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A New Breed Of Home Studio Producer?: Agency And The Idea 'Tracker' In Contemporary Home Studio Music Production

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine the creative and collaborative agency of a young Finnish pop music producer Mikke Vepsäläinen, who identifies himself as a tracker/producer (Vepsäläinen: 2015a; 2016b). [1] I will examine his agency through the idea of *tracking* and *being a tracker*, concepts that he frequently uses when describing his activities as a producer. Moreover, I aim to bring a new approach to the study of producers by exploring this new terminology, which is widely used by personnel in contemporary pop production (Vepsäläinen: 2016b), but which in earlier writing on record production has been connected to production software and interfaces (see e.g. D'Errico: 2012) and not human agents. In this article, producing in the pop context, especially when combined with the idea of *tracking,* means having a creative input on a song from the beginning of the compositional process up until the point in which the song is sent to mixing and mastering. I seek to achieve my goals by answering the questions: what is *tracking,* what does it mean to be a *'tracker'*, how does the term define the agency of the producer, and how is the creative agency of the producer/tracker constructed within a collective.

Furthermore, my aim is to paint a picture of the work of an aspiring producer, who is on the way of becoming an established figure in the industry (Vepsäläinen: 2015a). Through the ethnographic means employed in this case study, I have acquired a multifaceted comprehension of the producer's aims, values, actions, interactions and musical judgment in the process of producing a pop song. Additionally, by listening and comparing different production versions of it, I will provide another perspective on what the music producer's role and agency in the process are.

My intention is by no means to imply that all of the results presented in this article necessarily pertain to all producers of the same status or generation. I do nevertheless think, and this is one reason I chose this particular producer as a case study subject, that the producer discussed here represents a somewhat typical aspiring Finnish contemporary pop producer, and that my findings have some relevance beyond this individual case study or immediate cultural context. I find it hard to believe that any producer could be an outlier to the extent that their activities are entirely independent of prevailing practices and cultural norms. The other reason for choosing this particular producer is that I knew him from before. Without having acquired a relationship of trust with him prior to this case study, I probably would not have been allowed to be present at the studio during the creative process due to the fact that "the first difficulty is finding songwriters who will agree to be observed…" (Bennett: 2011).

In what follows, I will briefly discuss previous research on producers and production, after which I will discuss the methodological and theoretical background of this research and introduce my research materials. Thereafter I will provide some background information on the producer and the singer he worked with during this case study, after which I will proceed to analyze my research material. I will end with some concluding thoughts about the agency of the producer as a *tracker* and tracking as an attribute of certain producers. This case study is part of a broader research project, in which I study the agency of music producers by comparing several substantially different production projects, ranging from projects of this small scale to larger professional undertakings.

Previous Research: The Producer And The Music Production Process

Despite all the writing and study on the producer and her/his role, scholars still, even in the twenty-first century, acknowledge the recurring question: "What exactly does a record producer do?" (Zak: 2001, p. 172). The fact that different producers have different conceptions of the role (Zak: 2001, p. 172), and that the "roles a producer performs are many" (Howlett 2012) doesn't make defining the role any easier. Conceptions also vary depending on era (Zak: 2001, p. 172) and genre or style (see Moorefield: 2005). As a premise, however, the role of the contemporary producer is creative and involves choices (Howlett: 2012).

As noted by scholars, record production is a highly collaborative creative process (e.g. Zak: 2001, p. 163). The process thus entails different tasks, which are taken care of by different individuals. According to Zak (2001, p. 164), "In general, the tasks involved in record making are songwriting, arranging, performing, engineering, and producing" Zagorski-Thomas (2008, quoted in Howlett: 2012) and Moore (2012a quoted in Howlett: 2012) consider the essential stages of most productions to be composition, arrangement, performance, and engineering. Leaving the activity of 'producing' from the list would suggest that production is an activity that encompasses all the other tasks and duties involved in record production. The term 'production' thus can mean the overall 'making of records'. If production covers such a large proportion of what is involved in making records, the producer as an agent might be involved with one task or all of them depending on the project. These categories can and should for the purposes of this article be further divided into sub-categories. Songwriting for example divides into top-lining (composing the melody, see Bennett: 2011) and writing lyrics. Engineering again could be divided into recording, mixing and mastering as separate duties, especially as mixing and mastering have to some extent remained activities carried out in separate facilities by specialized mixing and mastering engineers, despite the decrease in the amount of professional recording studios caused by the home studio boom and affordable technologies (see Gibson: 2005, p. 205).

Historically the producer's role has evolved in connection with the development of music technology. In his somewhat canonical account [2], Moorefield (2005, p. 111) writes: "At the top of the current charts, one increasingly finds cases in which the producer is the artist is the composer is the producer; and technology is what has driven the change." Even if I hesitate to agree with the level of Moorefield's technological determinism, I nevertheless agree on the fact that technological development has had an impact on the producer's role. The invention of the magnetic tape can be acknowledged as the key invention in empowering studio personnel with creative agency; the medium's "increased flexibility in editing" made engineers more influential (Kealy: 1974, p. 44). Before the 1950's the record producer was often merely a record company official, whose duty it was to organize the recording events (Zak: 2001, p. 182; Muikku: 1991). Even if this notion personified by George Martin is connected also to Martin's role as an employee of a large corporation (Zak: 2001, p. 182), Martin himself, and Phil Spector, in particular, as the first producer whose name would be used in the marketing of records (Zak: 2001, p. 178), are widely considered the first producers with creative or artistic agencies (e.g. Moorefield: 2005). As Burgess (2008) argues by referring to the Motown hit factory, writer producers have been an important part of the music industry for a long time and continue to do so "particularly in the pop and urban genres" (which is clearly reflected in my case study). The most recent technology-driven development with innovations like MIDI and DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) has led to the emergence of the home studio (Théberge: 1997; Burgess: 2008), which has become "virtually a prerequisite for any aspiring pop musician" (Warner: 2003, p. 20). According to Burgess (2008), this has brought about the trend of "the engineer-producer or at least the producer who can engineer somewhat", and simultaneously it has led to producers becoming independent entrepreneurs again like in the 1950's and 1960's.

In addition to discrepancies and similarities between different historical eras, the role of the producer also varies between genres. In some, the producer stays in the background while others take a center-stage role (Moorefield: 2005). Different styles and genres feature different production settings, in which the agents called 'producers' might occupy different roles. Bennett (2011) provides a typology of songwriting models, between which the role of the producer differs from someone completely excluded from the songwriting process to an active participant in it. He labels one of his models 'top-line' writing, in which

> [a] completed backing track is supplied by a 'producer' to a top-line writer who will supply melody and lyric. The backing track acts as harmonic/tempo template but more crucially as inspiration for genre-apposite creative decisions, such as singability of a line. (Bennett: 2011)

Because my case study use this same terminology, this model will work as a starting point. Nevertheless, as I will show, agencies change and intertwine during the production process of a song and in the end the only distinction that is certain

between the 'producer' and the 'top-line writer' is that the former is not the featuring artist of the song and the latter is.

In addition to determining to what extent the producer is an artist or *auteur* (Zak: 2001, p. 178), researchers have dealt with the producer as a central figure amidst other agents. Howlett (2012) proposes the concept of a record producer as a "nexus between the creative inspiration of the artist, the technology of the recording studio, and the commercial aspirations of the record company". This concept is helpful when examining the producer's role and agency as a *tracker* in the production of a pop song.

Much writing has been done on the effects of changes in the music industry on the work of producers. As a result of the changing music business, "the required skill sets, work environments, sources and types of work, and the ways and means of remuneration are all in a state of flux" (Burgess: 2008). Together with Burgess, I acknowledge that the changing agencies of the producer are partly a result of the changing music business environment and producers have to seek new sustainable income sources as record budgets shrink. Producers of the younger generations nevertheless do not have to change their working habits, as they have not had the chance to develop these in the first place. Producers in the making are confronted with the prevailing system directly.

It is clear that writing on established 'star producers' (e.g. Warner: 2003) appeals to the majority of readers interested in music production, which might be the reason why producer-centered studies on western music have concentrated predominantly on famous individuals. Studying the work of a non-canonized producer who is not widely known might not be quite so interesting to the general reader, but can be important to music researchers, since research of this kind produces knowledge about the 'grass roots level' of music production and thus brings to the fore new perspectives on production, producers, agencies and the producer's values, even before media content and public image add new layers of meaning to their work. Furthermore, to study the work of such a producer offers a perspective on how careers are built in the music industry, giving voice to the unknown producer before the heroic narrative of the successful, exceptionally talented and hard-working individual comes into play [3]. Ideally, this would allow me an opportunity to study the arc of a single producer's career, thus demystifying the actions and processes that go into establish a name in the music industry. Additionally, studying a producer 'in the making' instead of established names sheds different light on aspects of the present and future of the music industry. While the effort to give a voice to relatively unknown producers working at the margins of the music industry is important (see Crowdy: 2007), it only partially remedies the fact that such voices have not been heard to a sufficient degree. These facts motivate and justify my research, which focuses on a younger aspiring producer and thereby contributes to academic discussions on the role of the producer. [4]

Ethnography In The Music Production Studio And Agency As A Concept

I define myself as a material-oriented researcher in the field of cultural musicology leaning towards the emerging tradition of ethnographic research on music production (Bates: 2012; Porcello: 2004; cf. Rice: 2008, p. 42) in a 'studio anthropological' manner. Interviews with the producer Vepsäläinen and the singer Ida Paul (Vepsäläinen: 2015a-c; 2016; Vepsäläinen & Paul: 2016) took place at Vepsäläinen's home studio in Kamppi, Helsinki, both in the context of production sessions and outside of the sessions. Observations in my field diary (Auvinen: 2015a; 2016a-b) were written during production sessions at Vepsäläinen's home studio. Field recordings (Auvinen: 2015b; 2016c) were recorded, photos taken and video footage (Auvinen 2016d) shot at Vepsäläinen's home studio during production sessions [5]. This data will complement the interviews—which are my main data in this study. Close listening of the song and its different versions combined with interviews and field observations also reveals new aspects of the agency of the producer, and the question of what the producer actually does to the music. By applying an ethnographic approach in this case study, my aim is to avoid the 'they-do, we theorize' opposition and give voice to the doers who possess "eloquent, theorized voices of their own" (Greene & Porcello: 2005, p. 272).

Regarding the concept of agency, I draw on Timothy D. Taylor's (2001, p.35) definition of agency as 'an individual actor's or collective capacity to move within a structure, even alter if to some extent'. Founded on Ortner's practice theory (1996, quoted in Taylor: 2001 p. 34), this body of theory can "grapple adequately with the problem of structures and individual agency" (Taylor: 2001, p.34). Furthermore, practice theory provides an escape from

> …the polarized positions of voluntarism on the other hand and some kind of structural determinism on the other. (Taylor: 2001, p. 34)

Another strength of this definition is that it takes into account the premise that the production of a pop song is "intrinsically a collaborative process" (Zak: 2001, p.163), where the creative collective has replaced the individual artist (Hennion: 1983, p.160). By structure I don't mean the entire music industry, but rather, I refer to the production process of a song as a set of practices, values and ideas evolved over time and facilitated by studio spaces and technologies. Since I am dealing with creativity, I also find it helpful to consider Jason Toynbee's (2000, p.35) ideas, which understand "people who make popular music as *creators,* that is agents who make musical differences in the form of texts, performances and sounds". Moreover, I find useful to apply Toynbee's (2000, p.140) ideas of musicians', and in this case producers', work being "determined by the prevailing discourses and practices in their field" with the notion that, as musical practices change very quickly, the notion of field as something that depends on stable structures, is difficult to sustain.

In addition to these, I find Keith Negus's (1996, p. 62) theory of *The Culture of Production* another valuable approach, as the culture of (music) production is the very notion that is most central in this study. The value of this approach is contained in the assertion that

> the cultural practices of personnel cannot simply be explained by reference to the determining influence of corporate capital or according to formal organizational criteria (job descriptions, occupational hierarchies etc.) (Negus: 1996, p. 62).

Negus draws, among other things, on sociologist and cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986, p. 151) idea of cultural intermediaries whose "jobs and careers have not yet acquired the rigidity of the older bureaucratic professions". I see no reason why this situation would change in the context of the present study; the tendency of capitalism to outsource risk is perhaps the reason why most music producers in popular music, and increasingly in classical music as well, work on a freelance basis (Blake: 2012, p. 195).

Introducing The Producer And The Artist

My case study on Mikke Samuli Vepsäläinen (b. 1992), is a producer of popular music who lives in Helsinki, Finland. He works primarily from his home studio in Kamppi, a district in downtown Helsinki, Finland. Vepsäläinen has a background as a professionally schooled drummer. He became interested in music production when he got to observe the work of a producer while working on songs made by one of his own acts. Consequently, he switched his career path to producing music. After graduating from the Helsinki Pop/Jazz conservatory, he also started to study law at the University of Helsinki. (Vepsäläinen: 2015b.)

As a producer, Vepsäläinen could be described as aspiring. He is not yet an established name in the trade, as he himself realizes. In his view, the scarcity of production projects and the small amount of available money for music production make it even harder for younger producers to get assignments. (see Burgess: 2008.) Projects are often given to producers of a higher status. (Vepsäläinen: 2015b.) Vepsäläinen nevertheless identifies first and foremost as a music producer and works within the constraints of the music industry. Between my first interview with him in March 2015 and my second in September 2015, he was signed to Warner Music with a publishing contract (Vepsäläinen: 2015b). He has no formal education in music *production,* but this is not a new characteristic of producers. Being a law student and thinking of that as an important part of the producer's skill set (Vepsäläinen: 2015a), though, can be viewed as fairly unconventional and may perhaps be viewed as a reaction to attorney's fees taking up an ever-growing percentage of the total budget of an album (Burgess: 2008). Being able to negotiate and draw up contracts himself, Vepsäläinen can reduce his own legal costs. I have also observed the singer Ida Paul, (who collaborated with Vepsäläinen), a 19-year-old singer/songwriter from Helsinki. Before her first solo single, '*Laukauksia pimeään'* (Paul: 2016a), she already gained some publicity as she acted as a featured singer and songwriter on the 2015 hit song, '*Madafakin darra',* by the pop/hip-hop group Roope Salminen & Koirat (2015).

Vepsäläinen and Paul first met at a songwriting camp organized by Warner Music. They both have a publishing contract with this publisher. (Vepsäläinen: 2015c.) Even though Vepsäläinen and Paul originally met through Warner Music publishing, the basis for their collaboration is not label-driven employment. In practice, Vepsäläinen and Paul work as independent entrepreneurs who try to sell songs to the label. (Vepsäläinen: 2015c.) This notion resonates well with Burgess's (2008) ideas on the music business changing from the producer's perspective.

Vepsäläinen has always produced music on digital platforms. At Vepsäläinen's home studio, most work happens in the digital

space of the DAW. This is naturally a stylistic choice, too. The overall sounds of Vepsäläinen's productions are essentially electronic and the producer himself defines his style as 'urban pop' (Vepsäläinen: 2015a) (see Burgess: 2008), which as a stylistic category relates to the idea of the producer as *tracker*.

The Song '*Kunhan Muut Ei Tiedä' (Trans. 'As Long As Other's Don't Know')* And Its Production Process

Upon request, Vepsäläinen sent me four versions of the song (Paul: 2016b; Paul & Vepsäläinen: 2016a-d) in different stages of production, in addition to the official one published on Spotify. The lyrics of the song, tell about a stagnated relationship or a failed love story between the narrator and someone else. The structure of the song follows a standard pop-song structure (see e.g. Bennett: 2011). Before starting the songwriting process, the two discussed possible song topics. After choosing one it was "easy for them to start to compose a song". The first demo (Paul & Vepsäläinen: 2016a) was made in Vepsäläinen's living room in early August 2015. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) The objectives of making several production demos with different instrumentations, sounds and vocal ideas, were among other aspects to "find the suitable key for Paul and to "zone out ideas that were not suitable for Ida Paul's voice and artistic persona". (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) After four versions, Vepsäläinen and Paul were both satisfied with the outcome. After some negotiations, the A&R person was satisfied enough and Vepsäläinen sent the song to be mixed. He participated in the mixing process partially in a consulting capacity, but was not turning the knobs himself. When the final mix was ready, the song was sent to the mastering engineer. Vepsäläinen did not take part in the mastering process. (Vepsäläinen: 2016c.)

Examining the development of the song reveals that Vepsäläinen's main duty in the production of *Kunhan muut ei tiedä* was technically to come up with the arrangement, whereas the melody and the lyrics have mainly come from Paul. These roles were subject to constant change during the project, as I will show later. Arrangement as a term is of course strictly a technical one that is used when copyright percentages of a song are divided. This might be connected to the producer's aim of getting his share of royalties and copyright fees (see Burgess: 2008), which producers in the traditional sense have not had the possibility to obtain, as discussions of copyright laws to include producers and engineers without songwriting input have only recently begun (see Middleton 2016). This moulds Vepsäläinen's agency into what he calls that of a 'tracker' (Vepsäläinen: 2015a), often with the combination 'producer/tracker' or 'tracker/producer' (Vepsäläinen: 2015b; Auvinen: 2016b). According to Vepsäläinen, the tracker is responsible for the programming and/or playing of the backing tracks, whereas the 'top-liner' is responsible for coming up with the melody. The 'songwriter/lyricist' (Paul) again is responsible for the lyrics. These three agencies form the songwriting/production team, although agencies constantly become mixed and overlap, even if everyone has their own main area of responsibility (Vepsäläinen: 2015a). The writing and production process of the song was nevertheless a collaborative effort from the very beginning of the process (Vepsäläinen: 2016). Furthermore, the melody and the lyrics were subject to constant change during the production process and both would have ideas for changes (Auvinen: 2016a-c). Vepsäläinen would nevertheless have more say in the lyrics and the melody than Paul on the arrangement, or what Vepsäläinen would call 'production' (Vepsäläinen: 2015b) (Auvinen: 2016a-c). This finding connects with and expands Bennett's (2011) theorization of a 'top-line writing model'.

A songwriting or song production setting of this nature calls for a re-evaluation of the traditional divide between the melody, the arrangement and the lyrics. According to Vepsäläinen (2015a) an 'even split', in which the copyright fees are divided evenly between the members of the creative collective, is a standard. The tracker's role is much greater than the standard 16.67% (Teosto: 2013) maximum copyright share for an arrangement would imply.

A third important agent in the production of the song was the A&R person, who represents the record company. When Vepsäläinen and Paul were recording the final vocals for the song, they mentioned the feedback they received from A&R. In their account, the A&R person gives comments on the basis of 'feelings' rather than accurate musical parameters. (Vepsäläinen & Paul: 2016a.) The importance of A&R in record production should not be underestimated. According to Howlett (2012), the reason a production of a song happens in the first place is that

> someone in the record company (usually the A&R person) thinks that the idea—the song performed by that artist—has qualities that can appeal to a wider audience. (Howlett: 2012)

It was my intention to interview the A&R person for this case study as well. Unfortunately, I had to discard the idea for ethical reasons; Vepsäläinen as a newcomer in the industry didn't want me to contact A&R about his project before he had the chance

to discuss things through with the A&R person.

The Producer As 'Tracker'

As I have suggested, Vepsäläinen describes himself a tracker/producer or a producer/tracker (Vepsäläinen: 2015b). As mentioned, the tracker is the agent whose responsibility is to come up with the tracks excluding the melody. The tracker might also be the producer and a producer might be a tracker. The first time Vepsäläinen himself heard the term 'tracker' was in Sweden. He had a discussion with someone about a songwriting session and someone mentioned the 'trackers' and 'top-liners' involved in it. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) The term tracker is also strongly present at songwriting camps. According to Vepsäläinen:

> If I sign up for a songwriting camp they might ask me, 'so are you coming as a tracker'? But they also might ask me, "So are you coming as a producer/tracker"? So, they use the term producer/tracker, which practically is the same as a songwriter-producer. But I would say that it is not a 'full producer', because there are several songwriting situations where we're only asked to finish the song in the traditional sense. (Vepsäläinen: 2015b.)

These views suggest a (vague) difference between a tracker and a 'full producer'. Vepsäläinen acknowledges the fact that distinguishing between a tracker and a producer is challenging. Different roles overlap especially in countries where circles are smaller and the term "producer" can mean a variety of things (Vepsäläinen: 2015b). He states:

> A tracker is more of a technical term. It describes the person who engineers the production, i.e. the backing tracks. So the tracker is the one who programs the different instrument tracks. The tracker might play and record the tracks and the producer has more of a general picture of the song as a whole. The producer has the last word in what sounds will be used and might influence the song after the tracker has worked on it. (Vepsäläinen: 2015b.)

In a later e-mail he explained the idea of the tracker a little further. Here Vepsäläinen extends the responsibility of the tracker to cover some of the melody as well when roles become mixed during production (Vepsäläinen: 2016b). He comments:

> Let's think about a situation where the production team is comprised of a tracker/producer (who cannot play any instruments) and a guitarist. The tracker/producer might have an idea of a song he/she would like to write. He can ask the guitarist to 'play some kind of keystroke pattern in a meter divisible by three'. Then the guitarist plays according to these instructions but the producer might guide it into a certain direction: 'That's good.' 'Try something else.' "What if you played that chord for a longer period of time". This also happens sometimes when melodies are written. (Vepsäläinen: 2016a)

This raises an important question about creative agency and the artistic role of the producer. Who is the composer in a situation like this? Vepsäläinen continues:

> Is it the person who has operated the instrument (who comes up with ideas according to his/her skills based on what the tracker/producer says), or the tracker/producer (who has a concept in mind, but who doesn't have the skills to realize it)? I face this phenomenon very often, because I'm not a singer. (Vepsäläinen: 2016a)

Vepsäläinen says he can still take a rather great responsibility of the melody by giving guidelines such as 'how about a screeching high melody line here, which comes down halfway through the second bar. How about the first note on the fourth.' (Vepsäläinen: 2016a)

In a later interview, Vepsäläinen differentiates between being a tracker or a *producer* by referring to the agent's relationship to production technologies. According to Vepsäläinen the tracker is the guy 'who is tapping at the computer' whereas a producer, who is not a tracker, doesn't necessarily have to touch the production technology (Vepsäläinen: 2016b). Furthermore, Vepsäläinen says that a project might have a tracker and a separate producer. He elaborates (2016b):

> You can have a tracker who is programming and behind him/her there could be a producer, who says what to do. So the role of the producer extends beyond the role of the tracker.

He continues:

> I could present the question: 'who has tracked these strings?'… If I know that the tracker I'm talking to couldn't have made them…, in that case there are two trackers of which only the other one is a producer. The other one has only tracked something into it. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b)

According to Vepsäläinen (2016b), a tracker can also be in that role without being a producer, but very seldom in Finland.

Interestingly, Vepsäläinen often uses the word 'programming' in connection with the tracker's activities, echoing Paul Théberge's (1997, p. 251) thoughts on the increasing importance of obtaining skills in operating computer-based systems. Vepsäläinen (2016b) says that he might consider a tracker as someone who "recorded and programmed the song" and that the "core purpose of a tracker is based on programming". Vepsäläinen would nevertheless not consider a plain recording engineer a tracker. The tracker has to do something creative to the tracks in order to be considered a tracker (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) The tracker's agency hence sits somewhere between artistic and aesthetic decision-making and engineering with music production technology.

Vepsäläinen distinguishes between the roles of the tracker and that of the producer depending on what he is doing at a given moment. According to Vepsäläinen a tracker/producer is a double role in which the producer is mainly interested in the vocals, whereas the tracker's interest is focused on the rest of the tracks. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) When he works as a tracker/producer:

> Then both [the vocals and the tracks] are very important to me, but my role changes back and forth. If I'm a tracker/producer the vocals are always more important. As a tracker/producer the producer always beats the tracker, in my case anyway. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.)

This alternation between producing and tracking was strongly demonstrated in the vocal recording and production sessions of the song '*Kunhan muut ei tiedä'.* Vepsäläinen would record take upon take of vocals and give feedback to Paul between the takes. Then they would take a break from recording vocals and Vepsäläinen would work on the tracks in the session. (Auvinen: 2016a; 2016d)

For Vepsäläinen, the idea of being a 'tracker' is also connected to the style of music he is involved with. The term 'tracker' would only be used in reference to pop production, and more specifically the production of a subgenre he calls 'urban' (see Burgess 2008). A rock production for instance would not include a tracker. (Vepsäläinen: 2016b.) "If I'm doing a rock-record", he comments, "I'm not tracking it. I mean I'm not a *tracker* in a project like that" (2016b). Nevertheless, someone could ask him whether or not he's "tracked those guitars" (2016b). This is because the verb 'to track' and the term 'tracker' are so commonly used in music production that they have become synonyms for recording and editing or being a recording and editing engineer.

Observing Vepsäläinen's work during the production process of '*Kunhan muut ei tiedä*' supports the views he put forward in the interviews. When recording vocals, he paid a great deal of attention to the feelings and emotions conveyed by singer. He was very mindful of all the small paralingual elements in the vocals, such as creeks, sighs and minute timing changes in the vowels of the vocal text. (Auvinen: 2015a.) This demonstrates an understanding of the importance of the voice as carrying much more information than the "semantic value of the actual words it utters" (Lacasse: 2000, p. 10; Frith: 1996, p. 192); or at least that a "paralinguistic dimension is often as important as direct verbal meanings" (Middleton: 2000, p. 29). He also provides Paul with interpretation instructions between takes and instructs her to make a certain kind of sound "which people dig" (Auvinen: 2015a).

This makes Vepsäläinen a coach and a collaborative agent behind the vocal performance that ultimately is strongly tied to Paul's artistic agency and persona. During a vocal session Vepsäläinen and Paul would record take upon take of the same spots in the song. They could spend lots of time on a single bar and record it with different sounds to get lots of options for the editing process. Later on, they would sit down in the living room and build the vocal track from dozens of different takes, syllable by syllable. Vepsäläinen is in charge but listens to Paul's comments and takes them into account. Furthermore, he would edit the final track on his own but would send it to Paul for approval. If Paul didn't like something, Vepsäläinen would redo it. (Auvinen: 2016a.) Vepsäläinen's comments and instructions serve the purpose of getting different kinds of vocal takes with different kinds of sounds to be used as raw material later on in the production process. Sitting behind the DAW and having visuals of the project as a whole puts him in a position of keeping track of and tracking further what they have already recorded and what they still need.

Concluding Thoughts

My research materials show that the aspiring home studio-based music producer Mikke Vepsäläinen identifies himself first and foremost as a *tracker/producer*. This means that his main duty is to come up with the 'tracks' for a song, which would translate into the *arrangement* in traditional songwriting terms. In spite of the arrangement being his main responsibility, the traditional technical copyright-related term 'arranger' would not be sufficient to describe Vepsäläinen's work. He works together with the songwriter/top-liner from the very early stages of the compositional process, selects sounds, works as a recording engineer, an editing engineer, and collaborates with the singer to make the vocal tracks better while contributing to improving the 'top-line' (melody), the lyrics and, through giving feedback, the vocal performance along the production process. When a tracker/producer is working, the processes of songwriting and music production constantly intertwine and cannot be separated from one another.

I argue that the idea of 'tracker' as a facet of the broader role of the producer stems from the development of digital music production technologies such as the DAW. Software-based workstations and the vast instrument libraries available today enable the producer to program, record, create and edit all of the tracks included in a project. Furthermore, the fact that project studios and home studios as private spaces have the opportunity to fully compete with commercial studios gives the single tracker/producer even greater and more holistic control over the entire project and all its tracks during production process. Without the contemporary technology available for music production, the agency of the tracker could not exist in the way in which Vepsäläinen describes it. In addition to the *tracks* of a project, the tracker also acts as a social agent by working with singers and musicians to make their tracks better. Therefore, the agency of the *tracker* is a combination of artistic decision-making, aesthetic judgment, collaboration with other creative parties and using digital production technology.

In the light of my findings, the noun *tracker* and the verb *tracking* appear to be concepts that are commonly used in the context of contemporary pop production. Even if the terms are widely used, they have not yet been strongly conceptualized. This is highlighted due to the observation that even if Vepsäläinen uses the term in a self-evident manner, he struggles to clearly define its meaning or its distinction from other producer agencies. In the light of my findings the use of the term *tracker* as a facet of the role of the producer is limited to contemporary 'urban pop'. Furthermore, it is possible that the term 'tracker' is only a new piece of terminology applied to an old role or agency, which is the producer of urban pop.

The term 'producer' may point to a variety of different agencies. Moreover, the term *programmer* as an attribute of the producer's agency comes up in interviews and conversations much more often than the more traditional term *musician.* The constant renegotiations, overlaps, blurred lines, and switches of between the different agencies might reflect a flexible production culture, in which anyone can do anything depending on the situation. Different kinds of production settings nevertheless call for different kinds of producers and conceptual attributes connected to them. The term 'tracker' as an attribute of the producer's agency and a concept describing the producer's self-identification requires further comparative study on other producer subjects. Here, though, I have attempted to outline some principles for future discussion.

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Field Work Materials

Auvinen (2015b) Field recording, 7th Floor Studio (audio). Helsinki. 1.10.2015. Recorded by Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author. 6 min 45 sec.

Auvinen (2016c) Field recording, 7th Floor Studio (audio). Helsinki. 18.2.2016. Recorded by Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author. 20 min 41 sec.

Auvinen, Tuomas (2015a) Field diary. 1.10.2015, Vepsäläinen's home studio, 7th Floor Studio, Helsinki. In the possession of the author.

Auvinen, Tuomas (2016a) Field diary. 15.2.2016. Vepsäläinen's home studio, 7th Floor Studio, Helsinki. In the possession of the author.

Auvinen, Tuomas (2016b) Field diary. 18.2.2016. Vepsäläinen's home studio, 7th Floor Studio, Helsinki. In the possession of the author.

Auvinen, Tuomas (2016d) Video clip shot at Vepsäläinen's home studio. 15.2.2016. Footage in the possession of the author.

Interviews

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2015a) Helsinki 10.3.2015. 1h, 10 min, 15 sec. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2015b) Helsinki 30.9.2015. 36 min, 15 sec. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2015c) Helsinki, 7th Floor Studio, 1.10.2015. 3 min, 17 sec. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2016a) E-mail interview. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Question list sent 2.2.2016, reply received 2.2.2016. Interview in the possession of the author. 6 pages.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2016b) Helsinki, Kamppi, 28.4.2016. 53 min, 28 sec. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2016c) Helsinki, Kamppi. 14.4.2016. 23 min. 51 sec.

Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author.

Vepsäläinen, Mikke & Paul, Ida (2016) Helsinki 15.2.2016. Interviewer Tuomas Auvinen. Mp3-file in the possession of the author. 20 min, 40 sec.

Other Research Materials

Vepsäläinen, Mikke (2016b) E-mail from Mikke Vepsäläinen. 15.4.2016

Notes

[1] I have written on this in an earlier article, in which I also illuminate how music production technologies and practices shape our understanding of the music production studio as a socially constructed cultural space in connection to the agency of the

contemporary aspiring music producer. (Auvinen 2016m.)

[2] I consider canonical any text, which clearly constructs a chronological continuum of successful and famous individuals. Moorefield's (2005) monograph presents a continuum of famous producers, who follow one another more or less in a master-apprentice-like fashion. This strongly resembles the canon formation of western classical composers (e.g., Citron 2000).

[3] This discourse can be seen both in the media and to some extent in academia (e.g. Moorefield 2005; Warner 2003; Swedien 2009). I consider researchers' choice to concentrate on successful and famous professionals without question the reasons why these people are being chosen as objects of study as taking a position into this direction.

[4]Much of the literature on music production and producers is professional literature written to help production personnel to develop their skills. This kind of literature can be important for academic research, but does primarily not aim at producing scholarly knowledge. (See e.g. Swedien 2009; Visconti 2007.)

[5] My informants in this study didn't feel comfortable for photos and/or videos to be publicly available in a web-based journal. Therefore, research ethics limit the use of these materials for myself and upon request, for reviewers of this article. If you would like more details on the production demos, please contact me (**tuomas.a.auvinen@utu.fi**).

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