



“Never Give Up Hopelessness!?”: Emotions and Spatiality in Contemporary Finnish Experimental Poetry

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In the past decades, the Finnish poetry scene has been vital, dynamic, and full of life. Poets of different ages have worked concurrently. Young poets have come along one after another, and they have brought out new ideas and aesthetic outlooks. Moreover, senior poets have had a vital role in formulating and reformulating the poetics of the twenty-first century. Influences have been taken from various directions. In experimental poetry, one source of inspiration has been Finnish avant-garde poetry from the 1960s, and the influences of (post)-structuralist theories as well as new American poetry have also been evident.

This chapter focuses on a small array of recent Finnish poetry and especially on experimental poetry. The poems are written by Karri Kokko (b. 1955), Tytti Heikkinen (b. 1969), and Eino Santanen (b. 1975). I have chosen the poems on the grounds of how they deal with different aspects of contemporary Finnish society. I interpret the poems in the context of late modern Finland, the geographical place and cultural area in which the

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poems have been written, published, and received. The poems discuss twenty-first-century Finnish issues: some deal with finance capitalism, while others tackle social problems and unsatisfactory subject positions. The poems, moreover, express, describe, and arouse different kinds of emotions, which are typical of contemporary Finnish poetry (Blomberg et al. 2010). In these poems, the emotions are closely related to how it feels to live in today's Finland. However, there is often an ironic twist, too, as in the title's quote "Never give up Hopelessness," taken from Heikkinen's poem.¹

By approaching the poems in the context of late modernity and from the viewpoint of emotions and spatiality, I wish to analyze how contemporary Finnish poetry deals with the surrounding society. I aim to answer the following questions: What do the poems talk about? What kinds of emotions are there in these poems? What is the role of spatiality in them? How are the poems connected to the surrounding world? Spatiality in this chapter does refer not only to late modern Finland as a place and a cultural area but also to Finnish literature (poetry, to be more precise) as a public space in which emotional and potentially political topics are experienced and dealt with.

EXPERIMENTAL POETRY AND POSTMODERNISM

Experimental poetry is understood here as the kind of poetry that seeks to extend the boundaries of poetry and raises fundamental questions about the nature of poetry itself (Bray et al. 2012, 1–2). Poetics refers to the "creative principles informing any literary, social or cultural construction."²

The poetry that I deal with can be characterized more precisely as postmodern, although the term "postmodern" is rarely used in Finnish discussions concerning recent poetry. The reasons for neglecting the term are not self-evident. Nevertheless, from the 1980s onward, the notion of postmodernism has been frequently used in relation to the postmodern novel and I suppose that the term has become somewhat overused. This may well be the case beyond the boundaries of Finland as well. Brian McHale, for instance, has noted in *The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole* (2004, 1–2) that the word "postmodernism" is not very often used when talking about the latest American poetry.³

Be that as it may, postmodernism in poetry can imply many things. It can mean recycling already existing texts, or making pastiches. Different styles can be mixed and combined with texts that deal with contemporary ways of living and writing. Postmodern poetry, moreover, often uses

unpoetic material (Haapala 2013, 182). Joseph Conte (1991, 9) has stated that in comparison with modernist poetry, postmodernists see the language as a more plastic medium that can be reshaped and employed for multifarious purposes. Although this opinion can be challenged by referring, for example, to the highly modernist *Waste Land* (1922) by T. S. Eliot, which mixes different languages, registers, voices, and cultural images, I argue that in a broader perspective this kind of poetics is rarer in modernist poetry and more prevalent and dominant in postmodernist poetry.

Moreover, while modernists often longed for the lost promise of cultural renaissance, postmodern poets more commonly see the world as irreversibly chaotic and out of control (Conte 1991, 9). Some theorists emphasize the anguished nature of postmodern poetry, while others highlight its playful and liberating aspects (Conte 1991, 9; Hoover 2013, xxix). In the poems that I scrutinize here, there is always a humorous or ironic tone even if the contents are otherwise serious.

One postmodern feature that is common to all the poems discussed in this chapter is that the speakers of the poems are evidently artificial constructions (see Conte 1991, 43–4). The selected poems also utilize citation techniques or recycle found material, and all of them are based on an experimental approach to composition. Moreover, due to the artificially constructed speakers, the contents of the poems cannot be seen as direct expressions of the inner life of the poets. All this is typical of postmodern poetry (Hoover 2013, xxix–xxx).

The relationship between the experimental poems that I inspect here and questions of spatiality is complex. To begin with, the poems use different kinds of found material. Kokko’s *Varjofinlandia* (2005; “Shadow Finlandia”) is made up of texts that have been taken from Finnish blogs dealing with depression, while Heikkinen’s poems recycle material found from Finnish blogs in which teenage girls write about their lives. Santanen’s bank-note poems, on the other hand, have been written on 20 euro bills, that is, found objects that belong to the public domain.

The poems chosen play with the notions of intimate and public spaces and question the borders between them. In the original contexts, the source materials of Kokko’s and Heikkinen’s poems deal with intimate matters of private persons. They were, however, already public when the poets found them on the internet and modified them into poems that are public in a very different sphere. This conceptual move, the shift from one realm to another, changes the nature of the texts and the way in which

readers respond to them. Santanen's poems, for their part, use bank notes as a public space in order to criticize the problems of present-day capitalism. Writing poetry on bank notes makes the two very different public spaces of poetry and money collide.

POETICS AND POLITICS OF EMOTION

The language of the poems that I scrutinize here is emotionally charged, which is why I suggest that they employ a kind of "poetics of emotion." Today, the theoretical toolbox available for analyzing literature, emotions, and affects is more than well stocked. There are several central concepts such as affect, emotion, feeling, and sentiment, among others, and a multiplicity of ways for defining them (e.g., Helle and Hollsten 2016; Seighworth and Gregg 2010; Nussbaum 2001, 22–3; Keen 2011; Deleuze 2012, 63; Massumi 2002; Ahmed 2004; Ngai 2005). In this chapter, I use the concept of emotion to refer to different kinds of human sentiments, or to feeling something in relation to other people, thoughts, or situations.⁴ Emotions can be purely mental or they may have bodily dimensions. They are often conscious, but it is also possible that subjects do not always know how they feel (Ahmed 2004, 5–11).

Interestingly enough, the American literary scholar Fredric Jameson (1991, xix–xi) has stated that postmodern culture (by which he refers both to postmodernist literature and art, and to late modern society marked by capitalism) is witnessing a waning of affect. Jameson (1991, 10–5) argues that he does not claim that all affect, feeling, or emotion has vanished in the postmodern era. However, in postmodernism the subject is "dead" or decentered in the way that art can no longer express its feelings.⁵ He also states that along with the end of the centered bourgeois subject we might be liberated from the kind of subject's anxieties but also from "every other kind of feeling."

Reading the postmodern poems that I have selected—and the most recent Finnish poetry in general—makes the notion of the waning of affect problematic. As I see it, the twenty-first-century Finnish postmodern poetry is replete with emotions, and this is one of the main reasons why the poems are thought provoking and political. Jameson published his famous book on postmodernism already in the early 1990s and he dealt with cultural phenomena of the 1960s. Hence, the difference between my understanding and that of Jameson's may be the result of the temporal gap between the 1990s and the present day but also of focusing on dissimilar

texts. While Jameson refers to artists and writers such as Andy Warhol (1922–1987), Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930), John Cage (1912–1992), and Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937), my material consists of Finnish poetry written in the twenty-first century. Over the past few decades, both theoretical conceptions and postmodernist literature have altered.

It is nevertheless true that postmodern poems rarely express directly the feelings of the poets. I see this, however, as a question of poetics, not as a sign of the death of the subject. The fact that the speakers of the poems that I scrutinize here are artificial constructions and the poems themselves are often made by copy-pasting found material does not eradicate the affective force of the poems. I suggest, on the contrary, that emotions have an important role in connecting the poems to the surrounding world.

The politics of emotion refers to the ways in which things are made political through emotions (Ahmed 2004). Emotions are everywhere, and literature has a crucial role in reflecting and discussing the emotions that circulate in our rapidly changing culture and society. For instance, fictional characters live through affective experiences, and they react emotionally to the circumstances in which they live. Literature offers means to verbalize and comprehend obscure and problematic emotions. It also serves as a public space where affective issues can be brought into discussion.

Approaching contemporary literature from the viewpoint of emotions is important. It has been assumed that the affective climate of contemporary culture is transforming along with the societal transition from the industrial to the post-industrial phase (e.g., Clough 2007, 2–3). Raymond Williams’s (1988, 146) notion of the changing structures of feeling is worth remembering here. His basic idea is that groups of people may experience life in different ways, and that experiences are structured. The structures are mobile, and they change in time and in relation to the surrounding society. Literature as an instance of cultural meaning-making participates in expressing, molding, and interpreting the changing affective climate. Although all of the poems discussed in this chapter are Finnish, I suppose that they express the kinds of structures of feeling that are recognizable in many other late modern societies too.

VARJOFINLANDIA AND THE VOICES OF FINNISH DEPRESSION

The latest Finnish poetry often builds a space to deal with negative emotions. Karri Kokko’s *Varjofinlandia* is a perfect example of this since it is a collage made of material found from Finnish blogs dealing with depression.

Kokko is a Finnish experimental poet who has published 16 literary works. All of his works (except for the debut collection *Uno boy*, 1982) have been published by alternative Finnish publishers instead of established publishing houses. Despite his somewhat marginalized status in relation to established literary institutions, Kokko has a relatively visible role in the Finnish twenty-first-century poetry scene. He is also known as a literary critic and journalist, and has had several blogs. He participates actively in poetry events and keeps inventing new approaches to poetry.

The genre of *Varjofinlandia* is not self-evident. It consists of 61 pages filled with successive sentences cut off from blog texts and rearranged into an artwork. It could therefore be seen as prose literature. Another possibility is to see it as prose poetry or procedural poetry, as I do; I read *Varjofinlandia* here as a long postmodern poem that uses the New Sentence Technique.⁶

The name “Varjofinlandia” refers of course to Finland. The name of the country is “Suomi” in Finnish but it is called “Finlandia” for example in New Latin. The name connects Kokko’s work to a specific geographical place, Finland. Finland is also a certain cultural area marked by its location in the North between Scandinavia and Russia, and is one of the Nordic welfare states. The word “Finlandia” has, however, particularly solemn connotations, because it is used, for example, in Jean Sibelius’s *Finlandia Hymn* (1900), which is almost a national anthem in Finland—Sibelius (1865–1957) himself was a world famous Finnish national composer. Moreover, the most distinguished Finnish literary prize for novels is the Finlandia Prize.

With the prefix “Varjo-” (“Shadow”), *Varjofinlandia* aims to question the elevated connotations of “Finlandia.” The name can therefore be interpreted in several ways. It may refer to the dark sides of the official Finland, or it can be read as a statement according to which the neglected voices that express malaise should be heard by the wealthy part of the nation. In relation to the Finlandia Prize,⁷ it may also refer to marginal or marginalized literature (such as experimental poetry) that flourishes in the shadows of the best-selling novels that fill the shelves of bookshops.

Varjofinlandia is a postmodern dramatic monologue in which a decentered subject reflects on his or her emotions. A dramatic monologue is, of course, a poem that consists exclusively of the speaker’s speech and in which the speaker is obviously someone else than the author of the poem. In fact, the speaker of *Varjofinlandia* can be characterized as a “pseudo-center” of the poem, to borrow the notion of literary scholar Juri Joensuu

(2012, 183) who has used it in relation to search engine poetry. The next passage speaks about a particular emotion, misery or sadness, and possibly about disappointment, too:

Suhteellisen surkea olo. Jossain on jotain vikana, kun annan pompotella itseäni noin, kohdella näin. Olen epäonnistunut jossain, koska en kerta kaikkiaan osaa tehdä itseäni onnelliseksi. (Kokko 2005, 18)

Feeling quite miserable. There is something wrong when I let other people bounce me and treat me like this. I have failed in something because I just can't make myself happy. (Trans. AH)

Varjofinlandia's speaker continuously describes his or her depression and complains about his or her miserable life—the gender of the speaker remains unclear, or it keeps changing.⁸ Besides, the speaking I is evidently a construction because the whole work is made of text fragments found from blogs. One could also claim that there is a multitude of speakers in *Varjofinlandia*. Due to the form of the work—there are no divisions into paragraphs or into stanzas—I tend to think, however, of one multiple speaker. “Multiple” refers here to one entity that includes many, as in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of multiplicity (see Massumi 1992, 6). Consequently, the impression of the speaker is not very coherent.

Every now and then, the reader can observe small breaks or ruptures in points where fragments from different sources have been placed together:

Päivät mä olen liian väsynyt ajattelemaan tai tekemään mitään ja yöt mä pyörin sängyssä hiestä märkänä ja ajattelen ja ajattelen ja ajattelen. Sillon kun mä en pysty nukkumaan, asiat on aika huonosti. Mä en oo nukkunut viikkoon. Mä en pysty nukkumaan. Auta. Paljon on elämässä murheita. Heräsin hikisenä ahdistaviin uniin. Jouduin eilen miettimään liikaa, liikaa, liikaa ja tulini levottomaksi. Että voi olla vaikeaa. Lievää alakulua. Väsyttää ihan tuskaisesti. Onpa voipunut olo. (Kokko 2005, 21–2)

In the daytime, I am too tired to think or do anything, and during the night, I toss and turn in my bed all sweaty and I think and think and think. When I can't sleep, things go wrong. I haven't slept for a week. I can't sleep. Help. There are many worries in the life. I woke up all sweaty because of distressing dreams. Yesterday I had to think too much, too much, too much and I got nervous. How difficult can it be? Feeling slightly melancholic. I am horribly tired. Feeling exhausted. (Trans. AH)

The speaker goes through various emotions, such as exhaustion, worry, anxiety, and melancholy. The speaker uses colloquial language, which creates a sense of intimacy, and he or she repeats certain words as if to emphasize the fraught situation. Moreover, the somewhat floundering progression is part of the aesthetics of *Varjofinlandia* and it underlines the artificial nature of the speaking I. For example, the sudden appeal “Help,” addressed to an unknown receiver, catches the reader’s attention. This kind of style also highlights each sentence and makes one think of the huge number of Finnish people (or indeed people throughout the world) who suffer from depression.

Due to the way in which *Varjofinlandia* has been created—by copying, pasting, and reorganizing found sentences—it has a documentary feel. The material comprises thoughts of real people who have discussed their mental health issues in blogs. The book can therefore be read as an expression of a certain kind of subjectivity in present-day Finland. It is the kind of subjectivity that for some reason or another fails to keep up with the actions of the surrounding society.⁹ The method behind *Varjofinlandia* is also interesting from the viewpoint of public space. Kokko has taken thoughts and emotions that other people have expressed publicly on the internet. He has anonymized them and transformed them into conceptual poetry in which the original, allegedly authentic voices have been turned into an obviously constructed speaker. This play between the two public spaces—blogs and printed poetry—highlights the tension between private and public on the internet.

What has all this to do with the politics of emotion? To begin with, *Varjofinlandia* is full of negative emotions expressed by the speaker. Of course, depression is not merely an emotion—it is a mental problem that can be diagnosed—but living through depression partly means living through negative emotions that make life difficult and unsatisfactory. The speaker is exhausted and anxious, but the reader never really gets to know why, making the reading experience primarily oppressive.

The negative emotions are closely tied to *Varjofinlandia*’s critical stance toward the Finnish welfare state. The topic of depression is rather serious considering that depression is one of the biggest problems of Finnish public health. Every fifth Finn suffers from depression during his or her lifetime, and depression is the most common reason for sick leaves in Finland. In fact, the number of burnouts in working life—often diagnosed as depression in Finland—is on the increase due to changes in work causing precarious positions and growing demands for efficiency.¹⁰

The dull and grinding emotions related to depression are utilized in *Varjofinlandia* in an effective way to arouse contradictory emotions in readers. To begin with, the book is somewhat boring, but then again, so is living through depression. In this sense, the poetics of *Varjofinlandia* amplifies the affective tone of its content. On the other hand, the “poetics of boredom” connects Kokko’s work to American postmodern poetry. Experimental poet Kenneth Goldsmith (2008, 146), for instance, has stated that his own works—which are often conceptual in nature and resemble Kokko’s works in many ways—are so boring that even he himself is reluctant to read through them.

Nevertheless, the repetitive and excessive way in which the work deals with depression also creates ambiguous emotions and humorous tones. One could say that *Varjofinlandia*’s “tongue is seriously in its cheek,” as Paul Hoover (2013, xxx) has described postmodern American poetry. The amusement does not derive from the contents of *Varjofinlandia*, at least not directly. The topic of depression is not funny, and the speaker mainly speaks about it in serious ways.¹¹ The comic effect is rather due to the procedure by which the book has been made. Putting numerous complaints of single speakers together creates an impression of an inconsistent speaker who endlessly harps on about problems that in the end start to seem somewhat banal. Private suffering turns into a generic discourse, and this has two consequences. Firstly, as the complaining voices are detached from the original context of the blogs, the tone of the text becomes more ambivalent or ironic. Secondly, the effect created is both serious and amusing at the same time.

As Linda Hutcheon (2003, 9–11) has noted, irony can mean different things: either saying something else than what you mean, or leaving something unsaid so that the receiver has to interpret the hidden meaning. I suggest that the latter meaning is better suited to describing *Varjofinlandia*, because it does not provide the reader with any interpretive frame that would help to contextualize the content. With irony there are two participants, the one who ironizes and the one who interprets, and ultimately it is always up to the interpreter to decide whether something is ironic or not. Hence, irony is risky because not everyone understands it. It is also difficult to direct the receiver to interpret the ironic message in the desired way (Hutcheon 2003, 10–11).

Most importantly, Hutcheon (2003, 14–15) writes about the emotional ethics of irony, which is intriguing from the viewpoint of *Varjofinlandia*. Hutcheon states that even though irony is often seen as a

vehicle that “engages intellect rather than emotions,” irony may also arouse various emotions in the receiver, such as uncertainty, humiliation, or embarrassment, to mention but a few. Irony is often used to affect the receiver emotionally, but it can also lead in the opposite direction and distance the reader from the text.

How should the irony of *Varjofinlandia* be interpreted? What would be its ironic edge? As I see it, Kokko’s work gives a voice to an anonymous mass of depressed Finns and criticizes the Finnish welfare state for its inability to solve the problem. On the other hand, it plays with the stereotypical assumptions of the Finns as a miserable nation by condensing and exaggerating the experiences of depression into one book. Far from disdaining the problems that depressed people have to live through in real life, *Varjofinlandia* offers its readers a possibility to see the topic from an ironic, distanced viewpoint and, at certain points, also through humor. This offers a fresh and challenging perspective on one of the most serious problems of Finnish society.

FATTY XL AND FINNISH “SOCIAL” FLARF

My second example of experimental poetry dealing with present-day Finnish problems is Tytti Heikkinen’s flarf poem “On Par with Whales.” Heikkinen is a Finnish experimental poet who uses material found from the internet in her poetry. She has published three poetry collections, and her debut volume, *Täytetyn eläimen lämpö* (*The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal*), was nominated for the Helsingin Sanomat Prize for the best literary debutant of the year in 2008. *Helsingin Sanomat* is the most widely read Finnish newspaper. A selection of her poems from her first two collections has been translated into English under the title *The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal* (2013). In this chapter, I use the English translation.

Flarf refers to the kind of experimental poetry that draws material from the internet by using odd search terms and then selecting and modifying it into poetry; the procedure has been called “Google sculpting” (Epstein 2012, 311, 318). Gary Sullivan, who coined the term, defines flarf as “a kind of corrosive, cute, or cloying, awfulness. Wrong. Un-P.C. Out of control. ‘Not okay’” (Magee et al. 2003). According to him, the word can also be used as a verb “to flarf,” and in this sense the meaning of the word is “to bring out the inherent awfulness, etc., of some pre-existing text” (Magee et al. 2003). Furthermore, the already mentioned Goldsmith

(2011, 4) emphasizes the brutality of flarf by stating that it is based on using the “*worst*” results of Google searches: “[t]he more offensive, the more ridiculous, the more outrageous the better.” In flarf, the already public material is transferred into a different kind of public space. Bringing graceless and vulgar content from the internet to the realm of poetry is unexpected, causing unease in the reading.

Flarf in its original American form is primarily humorous. However, Finnish flarf has been called “social flarf” because it discusses social problems such as drug abuse, obesity, and violence (Rantama 2010). Finnish flarf is therefore more political than its American counterpart. While it is typical for all flarf to express and arouse forceful emotions, Finnish flarf is more empathetic than American flarf, and American flarf has even been accused of using uneducated, racist, or populist language to mock and ridicule those who use this kind of language (Sullivan 2008, 194).¹² Finnish flarf also uses so-called bad language, albeit in a more sensitive way.

Heikkinen’s “On Par with Whales” is the opening poem of the “Fatty XL” poems,¹³ which have been put together from material found in internet chat forums and blogs where teenage girls write about their lives (Pollari 2013, 4). The poems are in many ways similar to Kokko’s *Varjofinlandia*, not least because the poems have been constructed with the help of internet search engines. Fatty XL poems, too, are dramatic monologues in a similar way to *Varjofinlandia*. The style of Heikkinen’s poems, however, is rougher and more provocative. This is how the poem begins:

Fuck i’m a fatty when others are skinny.
 Also Im short, am I a fatty or short? Wellyeah
 I’m such a grosss fatty that it makes no sens
 My Woundedness has let the situation get
 this way tht the fat squeezes out etc. Now I’m
 putting distance btwn me and everything, because I’ve been so
 disappointed in my self, cause from the “greedy”
 I think of a greedy fatty and then I get mad. Panic
 rises in my chest, a tremor. Everything is so terrible
 , outside its wet and icy, It’s cold when I.
 lay here and im an undisciplined fatty.
 .This morning smeone I know was fucking aroundAbout how I’m such a fatty
 and I hadto punch them BTWN THE eyes ... they spit back at me
 and I got a horrible pigsnot on the bag of my neck. After that
 I gothome super hungry. (Heikkinen 2013, 79)

Although the poem mixes together multiple sources, “On Par with Whales” is coherent in the sense that it could be spoken—or rather written—by one person.¹⁴ Heikkinen’s artistic output shows here; she has searched for a certain kind of material and she has selected, reorganized, and (possibly) rewritten it in order to convert it into poetry. This poem’s play with the notion of intimate and public is layered in a similar way to *Varjofinlandia*. Individual teenage girls have written about their life and sentiments on the internet sites, thus sharing them in public communities. The poet has used this publicly available material by merging the numerous voices into one poetic I called “Fatty XL.” The result is quite puzzling; “On Par with Whales” reproduces collective speech under the guise of a speaker who clearly resembles the traditional speaking subject.

The more or less coherent form of dramatic monologue has certainly influenced the affectivity of the poem. It creates a sense of intimacy, an illusion of somebody expressing directly her thoughts and feelings, and in dramatic monologue, this someone can tell her story entirely from her own viewpoint. All this encourages the reader to identify or empathize with the speaker, an identification strengthened by the many narrative elements in the Fatty XL poems.

The flarf elements are highly visible in “On Par with Whales.” The use of a four-letter word at the very beginning (“Fuck I’m a fatty”) introduces the reader to the somewhat unusual register of the poem. The poem also uses language typical of internet chat forums. There are abbreviations such as “BTWN” for “between” or “abt” for “about.” There are also many misspellings, such as “I” written in lower case at the beginning of the poem, or separate words typed together like in “wellyeah,” all typical features of internet language. The style of the speaking I, moreover, is unpolished, to say the least; she does not aim at impressing what she might call highbrow readers, quite the contrary.¹⁵

Fatty XL expresses her emotions in an overflowing manner, and this may touch at least some readers (Helle 2015). The poem is also interesting from the viewpoint of social class and intersectionality. The girl called Fatty XL seems to incarnate many of the negative stereotypes related to working-class girls and women—Joensuu (2012, 181) has even used the term “white trash” when writing about the Fatty XL poems. To begin with, her language is vulgar and she speaks very openly about everything; about her fatness, about her humiliating sex experiences, about her mother’s alcohol abuse and sex life, and so on. Niina Pollari (2013) who has translated Heikkinen’s poetry into English calls Fatty XL therefore an

“over-sharer,” a person who discloses too much about herself. Fatty XL’s spelling mistakes also point to stereotypical ideas about the working classes, hinting at a low education.¹⁶

The Fatty XL poems are emotionally charged, dealing with present-day social problems in a provocative way. She can be seen as a victim of the weight loss industry, as Laura Joyce (2014) has noticed in her essay. Fatty XL sees herself as too fat and she would like to lose weight, feeling anger, frustration, self-loathing, and shame about her body. The Fatty XL poems connect to a wider context of fatness discourses in late modern Western culture (see Harjunen 2009; Helle 2015). We have constructed certain medical and cultural standards for normal weight, and fatness is usually seen as a problem or as something to be ashamed of. Fatness discourses permeate society as a whole, urging everyone to judge and control their own bodies, sometimes in unhealthy ways. Young girls are especially vulnerable in this regard, and different kinds of eating disorders are increasingly current. As Joyce points out, Fatty XL “has adapted entirely to the weight loss industry’s dangerous cycle” (Joyce 2014).

The fact that the Fatty XL poems have been created by recycling material from internet forums generates a kind of “reality effect.” The styles and topics of the poem both imitate and borrow from those found on the internet. This gives the poem a documentary character akin Kokko’s *Varjofinlandia*. In many ways, Fatty XL is the incarnation of a certain kind of subject in late modernity. She is lonely and isolated, and seems to live her life primarily through the internet. The poem does not, however, merely recycle the discourses found from the internet. As flarf poetry, it also comments on them by bringing out their “inherent awfulness” (Magee et al. 2003), namely unhealthy ways of speaking about weight and one’s own body. But despite the sad themes of the poems, they are nonetheless hilarious. The outspokenness and excessive emotions of the speaker together with the rough language (and other humorous elements such as misspelling) are likely to make at least some readers laugh.

EINO SANTANEN’S BANK NOTE POETRY AND FINANCE CAPITALISM

The third example, Eino Santanen’s bank note poetry, deals with present-day capitalism by manipulating the ideological features of both bank notes and capitalism. The poems, published in an anthology called *Tekniikan*

maailmat (2014; “Worlds of Technique”), have been written with a typewriter on 20 euro bank notes. Santanen has published five collections of poetry beginning from 2002, *Tekniikan maailmat* being the fourth. It won the prestigious Tanssiva karhu poetry prize awarded by the Finnish national broadcasting company YLE.¹⁷

There are altogether eight bank-note poems in the anthology, and they speak about money, economy, and love. The material bases of euro notes connect the poems to the euro zone, that is, countries that belong to the monetary system of the European Union. The Finnish language in which the majority of these poems have been written (some are in English) ties them more specifically to the Finnish cultural area.¹⁸ Bank notes belong both to the public and to the private sphere. They are essentially public because they represent the common monetary system. At the same time, bank notes can be someone’s private property.

Santanen’s poems make use of bank notes, Euros, as public space, as a publishing platform on which to display and distribute poetry. They also play with the idea of the special relationship people have with owning money (Fig. 6.1).

1./Sinä tunnet tämän/setelin nyt. Tämä/seteli on kädel-/läsi nyt. Tämä/
seteli on sinun,/rakas ja tärkeä,/nyt.

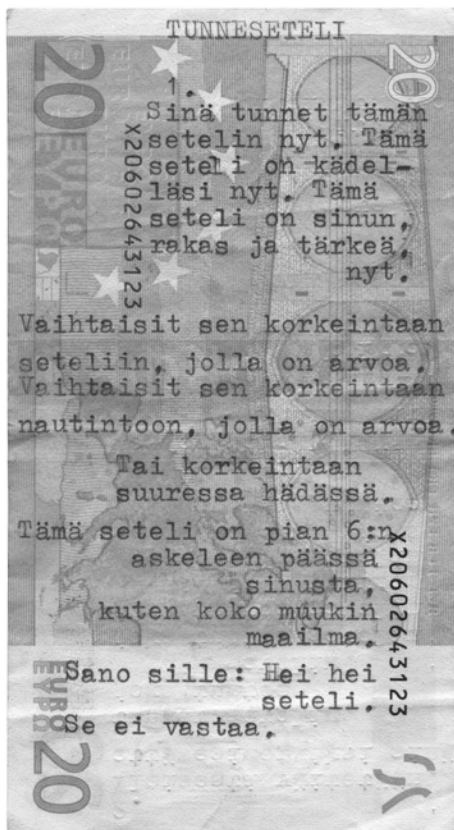
Vaihtaisit sen korkeintaan/seteliin, jolla on arvoa./Vaihtaisit sen korkein-
taan/nautintoon, jolla on arvoa./Tai korkeintaan/suurella hädässä./Tämä
seteli on pian 6:n/askleen päässä/sinusta,/kuten muukin maailma./Sano
sille: Hei hei/seteli./Se ei vastaa. (Santanen 2014, 30)

1./You can feel this/note now. This/note is in your hand/now. This/note
is yours,/beloved and important,/now.

You would only change it/for a valuable note./You would only change
it/for valuable pleasure/Or only/in a very difficult situation./This note will
soon be 6/steps away/from you,/like the whole world./Say to it: Bye bye/
note./It does not answer. (Trans. AH)

This poem called “Tunneseteli” (“Emotional Bank Note”) is the first poem in the bank note poetry section. It is a good example of these poems as it contains many of the central themes of the bank-note poems. It speaks about emotions, it refers to money’s exchange value, and it presents money as providing the potential for pleasure. The speaker of the poem remains undefined, and the “you” of the poem refers to the user of the money, the bearer of the bank note. The speaker of this poem is estranged in a different way than in Kokko and Heikkinen; the source of the voice remains unknown. The emotion of love in the poem is one-sided:

Fig. 6.1 Eino Santanen’s artwork “TUNNESETELI / X20602643123”, part 1/2 in *Tekniikan maailmat* (Santanen 2014, 30)



according to the speaker, the note is “beloved and important” for the bearer, but the note is mute and makes no response (Fig. 6.2).

The theme of love is even more evident in another poem called “L24680445062 Tunnistaa Osa 1/2” (“L24680445062 Recognizes Part 1/2”):

Minä rakastan sinua/kuin seitsemäätoista kirjainta/minä rakastan sinua/
kuin kolmea Sanaa/Numeroiden pyörteenä/minä/sinun numerosi
kohtaan//Minä sanon sinun nimesi/Se on kolme sanaa. (Santanen 2014, 32)

I love you/like I love eight letters/I love you/like I love three words/As a
whirl of numbers/I/encounter your numbers//I say your name/It is three
words. (Trans. AH)

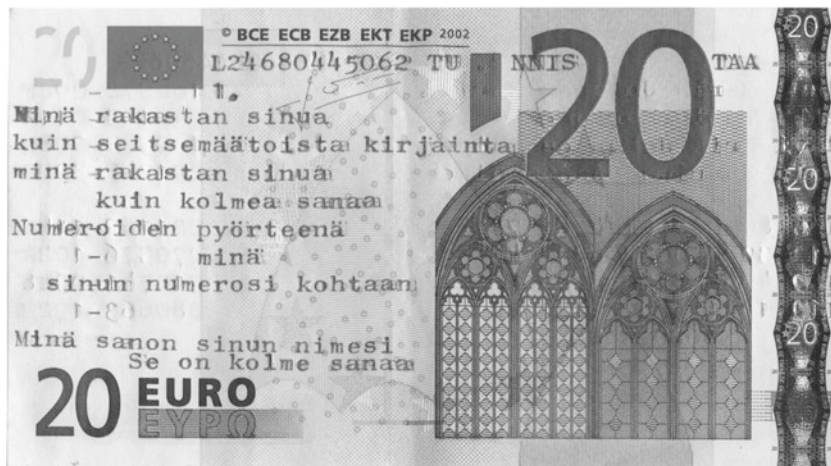


Fig. 6.2 Eino Santanen’s artwork “L24680445062 TUNNISTAA”, part 1/2 in *Tekniikan maailmat* (Santanen 2014, 32)

In this poem, love and money intertwine. The speaker of the poem pretends to be the bank note itself. Hence, an official object, the bank note, is humanized or personalized. It addresses the speech to the bearer of the note. Once again, the experimental poem confuses the boundaries between private and public.

The talk about love evokes the discourse of love poetry, and Finnish readers may be reminded of Pentti Saarikoski’s famous love poem “Minä rakastan sinua” (“I love you”) published in *Mitä tapahtuu todella?* (1962, “What is actually going on?”). Saarikoski (1937–1983), one of the Finland’s best known and most established poets, began his career as a modernist but soon started to transform poetic language by introducing material from everyday life and from political discourse. Saarikoski was an ardent communist and a celebrity known for his four marriages and problems with alcohol. In addition to referring to Saarikoski, Santanen’s poem also expresses our fascination with money in the capitalist cultures in which we live.

However, the content of the bank note’s love talk remains empty and without point. “Minä rakastan sinua” (“I love you”) are merely “seventeen letters” or “three words” (“eight letters” in the English translation). The poem, in fact, only pretends to speak to the bearer, and the bearer could be anyone, and of course the note is endlessly passed from one person to another (Fig. 6.3).

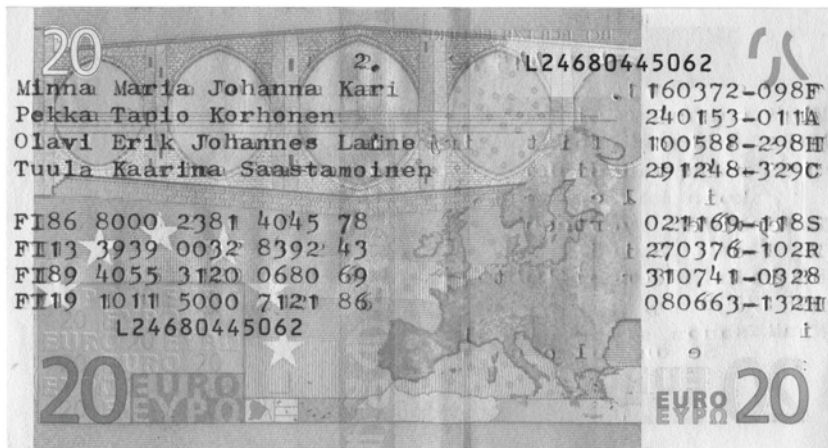


Fig. 6.3 Eino Santanen’s artwork “L24680445062 TUNNISTAA”, part 2/2 in *Tekniikan maailmat* (Santanen 2014, 32)

The lines “As a whirl of numbers/I/encounter your numbers” refer to the second part of the same poem (“L24680445062 Recognizes Part 2/2”):

Minna Maria Johanna Kari 160372-098F
 Pekka Tapio Korhonen 240153-011A
 Olavi Erik Johannes Laine 100588-298H
 Tuula Kaarina Saastamoinen 291248-329C

FI86 8000 2381 4045 78 021169-118S
 FI13 3939 0032 8392 43 270376-102R
 FI89 4055 3120 0680 69 310741-0328
 FI19 1011 5000 7121 86 080666-132H
 (Santanen 2014, 33)

The “whirl of numbers” refers to number 20, the value of the note, and to the serial number of the note L24680445062. These numbers are juxtaposed with the social security numbers and bank account numbers of—presumably—fictional people.

From the viewpoint of finance, the individual user of money can be anyone, and the humanity of the user can be reduced to series of numbers. However, people tend to project feelings onto money and to the possibilities it offers. Although the poems speak about love they do not arouse

affectionate or tender emotions in the reader. Rather, the tone of the poems is ironic because all the talk about love is hollow. The emotions that the poems are more likely to arouse are suspicion and amusement.

Santanen himself has stated in the anthology's afterword that the bank-note poems participate in the discussion on finance capitalism and its recurrent crises, as well as nature and status of money in contemporary finance capitalism.¹⁹ The poems' comment on finance capitalism, however, is not self-explanatory but needs to be construed.

Finance capitalism refers to the form of present-day capitalism in which most accumulation of financial resources takes place within the financial market. It has been the dominant force in the global economy since the end of the twentieth century. Nowadays, business is mainly based on the trade of financial products such as bonds, stocks, futures, and other derivatives and on creating new financial instruments. The value of money is detached from concrete, material bases; the value of stocks, for instance, is mostly based on speculation. Whereas trade used to be based on selling manufactured or acquired goods, today it is based on selling money, credit, debt, and bonds. In the old days, profit was pursued in the long run, while nowadays it is more likely that short-term gains are sought.²⁰

Santanen's bank note poetry comments on the vague value of money. In the same way in which the value of money can change rapidly in the financial market due to speculation and the reactions of speculators (Marazzi 2011), the value of a bank note can change if you write poetry on it. However, it is not precisely clear how the value of a note changes when you write a poem on it. The note may become invalid if it is thought to be damaged. Or its value may rise if it is seen as a prized artwork. In this case, the value of the note is based on other things than the material base of the 20 euro note. Moreover, the future value of the bank-note poem is itself speculative: its value as an artwork will be determined by how recognized Santanen will be as an artist and how established the bank-note poem will become.

There is a conceptual element in Santanen's bank note poetry. It is not criminal to tamper with bank notes in the euro zone, at least not in Finland, but the Bank of Finland considers it unethical. There is also resistance and rebellion in Santanen's poems. They comment on the capitalist society in which money is not only a medium of exchange but has almost mythical dimensions, a potential that could be realized in the form of pleasure, happiness, or success. Santanen's poems criticize this way of thinking by suggesting that even if we project our emotions, dreams, and hopes onto money, money itself has no emotions and will never reply.

POETICS AND POLITICS OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY FINNISH EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

Twenty-first-century Finnish experimental poetry absorbs influences and inspiration from international trends but also formulates its own poetic principles. Contemporary poetry deals with timely questions concerning Finnish society and the Finnish way of life, although not to the exclusion of other themes. As I see it, innovative ways of using (found) language and found material (bank notes) open up a playful space where language is used for both poetic and political purposes.

The poems have also proven themselves interesting from the viewpoint of spatiality. The examined poems merge private and public spaces in a multitude of ways. Intimate confessions made by individuals on the internet have been used as poetic raw material in Kokko and Heikkinen, being turned into art that is both conceptual and documentary. In Santanen, public and private spaces intermingle when bank notes are used as a platform for poetry that speaks about the emotions humans have about money. The play with the borders of private and public in poetry makes visible the layered structures of reality.

There is also a multitude of emotions in the poems discussed in this chapter. Kokko's and Heikkinen's poems deal with negative emotions expressed by discontented speakers, while Santanen's poems adopt the conventions of love talk in an ironic way. These emotions are closely connected to the topics the poems address. The poems aim at shaking or disturbing readers, provoking them to think about certain aspects of our way of life. There are, however, humorous aspects to the poems as well. The excessive and repetitive form of *Varjofinlandia* is grating but also amusing, and the excessive emotional outpourings in Heikkinen's poem are hilarious and stupefying at the same time. Santanen's humor is based on the conceptual idea of writing poems on bank notes and on the play with the notions of you and I in a poem.

What, then, would be the political message? In the context of late modernity, the poems seem to take a stand on several issues typical of present-day Finnish society and culture. First, there are the different forms of malaise dealt with in the poems, such as depression and eating disorders that are alarmingly common in Finnish society. Secondly, the poems also criticize the Finnish welfare society and capitalism.

Kokko's and Heikkinen's poems can be read as a playful, modified, and amplified testimony of the downsides of living in twenty-first-century

Finnish society. The speakers of the poems are more or less alienated, and the fact that they talk about their issues on the internet makes one think of loneliness. The viewpoint of Santanen's poems is slightly different because they are closely connected to the economic or financial system that we live in. Under the somewhat cheerful or playful surface of the poems, there is an important and profound message to be found. Santanen's poems question the central role we have given to money in our late modern culture. The poems point out that as such, money is empty and can offer no meaning for life.²¹

NOTES

1. The quote is from the poem "Always the same thing" (Heikkinen 2013, 81), from the "Fatty XL" series. The first poem of the series will be discussed in this chapter along with other poems. The misspelling is deliberate.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "poetics."
3. McHale uses the term himself, as does Paul Hoover in *Postmodern American Poetry* (2013).
4. In psychology, the concept of emotion refers to certain conscious sentiments, although the exact number of them varies in different theories. According to Suzanne Keen (2011, 6), a literary scholar who focuses on emotions in her work, there are seven primary emotions (anger, sadness, fear, surprise, disgust, contempt, and happiness) and eight secondary emotions (empathy, compassion, shame, embarrassment, envy, guilt, hatred, and comfort in belonging).
 In addition, the concept of emotion often implies the idea of narrativity; the individual who experiences an emotion knows the reason that has caused it (see Altieri 2003, 2–4). The psychology-based definition with its limited number of strictly defined emotions narrows the scope of the concept too much, which is why I prefer not to use it here. The definition provided by Sara Ahmed (2004), for instance, is broader and more flexible.
5. According to Jameson, the feelings of a subject in modernism were often related to alienation and anxiety, as in Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893).
6. See McHale 2004; Silliman 1987; Lehto 2005. The New Sentence technique is a poetic technique invented by Ron Silliman (1987). In this technique a poem is created by combining phrases that have been found from different sources, thus generating a new unity.
7. In addition to the Finlandia Prize, there is also the *Varjofinlandia* ("Shadow Finlandia") award. The Helsinki-based (academic) bookstore Akateeminen

kirjakauppa gives the prize every year to the book that has sold the most in the store. In relation to these awards, the name *Varjofinlandia* can be read as ironic; Kokko’s work could never have become a bestseller.

8. In one passage the speaker says “Peniksessäni on mustelma” (“There is a bruise on my penis”), but in another “Tällaisina hetkinä minä kiitän valitseeva sukupuolijärjestelmää, jossa saan olla heikko ja herkkä ja avuton” (“In moments like this I am thankful for the prevailing gender system in which I am allowed to be weak and sensitive and helpless”), which seems to refer to a female speaker.
9. Other Finnish poets, too, have dealt with mental issues in their poems. Harry Salmenniemi’s *Texas, sakset* (2010, “Texas, scissors”), for instance, discusses mental problems and medicalization, among other things.
10. See Mustosmäki et al. 2016, 13; Rikala 2013, 17–18; Jakonen 2015, 110–13.
11. There are, however, some comical details in *Varjofinlandia*, for example when the speaker says that he/she is so distressed that his/her teeth are numb (Kokko 2005, 25).
12. Sullivan brings this out in his ironic essay “My Problems with Flarf,” which is composed of other people’s critical stances toward flarf.
13. The poems were originally published in Finnish in a collection titled *Täytetyn eläimen lämpö* (2009), and some of them have been published as English translations in *The Warmth of the Taxidermied Animal* (2013).
14. Although the poem quite obviously replicates written internet language, I still use the conventional terms “speaker” and “speaking I.”
15. The language of these poems deviates not only from the standard language but also from more traditional poetic language. It foregrounds certain linguistic elements, for example, features of internet language that are unlikely in a poem. One could even say that the language of “On Par with Whales” parodies the presumptions of foregrounding poetic language by transforming the informal internet language into poetry.
16. For stereotypical views on working-class women, see Skeggs (2004, 100–5).
17. There are also bank-note poems in Santanen’s latest collection *Yleisö* (“Public”), published in 2017. They deal with capitalism, but also with questions of nationality, civil rights, and religion. The collection was published after this chapter had been written, and hence its poems are not discussed here.
18. In the anthology, the poems have been published as scanned black-and-white images. In addition to them, Santanen has issued bank-note poems by means of YouTube (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfpRZc29VFY>). Together with Tatu Pohjavirta, Santanen has also

- made another video of the bank-note poems for the Kipinä art exhibition (held in Fiskars, Finland, in 2013): <https://vimeo.com/67806791>.
19. The poems also deal with other unwanted consequences of present-day capitalism, such as unemployment.
 20. Marazzi 2011, 2015; Ahokas and Holappa 2014, 127–31; Kocka 2016, 110–18. Ahokas and Holappa call the current phase of capitalism (beginning from the 1960s) “money manager capitalism,” linking it to finance capitalism.
 21. The chapter was written as a part of “The Literary in Life” project (285144), funded by the Academy of Finland.

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