmann (2010: 44), it is this challenged, contested nature of our ‘Collective Memory’, that keeps it alive.

Next I will try to do the difficult thing and address my own music career with some carefully chosen examples of how I think I work, and how I think my creative process unfolds.

In the Shadow of Influences

I started playing guitar when I was 15 years old. Until then, music creation had been of no interest to me. Rather, I had had a strong inclination towards visual arts. I was drawing, and had a keen interest in graphic novel as something that combined narrative storytelling to images. I think that background has affected my songwriting as well. The music I had listened by then had perhaps one common factor: I liked bombastic, symphonic music. Be it classical music, progressive rock, synthesizer pop, or classic rock bands like Queen, and Led Zeppelin, I liked layers, long epic structures, and conceptual storytelling. The fact that I started playing guitar relatively old was, in the end, rather helpful, as I had a massive motivation to train. The only formal training was a few lessons of easy classical guitar, which later turned out to be a smart move, as I learned the basics of fingerpicking with the right hand that plays rhythm. As is usual, I was technically a poor player during those early years – not that I ever became any kind of ‘shred master’. My strong motivation has been to be a minimalist as a player; I admired guitar players that were precise yet innovative, David Gilmour of Pink Floyd, and Tony Iommi of Black Sabbath being the primary influences. There is economy of playing in their very different guitar styles. Two other guitar players influenced me because of their holistic approach to playing, songwriting, and studio work, namely Pete Townshend of The Who, and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin.

Throughout the years, I have tried to challenge myself as a guitar player by starting very different kind of bands in different genres. Having said that, there are similarities in these bands, perhaps the thinly veiled melancholy, and some conceptual ideas, always working in album length rather than with single songs.

One important factor in the evolution of my creative thinking is the studio work. From the beginning of my recording career I have worked in bands that self-produce, of course with the help of a studio engineer. And especially after 2006 I have had the final creative say. I have never considered to be a professional musician, in the sense that I'd have to make a living out of it. This has been a luxury, as I never had to please anyone with my creative decisions, trying to make music that would sell. Then again, I have been lucky, in the sense that most of my music has interested other people. This has allowed me to continue making music in professional studios with decent budgets, with freedom to make creative decisions within the bands themselves. The importance of such freedom – which comes with responsibility to deliver each time – can't be overstated.

My first serious band was Reverend Bizarre, still the best known of the bands that I have worked in. Towards the end of its thirteen year existence, 1994–2007, it turned from a total underground band to a relatively well know cult act, topping the single charts, and reaching number four in album charts. As we were mostly signed to Spinefarm Records, which was owned by Universal Music, we had good resources and marketing, and, as we knew what we were doing, a total artistic freedom. We recorded three albums, several EPs and numerous split vinyl releases. I used the pseudonym 'Peter Vicar' in that context, teaming with vocalist/bass player 'Albert Witchfinder', and drummer 'Earl of Void'. Albert was the main man of the band, the one behind the idea of starting the band, and introducing us to doom

metal as a genre and tradition. But this is where I started contributing original material for records as well, about the same time I wrote material for my progressive rock band Orne, which I founded right after starting my university studies in 1997. With Reverend Bizarre we did three full length albums for Spinefarm/Universal Records, *In the Rectory of the Bizarre Reverend* (2002), *Crush the Insects* (2005), and *So Long Suckers* (2007), along with numerous Eps for several indie labels. Orne has done two albums, *The Conjuraton By the Fire* (2006), and *The Tree of Life* (2011), for Italian indie label Black Widow Records, and which also had the full lineup of Reverend Bizarre within the band.

Reverend Bizarre was pretty much a tribute band first, as we aimed for ‘perfect’ doom metal. Musically the old school bands such as Pentagram, Saint Vitus, Withfinder General, The Obsessed and Trouble were obvious influences, with the more universally recognised foundation offered by Black Sabbath. But later this band started expanding its expression to all kinds of directions, mostly progressive, gothic, and even avant-garde. But first and foremost it was a heavy metal band.

After Reverend Bizarre ended, it had given me enough contacts and credibility – social capital, if you will – to carry on recording with other bands. I formed the already mentioned Lord Vicar with Swedish singer Chritus Linderson, who was by then known as a vocalist for Count Raven, Saint Vitus, and Terra Firma, and English drummer Gareth Millsted, known for his work in Centurions Ghost, and End of Level Boss. Our three full-length albums, *Fear No Pain* (2008), *Signs of Osiris* (2011), and *Gates of Flesh* (2016), have been released by German indie label The Church Within Records. In addition to these bands I also play guitar in E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr, a minimalist ambient/krautrock band in the Tangerine Dream/Klaus Schulze/Popol Vuh/early Kraftwerk vein, with two albums –

Kometenbahn, and *Spiralo* (both 2013) done so far for Finnish indie label Svart Records – and one live album, *Live at Roadburn 2014* (Adansonia Records, Germany, 2016), and some EPs released so far. I also play guitar in a psychedelic pop band Uhrijuhla, with the album *Jokainen on vapaa lintu* (2015) also released by Svart Records. I have, furthermore, released two ‘confessional’ acoustic albums of singer/songwriter material with neofolk feel. The first album is named *The Bone of My Bones* (2013), and the second *Eye for an Eye* (2017, both released by Svart Records). All in all I have contributed creative work to more than thirty records, if we count EPs, and there is no end in sight. I have almost always entered studio prepared, with an idea of how the finished record should sound and how the music should be packaged.

Most of this time I have worked full time in academia. I started studying cultural history at University of Turku in 1997, with philosophy and comparative religion as minor subjects. I finished my MA in 2002, Licentiate of Philosophy (Phil. Lic, a grade the Finnish university system has had between MA and PhD) in 2008, and the PhD in 2014. My Doctoral Thesis analysed stadium rock aesthetics and stage designing from 1965 to 2013, mostly focusing on Mark Fisher's work with Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones, and U2, but also Robert Lepage's collaboration with Peter Gabriel at slightly more intimate arena spaces.

I am interested in the history of live music and music technology, retrofuturism, audiovisuality, history of religions, transhumanism, autoethnography, and history of heavy metal in different national contexts. In addition to my Alma Mater in Turku, I have been working as as a Visiting Fellow at Institute of Popular Music, University of Liverpool (2006), and as a Fulbright Visiting Fellow at Case Western Reserve University Center for Popular Music Studies, in Cleveland, Ohio (2017).

My own research field is hence history of popular culture, and most of my published work is on arena rock spectacles, stage designing and the changes in audiovisual technology. In the last two or three years I have been moving into a new territory, now starting in a new project: *Talking Machines. Electronic voice and the interpretation of emotions and self-understanding in human-machine communication in 1960–2020* (funded by Kone Foundation, Finland, 2018–2022). I will be analysing the past futures, retrofuturism, and human–machine communication in the Science Fiction films. What kind of impact this shall have on my songwriting remains to be seen.

In the longer perspective, there have been very obvious influences to my storytelling from both literature and films. I like literature which takes me away, captures my imagination, fuels the nomadic side of my personality. I still love the works of old horror fiction, fantasy and science fiction authors, and some of their work comes out in my writing, in a thinly veiled form. The ones that really formed my foundations when I was young, were Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Aston Smith, Robert E. Howard, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula K. LeGuin, and Frank Herbert. I have been loving this kind of epic storytelling since I learned to read, and found Homeric tales *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, C.S. Lewis, and Edgar Rice Burroughs at the age of eight. I think that is important for me in terms of creativity, that connection to the thrills one experiences at an impressionable age. Weird Tales authors have always been important because of their mixture of beauty and cruelty, of poetic and pulp elements. I like the idea that something can be both ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, depending on the angle. I don’t, however, believe such divisions are fruitful – they suffocate ideas like any cultural fences, hence I try to mix all kinds of cultural elements in my creative work.

Of course I have later read and loved all kinds of literature, that has made its mark to my writing, from Herman Hesse, Michael Bulgakov, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mika Waltari, Timo K. Mukka to Jack London and Karl Ove Knausgård. But I still think the creative foundations are forged at the young age, and the rest is nurturing and finding the finesse of the fundamental ideas. All creativity takes place on the shoulders of those that came before.

I have also collected occult books for about 15 years. My interest has been purely scholarly, even if I find some of the spiritual and ceremonial qualities of the rituals aesthetically beautiful, and can understand the potential benefits of the ritual meditative practices – silence and focus. I like the idea of studying something which is ‘useless’ for the modern technical society and its dominant scientific discourses, but is at the same time very much present, nowadays more than ever, in popular culture. Most of this ‘Western Tradition’ was formulated in the Victorian era studies of Quabalah and the Masonic heritage. Works of Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Edward Waite, Israel Regardie, and Dion Fortune, more or less originating from the Victorian occult society The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, form the basis of my collection. Around 2000 to 2003 I was planning to write a second MA thesis to Comparative Religion about The Golden Dawn, but realised it would have taken too much time from my popular culture research. I also have some older texts and ‘Grimoires’; works by John Dee, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Eliphas Levi, and some of Quabalistic origin. In terms of creative work, this part of my collection fuels a search for certain kind of atmosphere, that has a lot to do with the horror fiction mentioned earlier. I deeply love old books, the way they smell and have stories as individual items, as artefacts.

I actually might think that the world of cinema might even more influential for me, as there are huge emotional possibilities in the audiovisual environment, and I have an emotional investment for a lot of films. They resonate with how I think about what emotionally moving art should be presented. The idea of music and moving image is so important. And this reflects also to the way I think record covers and other sleeve art should be part of how album narratives unfold. Especially the films of Sergio Leone, Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick, Akira Kurosawa, Roman Polanski, David Lynch, and Nicholas Roeg are fundamental for my songwriting. In this context the collaborations of director and composer are also important. How the ideas of Leone and Ennio Morricone, or Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti, to name two very obvious examples, intertwine to offer those very special cinematic moments. To be able to reach such heights of expression, the emotionally touching key moments. I would love to be able to score a film one day.

With the name dropping that just took place, I am not intending to make a claim of the quality of my own work. I am, rather, trying to illustrate the influences, the works that really changed me somehow, and made me think differently. It could be said that the way I approach songwriting nowadays is a combination of the cultural influences, my own life events, the free and sometimes dreamy and surreal associations between ideas, and the knowledge of what I can do to convert those ideas to lyrics and sounds – the actual process of writing an album and recording it in a studio setting.

Latest influence in my creative work is my budo training. I started doing Japanese martial art Aikido in 2014, and it has had a total impact on how I think about performing and body movement, especially. But it is also impacting my songwriting, both because of me reading the history of Japan, and the ideas on spiral movements that come from the practice of ‘The

Art of Peace’, as it is widely known. The fruits of that process will be heard in the future. I am finding a new kind of balance and discipline.

To summarise the idea of my influences, I think I am drawn to works that somehow take another angle to reality, and instead of firm material everyday aspects of it, are an escape – they come from the shadowy, dreamy, surreal side of our culture. The side of sub-consciousness, the side of imaginary that feels intuitively real.

Doom Metal and Three Explorations of Totalitarian Willpower

Just to illustrate the actual processes of creative work, I will now try to remember what I had in mind some of the more accessible works of mine. As I mentioned, I have had trouble writing on my more intimate work, as total revealing of the personal content hidden in metaphors feels like taking away the magic of those songs.

As I am a cultural historian, it should be no surprise that I often use the past as a creative fuel. And epic historical storytelling resonates well with the ideas conveyed by the conceptual varieties of Cultural Memory, as theorized earlier in this chapter. A song can become a ‘monument’ in itself, something that brings the idea of the past close, awakens an interest in the listener. In addition to past as a fuel, I also tend to focus on cultural extremes, mostly the cruel, evil, and violent aspects of our culture. This creates tension to the way I write, makes it possible to play with darker aspects of our culture and also my own personality.

When I was writing some of the songs for the second Reverend Bizarre album, *Crush the Insects*, around early 2004, I came up with an idea of writing about English puritanism, and

especially the figure of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), who managed to turn England into a republic for a while, and lead it as a ‘Lord Protector’ after getting king Charles I beheaded in 1649. I immediately named the song ‘Cromwell’. The chain of ideas started from the English doom metal/new wave of British heavy metal band Witchfinder General, who took their name from the film of same name, starring Vincent Price (*Witchfinder General*, Michael Reeves, 1968). I wanted to touch the era and the aesthetic of the film, but also make a sonic portrait of this man who had the will to change a whole regime, one of the leaders of the ‘Ironsides’ of the New Model Army in the English Civil War.

I often have a few songs in various states of completion, and when I come up with a good riff or a chord sequence, I usually intuitively know which song it should go to, in most cases even the place within the song structure – intro, main riff, something under vocals, a bridge, b-part, solo, outro, and so on. With ‘Cromwell’, the main riff was a fast one with a ‘galloping’ feel, and it fell into place with a middle part that followed very naturally. I felt it worked well with the idea of the Ironsides and Oliver Cromwell arriving to London. I also had a b-part which had a long evolving sequence. This, as an idea, was heavily influenced by U.S. doom metal band Pentagram, and their song ‘Burning Saviour’. With Reverend Bizarre it was never a secret that we were, in our way, doing a tribute to the old school doom metal bands. For this part I had a simple riff, and then milked it by changing the key upwards, thus building the intensity until it climaxed back to main riff. The lyric was directly about Cromwell, but I added a graveyard on a hill, the idea that everyone who does not kneel will be buried there, and a consciously anachronistic reference to British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947): ‘Love will be my law, love under will. But first there is the law of Crowell’. This simple song is still perhaps the best known of my compositions, and it has been covered by several bands around the world.

This song was also a start of a ‘Tyrant Trilogy’, as I call it, where I wanted to study powerful leaders. The second song, called ‘Caesar Forever’, would appear on the third Reverend Bizarre album *So Long Suckers!*, and the third one, ‘The Spartan’, on the first Lord Vicar album *Fear No Pain*, even if it had indeed originally written for Reverend Bizarre.

These three songs indeed form an oppressive triangle in my mind, and each song also traveled further away in time. If ‘Cromwell’ touched the Early Modern period, ‘Caesar Forever’ studied imperial Rome, around the time of emperor Nero (Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, 37–68 AD), and ‘The Spartan’ dealt with the battle of Thermopylae and Spartan king Leonidas I (c. 540–480 BC). Obviously the idea of the trilogy came to me around the time I was composing ‘Caesar Forever’, late 2005. I then had ‘The Spartan’ composed before the last Reverend Bizarre album, *So Long Suckers!*, came out. As the band then unfolded, that some came out in first Lord Vicar album, thus destroying the idea of having a trilogy of songs featured in successive albums of Reverend Bizarre.

‘Caesar Forever’ was primarily about the clash of Christianity and Roman belief systems. The idea was to look at Christian martyrdom from the Roman perspective: ‘They believe in a virgin mother, that’s why they must be crucified’. I obviously had to throw in another anachronism, which comes in the last chorus: ‘Christs may come and Christs may go, but Caesar is Forever’. This comes from the Social Darwinist pamphlet *Might is Right* or *The Survival of the Fittest* (1890) by ‘Ragnar Redbeard’. I wanted to emphasize the continuity of anti-Christian thinking and proto-fascism that links the racists and event the current populists and neo-nazis to a manufactured ‘ideal’ of Roman empire: ‘Come my son, and I will show: Tonight we hunt together’, followed by cheesy ‘anthemic’ fanfare, played by our drummer

‘Earl of Void’, with a Casio I had bought with two pounds from a flea market at Liverpool in 2006. Anyone who know me, might understand the subtle layers of satire here, but obviously there could not be a disclaimer about that, and that’s a risk I felt I needed to take. The song can just as well be interpreted as something that longs for the glory of hunting and killing Christians.

Going back even more, ‘The Spartan’ goes back to the battle of Thermopylae (480 BC), during the Greco-Persian wars, where King Leonidas and his famous 300 Spartans – also 700 Thespians, and 400 Thebans, perhaps some others as well, in the end – were defending Greek city states at this narrow pass, from the attack by the Persians, led by king Xerxes I (519–465 BC). This time I wanted to examine the idea of martyrdom as experienced by a tyrant, and thus turning the table from ‘Caesar Forever’. Of the tree songs, this might be the one that was less a study of evil, or power as corruption, and more a study of admirable guts and willpower in a truly hopeless situation. Needless to say, going past the area of Thermopylae, on a train from Athens to Thessaloniki, in 2005, and later seeing the excavated arrowheads from the battle itself, at the Athens Archaeological Museum, made a lasting impression on me.

Confessional Acoustic Folk

Perhaps the biggest challenge as a songwriter and performer I could give to myself was about two great ‘fears’: Trying to be write honestly about my innermost thoughts, and confronting the audience alone and only with my acoustic guitar as instrumentation. No wall of distortion or a band to hide behind. Every sound you make becomes both meaningful and potentially

terrifying in that situation. Confessionality in storytelling has been an interest of mine for a long time, actually since I started reading books at the age of seven. I felt the magic of the stories, and ‘lived’ the roles. Obviously this is a hindsight.

Around 2010 was also the beginning of the period when my lyrics started moving from epic grand narratives towards something more personal. But that intimate personal can actually lead back to universal and culturally shared. And also universal themes hide direct personal references. A lot of the current lyrics reflect my own inner world, as a sort of purification, a banishment of the negative aspects of my personality: frustration, hate, sadness, and fear. That ritualistic quality extends also to reflecting my dreams. Other than that, religion, war, nature, history, and the seemingly bleak future of this planet – and life on it – offer endless inspiration. The nocturnal side of our culture has always been interesting to me.

My first solo album *The Bone of My Bones* (Svart Records, 2013) begins with the song ‘I Am Aries’. I wanted to start with a song that would reflect both me – Aries being my astrological sign – and something more universal. I had been seeing dreams about the boats that crossed the Mediterranean from Africa to Europe, and some never made it through to either Lampedusa or any other relatively safe harbour. I was thinking about the National Socialist idea of *Festung Europa*, the fortress Europe, the population overgrowth, and the reduction of clean water and other means of survival in a lot of the ‘third world’. Thus I wanted to write a song about me being in this incredibly lucky position of having been born within this safe haven of Finland, still able to travel freely to almost anywhere, and looking at the global situation with both ecological and moral considerations. We live behind walls, mostly ignorant, protected by coast guards, detention centers, migration bureaucracy, radars, weapon systems, and privileged citizenship legislation. Those born in poor areas of the Earth are

sometimes in a situation where moving is the only means to survival. But they don't have the same liberties as me. The song also got additional layers from my trip to the island of Lesbos in Greece, just two weeks before the Syrian refugees started crossing from Turkey. Me and my family were swimming at the same lovely beaches of Eftalou that soon become filled with life-jackets of those who made it across. The same life-jackets that later became the installation at the columns of Konzerthaus Berlin, by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. This fitted my original idea of ignorance and Fortress Europe perfectly, and I now remember the the beaches where I was swimming, and the installation, every time I play the song. For the video of the song, I shot images of traveling in the airplane above Europe, and flowing water at the Acheron river in Epirus, Greece. According to Greek mythology, this is the earthly manifestation of the river of death.

This river is connected to another song as well, 'The River of Shadows', on my second solo album *Eye for an Eye* (Svart Records, 2017). I wanted to write a tribute to Jason McCash, the late bass player of doom metal band The Gates of Slumber from Indianapolis, USA. We had done several tours with them, both with Reverend Bizarre – including in the USA – and Lord Vicar, and Jason was like a brother to me. He overdosed 5th of April, 2014, 37 years old. He was three days younger than me, and his passing was really hard to take. He was the first one of my really close friends to die. And also to die in that miserable and clichéd rock and roll way, something that could have been avoided, made it especially sad, as he left behind a wife and three children. I knew him as a gentle and intelligent man, someone who went through several religions in search for the meaning of life and the peace of mind. Unfortunately he also searched peace through opiates, something that was never obvious when we toured together, perhaps it was not yet something he did back then. And so I remembered him; how we played on a former church altar in Lansing, Michigan, back in 2005, or how we wondered

through nocturnal Paris in 2007, just us and some distant street gangs around, musing about the statue of Charlemagne outside Notre Dame. Or how we stood on the tribunal of Zeppelinfeld in Nuremberg, thinking about the ‘Blue temple’, a ‘dome’ constructed with anti-aircraft lights, designed by Albert Speer and Eberhard von der Trappen, one of the more impressive moments at the Nazi propaganda rallies. And I remembered him as I pissed at the area where Hitler’s remains had been burned in Berlin, now a parking lot near the massive holocaust memorial, full of oppressive monoliths. I was thinking about all that when composing the song, making the lyric about him descending the Acheron river in a boat, coins covering his eyes. I was thinking about the oracle that was supposed to have resided there – it was a place for communication with the dead, *nekyia* (ἡ νέκυνια). This is the place that, according to Homer, wise Odysseus visited on his travels, searching his way back to Ithaca. At the Acheron, freezing, crystal clear water bursts from the underground fountains, making it a place of contemplation, cleansing, and spiritual healing. In my mind, it was the most suitable reference, for a proper and heartfelt farewell to a friend and a fellow searcher. At the end of the song I described the land of the dead, as a beautiful but joyless field of ashes, full of silence and solemn sorrow. For this I remembered not only *Odyssey*, but also Ursula K. Leguin’s description of afterlife in *Fartest Shore* (1972), the third part of her Earthsea cycle. It is the most impressive account on the subject I have ever read. Homer’s epic description feels connected with Leguin’s fantasy.

My second solo album starts with ‘Entangled in Pleasure’, which is both a tribute to Leonard Cohen’s genius, and a description of an old man feeling regret over the choices he made in life. I started the songwriting process with the term nostalgia, that comes from two greek words, *Nostos* (νόστος), homecoming, and *Algos* (άλγος), pain, suffering. The ‘old man’ is obviously a powerful mythological motif, and the idea of looking back obviously resonates to

me as a historian. But at the same time, I was thinking about the personal side of this taking place, me as an old man, looking at all the wrong choices I had made that forced me to be alone, fully nostalgic – in pain and longing for the past that by now was beyond my reach – at the end of my days. It was meant to be a possible future that I would not want to experience. The idea of being entangled in pleasure, is to be an uncompromising searcher for personal joy, through lust, satisfaction, sleeping with everyone, eating and drinking too much, basically fulfilling all the carnal urges most people feel every now and then. Such a life can hardly be lived without destruction of personal relations, not to mention physical and mental health. Thus the central words, ‘And you try to feel something beyond sorrow/But there’s no way back home/There’s only pain’. By fulfillment of all desires the capability to feel anything else but pain through nostalgia has disappeared. And this, to me, would be the ultimate personal tragedy. I hope the protagonist of the song won’t be me, and I live my life with that awareness, trying to live a healthy and ethical life. The celestial female voices of Pirita Känkänen, and Anna-Elena Pääkkölä add the needed polar opposite to my rather crude baritone delivery. I played the guitar parts of the album mostly with a nylon string guitar, to add as much intimate feel as possible. In the chorus I introduced both bass, and 12-string guitar, to drive home the central message of the song – *trying* to feel something beyond the pain and longing for the past glories.

During the writing of this chapter I found out there are songs I can’t talk about. They cut too deep and were indeed conceived to offer a form of inner reflection, banishment, and therapy from real pain. Their very power, to me, is in the silence that surrounds them. Hopefully they offer comfort, release, and peace of mind to others as well.

Conclusion

Everything I do is somehow connected in my mind. It's all about loving different musical styles and genres, and about the challenges the variety of framing offer me both as player and writer. The heavy metal of Lord Vicar, progressive rock of Orne, cosmic ambient of E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr, psychedelic Finnish pop of Uhrijuhla, and the acoustic folk I play and record under my own name, they all contribute to my understanding of music. But similarly, my academic work, especially on popular music history, further reveals me new combinations of creative approaches.

I think it's a wonderful source of inspiration to both directions, and during the last few years I have been able to combine the two 'roles' or, rather, realities, more and more, sometimes combining playing a gig and giving a talk. I think my academic work has been profoundly changed by my experiences as a musician and in relation to what I have seen of the cultural industries. And I think of music making and live performance as hermeneutic layers as well, as research, as means of asking questions and feel the vibrations of life and death. I am really interested in the intuition and creative impulses, the combination of the tradition and the always surprising appearance of 'new'.

How to summarise a personal bundle of memories from three decades? How all this can be developed into some kind of new creative step in the future, for the future? I am working on new music for all of my bands, there are several albums in the various stages of making, including *Black Powder* for Lord Vicar, and *Eye in the Pyramid* for Orne. As the biggest step in new territory, my plan is to compose and record my third solo album, *The Spiral Mirror*, based on the idea of combining my work as a cultural historian, the history and bodily learning of Aikido (a Japanese martial art created by O-Sensei Morihei Ueshiba between

1930s and 1940s), and musical practice that is affected by this training; movement from visually based thinking to holistic, multimodal awareness. In a way this is extension of the phenomenological ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the new awareness of the methods discussed under the umbrella of ‘Research-as-creation’, and playful audiovisual hermeneutics, aiming for the combination of the visual aesthetics of Aikido with singer-songwriter storytelling. (See Merleau-Ponty 1993 & 2002; Richardson & Gorbman 2013: 23) This ambitious combination of Asian and European Cultural Memory, as transmitted by the bodily training in martial arts, folk guitar playing, and singing from the heart, will hopefully resonate with people who seek something else than the usual ‘Western’ hedonistic way of life.

Coda: Discography

Reverend Bizarre:

In the Rectory of the Bizarre Reverend CD Sinister Figure, Finland 2002.

Reverend Bizarre/Orodruin 12” split Hellride Music Records, USA 2003

Harbinger of Metal CD-EP Spikefarm Records, Finland 2003. Vinyl version, DLP,

Svart Records, Finland 2009

Reverend Bizarre/Ritual Steel 7” split Metal Coven Records, Germany 2003

Reverend Bizarre/Minotauri 7” split Metal Coven Records, Germany 2003

Slice of Doom 1999–2002 CD-compilation PsycheDOOMelic Records, Austria 2003

In the Rectory of the Bizarre Reverend + Return To Rectory 2-CD remastered reissue + CD-EP Spikefarm Records, Finland 2004. DLP of *In the Rectory*, Svart Records, Finland 2010.

DLP of *Return to Rectory*, Svart Records, Finland 2011

Slave of Satan CDS Spikefarm Records, Finland 2005

Crush the Insects CD Spikefarm Records, Finland 2005

Crush the Insects Double-LP Metal Supremacy Records, Germany 2006. Vinyl reissue, remastered, DLP Svart Records, Finland 2012

Thulsa Doom 7" EP Aftermath Records, Norway 2006

Under the Sign of the Wolf. Reverend Bizarre/Mannhai 7" split. The Church Within Records, Germany 2006.

So Long Suckers 2-CD, Spikefarm Records, Finland 2007. 4 LP Box, Svart Records, Finland 2014.

Electric Wizard/Reverend Bizarre 12" split. Rise Above Records, England 2008.

Kuolema/Reverend Bizarre CD-split MCR, Japani 2008, 7" split, The Church Within Records, Saksa 2008.

Rättö ja Lehtisalo/Reverend Bizarre 12" split. Ektro Records, Finland 2008.

Reverend Bizarre/Mr. Velcro Fastener 12" split. Solina Records, Finland 2008.

Dark World/ Deceiver 7" EP, Primitive Reaction, Finland 2008.

Death is Glory... Now a 2-CD compilation. Spikefarm Records, Finland 2009.

Magick With Tears DLP pre-production demo from In the Rectory era, Emissary Records, Chile. Existing but badly distributed.

Additionally several appearances on compilation albums in England, Finland, Germany, and Greece.

First two Reverend Bizarre full length albums and Harbinger of Metal EP were licensed to Season of Mist Records, USA. Some of the albums were also re-released in England by Spinefarm UK.

Orne:

As Mesmer (pre-Orne, 1997–2000):

Tuonen tytär. A Tribute To Finnish Progressive Rock (Mesmer appeared with Mandala song ‘Don’t Wake Me Now’) Mellow Records, Italy 2000.

As Orne:

The Conjunction by the Fire CD and LP, Black Widow Records, Italy 2006. Prog awards 2007: “Best Artwork”, third in “Best Foreign Album”. New remastered DLP version, with *A Beginning* demo (orig. self-released in 2000), Svart Records, Finland 2013.

Orne/Blizaro split 12”, Svart Records, Finland 2010.

Tree of Life CD and LP. Black Widow Records, Italy, 2011. New remastered DLP version, Svart Records, Finland 2017.

Lord Vicar:

The Demon of Freedom 7” EP, I Hate Records, Sweden 2008.

Fear No Pain CD, The Church Within Records, Germany, 2008. Hardcover DLP book version 2009.

Lord Vicar/Griftegård 7”, Ván Records, Germany 2011.

Lord Vicar/Funeral Circle 12”, Eyes Like Snow, Germany 2011.

Signs of Osiris CD, The Church Within Records, Germany, 2011. DLP version, April 2012.

Lord Vicar/Revelation 10”, The Church Within Records, Germany, 2012.

Gates of Flesh, The Church Within Records, Germany. CD 2016. LP 2017.

E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr:

Live at Sibelius Museum. Lux Vitae I CD, Finland, 2010.

Kometenbahn 12" vinyl full length album. Svart Records, Finland 2013.

Spiralo 12" vinyl full length album. Svart Records, Finland 2013.

Der Planet der Melancholie. Limited edition music cassette mini album. Sea State, Germany 2014.

E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr/Hisko Detria 12" split. Svart Records 2015.

Tonwald. Limited edition music cassette mini album. Sea State, Germany 2015.

E-Musikgruppe Lux Ohr Live at Roadburn 2014. Adansonia Records, Germany 2016. 12" DLP.

Also as a digital download at <http://e-musikgruppeluxohr.bandcamp.com/>

Uhrijuhla (with Kimi Kärki):

Jokainen on vapaa lintu CD & LP Svart Records, Finland, March 2015.

As a solo artist:

Kimi Kärki: *The Bone of My Bones*. CD and LP. Svart Records 2013. Tape version, Pléroma, Chile, 2017.

Kimi Kärki: *Eye for an Eye*. CD and LP. Svart Records 2017.

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