MEMORY AS A SOCIAL AND DISCURSIVE PRACTICE IN MONUMENTS

A case study of the Tapio Rautavaara Monument.

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Monuments are protagonists in many historical narratives. They “tell” fascinating stories of past times and past heroes and “advise” us to commemorate and reminisce. But who is actually doing the telling and to whom? How are the stories formed? In monuments the past and present, memory and history, meet in a complex way and form a structure of meanings reflecting the narratives and values of the so-called imagined community. Discursive and narrative practices play a crucial role in the formation and production of the meanings of monuments.

Remembrance is the main function of monuments. Without the memorial purpose the whole concept of the monument loses its meaning. Monuments also serve many other functions, such as ideological, political (national and regional) and aesthetic. These other functions of monuments are closely connected to remembrance and commemoration. Ideological and political functions especially are inseparable from the memorial aspects of monuments: remembering is an ideological and political practice. Even the aesthetic is related to remembrance in monuments. To carry the memory well means that the form of the monument must meet one's concept of good art. It is easier to link the commemorative function to the monument if its form is accepted and

understood as a proper sculpture or a good work of art. Concepts of good art may vary, but the idea of good art as the bearer of memory in a proper way seems to be common.

Several writers consider remembering as a socially structured practice.¹ This aspect of memory derives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sociological theories. According to this view remembrance and commemoration are formed in social interaction, in talk and performances. This aspect of the formation of memories is particularly interesting in researching monuments, which are clear examples of social and discursive meaning-making processes. The focus lies not only in questions: who is remembering, why and how does the commemoration occur, but also how

30 a remembered person or event, a remembering community and its identity are discursively produced.

In this paper I will examine how memory is bound to monuments as a social and discursive practice. I will illuminate this practice through a case study of a monument to the Finnish singer, athlete and actor Tapio Rautavaara (1915–1979). His monument, called *Dream of a Wanderer* (fi. *Kulkurin uni*), was raised in the year 2000 in the residential area of Oulunkylä in Helsinki, where Rautavaara lived most of his life. In the monument the past and present, individual and collective, memory and history, intertwine to form a discursive texture.

PROBLEMATISING INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In projects to erect monuments the general public or a specific community is encouraged to recall a past event or a person. Many newspaper articles are written during such projects about the importance of the memory and the meaning of elevating the person or event from oblivion into the minds of members of the community. In these texts those who are raising the monument urge the public to engage in individual commemoration, to meet the monument with subjective reminiscences and to relate it to their personal memories of the particular person or event. What does individual reminiscing mean in terms of monuments? If remembering is considered a social practice, the idea of the 'individual memory' and 'subjective commemoration' will also have some sort of social content.

The social understanding of individual memory was formulated as early as in the sociological texts of Emil Durkheim and Maurice

Halbwachs. They saw that humans are always social beings and they remember and forget according to the memory frames and practices of the group to which they belong. These frames are defined by a culture and contexts of cultural participation. Individuals are members of a variety of such contexts which is why they remember according to several social frames, which emphasise different aspects of the experienced reality.²

Seeing memory as this kind of social practice still allowed some space for the concept of individual reminiscence. In fact, for a long time individual and collective were kept as separate concepts in research into memory.³ In many texts this separation is still maintained.

In recent studies of memory in the field of cultural psychology many writers have located memory in culture and stressed memory as a cultural practice.⁴ In this cultural understanding of memory, the separation of the individual or personal memory and the collective memory is seen as unnecessary. Considering the manifold layers of the cultural fabric that weaves together individual, group and society, the idea and category of an isolated and autonomous individual becomes meaningless, as Jens Brockmeier writes.⁵ Understanding the individual and collective memory as a whole means that the earlier categories of individual and collective, private and public, are now seen in continuous interaction, interplay and mutual dependence, fusion and unity. Remembering and forgetting are also understood as interdependent features of one solid phenomenon. Seeing forgetting as being closely connected to remembering is not a radically new aspect, but several writers in recent years have emphasised the importance of forgetting in memory-making. Forgetting and modifying a given memory's intention or implication is as much

a part of memory-making as is remembering.⁶

If we reject concepts of the individual and collective memory, what should we then call the practise of reminiscence? In texts different concepts seem to be used in explaining memory practice. Different concepts are used to describe similar acts but on the other hand, similar concepts might be given different meanings according to the research aspect. Brockmeier, who emphasises the interplay of the individual and the collective in memory-making, uses a concept of cultural memory.⁷ Another concept, which refers to a combination of the individual and the collective, is the concept of social memory, as used e.g. by Peter Burke.⁸ However, the concept of social memory is sometimes used in opposition to individual memory (e.g. in some of Brockmeier's texts).⁹ Concepts of historical memory and collective memory explain memory more clearly as the opposite of individual or personal memory. The concept of collective memory was formulated by Durkheim and as Adrian Forty writes "since Durkheim [...] there has been a tendency to confuse the memory of the individual with the memory of societies".¹⁰ It seems that the idea of separate categories of individual and collective remembering and forgetting exist strongly, especially in historians' studies of memory.¹¹ Concepts of a public memory and a popular memory are more difficult to fit into a juxtaposition of individual and collective or into the combining concept of cultural memory. For John Bodnar the public memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions. It is understood as a body of beliefs and ideas about the past and as a site of contest between competing voices, a site that is created in a variety of public forums, where various parties representing various parts of society exchange views about

beliefs, ideas and the past.¹² The concept of popular memory has been used by oral historians to refer to commonly held representations found in the oral accounts people give of past events, traditions, customs and social practices.¹³ These various concepts of memory form dialogical relationships. The formation of the concepts also has a historical dimension.

In this paper I understand memory as the concept of cultural memory, referring to the complex structure of the memory-making process. In monuments both aspects of memory, individual and collective, seem to be present simultaneously and are intertwined so tightly that it is difficult to distinguish and separate them. The concept of cultural memory not only mixes the traditional categories of memory, it also emphasises a mixture of experiences of the past and present. Brockmeier has described memory as a movement within a cultural discourse that continuously combines and fuses the now and then, the here and there.¹⁴ Seeing the past and present in a changing interplay in the memory-making process is a fruitful starting point when observing monuments. The meaning-making of monuments combines: historical and fictive stories (texts or pictures etc.), which have been told about a remembered person or event, stories that comment or interpret these historical or fictive stories, memories of people who experienced the event themselves or met the deceased personally, and memories which have been formed from the bases of all of these written or oral stories. Memories transform easily into stories and stories feed memories.

If the memory and remembering is located in culture, the observation of this phenomenon can be carried out by and through other cultural practices: narrative and discourse.¹⁵ Narrative is crucial among memory practices: me-

32 memory practices are narrative practices, as Brockmeier emphasises.¹⁶ In researching monuments it is clear that meanings do not just originate from the monument as a sculpture: meanings are produced in texts, in narratives and discourses. If the memory is understood as a narrative practice, it can be said that texts and discourses influence how the past is remembered. David Middleton and Derek Edwards, who have studied memory as a discursive practice, state that the media and their concomitant modes of representation and discourse, constrain or shape what can and cannot be thought, said, written and remembered.¹⁷

The remembrance, forgetting and narrative are elements in the creation of power. 'Wrong' memories or narratives may seem as a threat in the eyes of committee members, who are raising a monument to exalt the 'right' memories and interpretations of the past. 'Wrong' memories might undermine the importance and validity of commemoration.¹⁸ It would be ideal for the memory activators, if varying interpretations could be drawn within the correctness of the one 'big narrative'. As Shawn Rowe, James Wertsch and Tatyana Kosyaeva put it: the "linking of one's life story to some overarching narrative of a collective is perhaps the dream of leaders of collectives who wish to create committed, loyal members of the 'imagined community'".¹⁹ In the case of the Tapio Rautavaara Monument, the unifying elements of an 'imagined community'²⁰ were Finnish popular traditional music (fi. *iskelmä*, sw. *schlager*) and a proud sports tradition.

REMEMBERING A FINNISH "JAVELIN AND TROUBADOUR HERO" AND A "LEGEND OF SPORTS AND ENTERTAINER"²¹

The faster Western societies change in late and post-modern times and traditions, religion and ethics lose their influence, the more energy flows into public practices, institutions and the establishment of artefacts that conjure up cultural memories.²² This can also be perceived in the production of monuments in Finland: new monuments are constantly being raised. Reminiscing and remembering cannot be properly understood without taking into account the social functions they fulfil.²³ What is this function in the Tapio Rautavaara Monument? Pierre Nora states, that the need for memory is a need for history.²⁴ Is the need for memory in the case of the Rautavaara Monument the need to raise the popular singer and entertainer into the category of official and 'serious' cultural heroes? The Rautavaara Monument reflects well the so-called memory crisis in Western cultures.²⁵ In the 1990s many popular heroes, such as well-known athletes, or even 'antiheroes' were given a monument in Finland or were the subject of discussions about a monument. Getting a monument no longer means that the deceased has been institutionalised as a great man, or vice versa; the category of so called great men has broken open or has changed.

The Tapio Rautavaara Monument project was started by the Tapio Rautavaara Society, with Rautavaara's daughter as chair. The Society wanted to honour Rautavaara's multifaceted career and life's work with a figurative sculpture which should be easy to recognise as him. The Society looked for an artist for a while before deciding on the Finnish artist Veikko

Veikko Myller, Dream of a Wanderer (fi. Kulkurin uni), the Tapio Rautavaara Monument, 2000, in Helsinki. Bronze (the figure 3 m, the swan 1,6 m). Photo TL.

Myller (b. 1951). His sketch satisfied the Society, and he was commissioned to begin work on the sculpture while the Society concentrated on raising money by organising various events, seeking donations and later by selling miniature models of the monument. The finished monument was unveiled on Tapio's name's day (18.6.) in a celebration, at which many popular singers of *iskelmä* music performed songs recorded by Rautavaara. After the celebrations at the monument festivities continued in Rautavaara's favourite restaurant with a karaoke contest with Rautavaara's songs.

What aspect of Rautavaara does the monu-

ment represent? The monument consists of three elements: a figure of Rautavaara wearing a jogging suit jacket and playing the guitar, a swan standing in front of the figure, and a plaque next to the figure and the swan with some facts about the sculpture on one side and a short presentation of Rautavaara on the other. According to this presentation Rautavaara was an athlete, singer, entertainer and movie actor. His greatest sporting achievements are listed, an Olympic gold medal javelin in 1948 and a world championship team gold medal in archery in 1958. The sculpture combines Rautavaara as an athlete and a singer. He is wearing

Veikko Myller, Dream of a Wanderer (fi. Kulkurin uni), the Tapio Rautavaara Monument, 2000, in Helsinki. Bronze (the figure 3 m). A close-up of the figure. Photo TL.

the popular jogging suit jacket which Finnish athletes used in the London Olympic Games in 1948 and which has become for Finns a sort of symbol of Finnish sport and even of Finnishness. On the front of the blue and white jogging suit jacket there is the text *Suomi* (Finland).

The guitar strongly symbolizes Rautavaara and his music. He was one of the most famous touring singers in Finland after the war, performing in dances and at evening shows with other artists. Rautavaara's success as a singer coincided with an increase in the popularity of Finnish traditional dance-floor culture in the 1950s. Rautavaara's role as a singer unifies his roles as actor and entertainer: his role in films

and evening shows was often to entertain others by playing the guitar and singing. Most of the songs Rautavaara performed were short stories about various human destinies, lives and memories of past times, or exuberant tales of the carefree life. In many songs the free and easygoing life of a wanderer is seen in a romantic and idealized light. One of Rautavaara's most popular songs is called *A Wanderer and a Swan* (fi. *Kulkuri ja joutsen*), in which the narrator, who calls himself a wanderer, sees a dream of a swan with whom he gets the chance to fly and wonder at the beauty of the countryside below. After the dream the narrator hopes to see the swan one more time. In the Rautavaara Monument this encounter is

made visible. The narrator who, in the monument, has become one with the real Rautavaara, meets the swan of the dream. Different time and reality levels fuse: a guitar playing athlete who performed in the 1948 Olympic Games, a popular singer, a narrator of songs and the myth of Rautavaara as a wanderer himself all come together. The swan, which is the Finnish national bird (whooper swan, lat. *Cygnus cygnus*), refers not only to Rautavaara's songs but also to the Finnish countryside, the fatherland and Finnishness.

The past is brought to the present in the Rautavaara Monument in several ways. This past is victorious and successful, it boasts sports victories and good music. There is a strong sense of nostalgia in the monument to the popular singer, whose live audience grows older at the same time as the whole Finnish traditional dance-floor culture has changed. In the late 1960s other forms of entertainment and music replaced evening shows and traditional dancing, and new sensational tabloids dismantled old myths of singer heroes.²⁶ The traditional dance-floor culture and *iskelmä* music experienced a revival in the 90s alongside new TV and radio programmes concentrating on traditional Finnish popular music, the appearance of new popular *iskelmä* singers and the huge success of the tango singing contest organised annually in Seinäjoki, in Ostrobothnia. As Walter Benjamin writes, cultural phenomena take on a new sense of importance and beauty when they are coming to an end.²⁷ When the Finnish traditions of the 50s and 60s were threatening to fade away, they were kept alive by nostalgia, remembering and revitalising.

The same phenomenon can be observed in Finnish movies of the late 1990s. The long-suffering Finnish film industry experienced a

huge boom at the end of the 90s. In most of the films which were good box-office successes, events were set in the countryside and in Finland's recent historical past. Several films told the story of a popular Finnish singer from past decades. In 1999 Timo Koivusalo's film *The Swan and the Wanderer* (fi. *Kulkuri ja joutsen*) was shown in the cinemas. The film tells the story of Tapio Rautavaara and other entertainers of the 50s and 60s. The atmosphere in the film is very nostalgic. The Tapio Rautavaara Society's monument project and Koivusalo's film have interesting parallels: they 'advertised' each other and supported the common aims of commemorating and remembering Rautavaara at the same time strengthening the myth of Rautavaara as a free and talented wanderer hero, who saw the whole spectrum of life in his journeys. The director, Koivusalo, emphasised this aspect of Rautavaara in his speech at the unveiling ceremony.

Remembering seems itself a phenomenon which characterises Rautavaara as a person. In the film Rautavaara is several times represented recalling past times. As many of his songs deal with memories and reminiscences from the past, the narrator in the songs and Rautavaara often become one. Reminiscence is in fact related inseparably to one genre of Finnish *iskelmä* music where the focus is on an individual who is recalling events and emotions from the recent past.²⁸ Is the Rautavaara Monument actually a picture of memory, a picture, where different aspects of a cultural memory of the entertainer flash into visibility at the same time?

The pose in the Rautavaara Monument may awaken memories among those who followed the 1948 London Olympic Games and later Rautavaara's career as a singer and entertainer. Rautavaara had a guitar with him in London and there are many press and fan photos where

he is playing the guitar dressed in the *Suomi* jogging suit. The guitar playing Rautavaara is, of course, printed on many tour posters and fan pictures. It is not only nostalgia, but also familiarity that determines interpretations of the monument. It is no wonder that after the unveiling of the monument, a newspaper wrote: "Now the wanderer has returned home from a long tour".²⁹

The cultural hero has been brought to his

rightful place strengthening the value and appreciation of the local community.³⁰

Meanings of the monument are also produced in narratives told in newspapers, magazines and books. The hero story of Rautavaara as a poor, sick boy from modest circumstances who achieves unexpected success through determination, hard work and luck, was already formed in texts after the winning of the gold medal in 1948.³¹ In this story the poor and

Tapio Rautavaara plays the guitar in the London Olympic Games in 1948. Similar photos were published in newspapers, magazines and fan pictures. Photo: Suomen Urheilumuseo. (left).

Tapio Rautavaara performing on tour in Varkaus in 1978, a year before he died. The repetitive use of this kind of picture constitutes the common imagery of Rautavaara as a performing artist. Photo: Helge Heinonen, Suomen Urheilumuseo. (right).

modest win, and hard work and a humble character are rewarded in the end. The narrative of “a noble athlete”³² and “one of the last athletes permeated by a pure Olympic ideal”³³ was also repeated in newspapers during the discussion about the monument. Apart from the narrative of a sports hero, the discussions produce a narrative of a charming “troubadour hero”,³⁴ loved by the whole nation. This narrative is more sentimental: the troubadour is a

wanderer, who amuses others, but is himself a “lonely vagabond”,³⁵ In the end a vagabond, who “has an eternal place in the heart of the Finnish nation”,³⁶ is granted official thanks (a monument) and becomes a legend. The vagabond has stopped touring and returned home, in the form of a monument. Thus the monument produces a home-coming narrative or a narrative of reunion. The hardness of the touring lifestyle, practice, planning, boredom,

38 heavy drinking or homesickness are not a part of any of these narratives. Those aspects are forgotten.

The narrative repeats the discourse of freedom: the wanderer is led by his heart but still takes responsibility for himself. "The image of the real wanderer does not include being a social bum",³⁷ as one magazine wrote. In a way, the role of Rautavaara as an honest, humble, carefree and child loving wanderer, is reminiscent of the tramp portrayed by Charlie Chaplin. These wanderer roles differ strongly as regards their emphasis on manliness. The idea of freedom and independence seems to be part of a masculine discourse of Rautavaara. Other characteristics that are related to this discourse, are notions of Rautavaara's "deep manly voice",³⁸ "roughly tender manliness",³⁹ his handsomeness, honesty and a combination of deeds (sport) and emotions (singing). "Also tender emotions are accepted from a hero",⁴⁰ but even "in the role of a poet Rautavaara stays within the measures of a man".⁴¹

FORMING MEMORIES AND IDENTITIES

Brockmeier writes that that which binds individuals together into a cultural community is a world view, rooted in a set of social rules and values, as well as in the shared memory of a commonly inhabited and similarly experienced past. It forms a cultural sense of belonging, which at the same time binds individuals into a culture and the culture into the individual's mind.⁴² This sense of belonging seems to approach the sense of identity. Social rules and values and shared memories are essential in the formation of the identity and integrity of a community.⁴³ Or as George Iggers writes, collective memory and collective identity largely coincide.⁴⁴ What kind of community or who-

se identity is the Rautavaara Monument serving?

The national emphasis is clearly visible in the monument and easily interpreted from discussions about it. One could state that the monument underlines certain Finnish icons, a swan and the *Suomi* jogging suit, and refers to the national clichés of *iskelmä* music and Finns as a sporting nation, particularly successful in javelin throwing. The figure of Rautavaara beside a swan refers to the Finnish countryside. The ideal setting for the traditional Finnish dance-floor culture is the countryside. Dancing often takes place near a lake with birch trees, in the light of a summer evening. Nature is also typically present in *iskelmä* music, where nature and emotions are intertwined: emotions are described in terms of different natural phenomena.⁴⁵ In the aims of the Tapio Rautavaara Society and in discussions in the newspapers, the monument is endowed with the meaning that it praises the national character and formulates true Finnishness. The past, which is remembered, is seen as the past shared by all Finns, and they are expected to recognise the figure in the monument and know Rautavaara's songs and sporting achievements. The past, connected to Rautavaara, is seen as a base of common experience, from which the sense of cultural belonging, the Finnish identity is inherited. In fact, this past is shared only by a certain segment of the Finnish people. Yet in discourse it was made the element which unified Finns. Seeing itself as a representative of the nation, the Society could write after the unveiling that "at last the Finnish nation had got the monument it had been waiting for".⁴⁶

According to Hall, positioning is the core of cultural identities. Identity is not just one single unifying experience, but is produced within the discourses of history and culture by taking

positions.⁴⁷ In the case of the Rautavaara Monument, the national positioning described above combines with a strong local discourse. Placing the monument in Oulunkylä, where Rautavaara lived most of his life, was supported by the Helsinki Art Museum, for example, because “Oulunkylä (...) deserves a monument of its own, that creates a strong local identity”.⁴⁸ In some newspapers Rautavaara was also praised as a “son of our village”.⁴⁹ His memory was emphasised in many local practices: Rautavaara sightseeing tours and dances were organised and a café next to the monument started to serve Rautavaara pastries. The figure in the monument is annually crowned with a large hat on Tapio’s day, a reference to Rautavaara’s popular song *Grandfather’s Straw Hat* (fi. *Isoisän olkihattu*). Even though the monument and Rautavaara are used to form locality and a local identity, there is not just one local identity in a community, but many different local identities.

FROM REMINISCING TO MAKING HISTORY

The cultural memory of a community may be distributed unequally in the minds of its members, but this distributed memory can be brought together at moments such as ritual performances.⁵⁰ Raising a monument is a ritual, which visualizes the cultural memory of a community or at least the ‘official’ or dominant picture of it. Even more effective in ensuring things are remembered, are periodical organised rituals or festivities. Durkheim emphasised that in order to retain the collective memory of some great person or event, society must set aside a time for people to periodically assemble and to contemplate the common things they cherish and wish to preserve.⁵¹ But

the more practices, performances and objects are used in the remembering, the more the remembering is transformed into the making of history. Visible, public traces of memory may easily become part of written history.

Nora states that with the appearance of the trace, we leave the realm of true memory and enter that of history.⁵² For Nora memory and history are in many respect conflicting concepts. Commemoration is needed to ensure certain things are remembered, are present in the community, things that would otherwise disappear and be forgotten. Nora uses the concept of *lieu de mémoire* to refer to sites, objects and phenomena which are symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of a community.⁵³

These *lieux de mémoires* emerge, when moments in history are plucked out of the flow of history and then returned to it.⁵⁴ Even though it is not clear whether Nora by history means the history as past time or history as narration, the idea of the emergence of *lieux de mémoires* is fruitful. As in the case of monuments, history as past time has lived in different memories until it is turned in a monument into a visible object and into a history as a narration. Different memories may still be alive, but from now on the monument expresses the official narration of history dominating the variety of memories, not only by hindering other types of narratives from being heard, but also by influencing the formation of memories.

It would probably be an exaggeration to apply Nora’s concept to the Rautavaara Monument.⁵⁵ However, the monument was produced discursively as a concrete place of reminiscence, a “common meeting place for residents of Oulunkylä”,⁵⁶ where “one can rest on a bench and, say, remember Tapio’s songs loved by many”,⁵⁷ but also as an abstract space where something very Finnish is crystallised.

40 CONCLUSIONS

The Tapio Rautavaara Monument can be interpreted as an expression of cultural memory. Cultural memory becomes concrete in texts, performances, narratives and interpretations of these: that is, in various social and discursive practises. In the case of the Rautavaara Monument, the cultural memory makes visible a certain segment of the past and the deceased: this past is defined by Rautavaara's sporting achievements and good traditional Finnish music. Cultural memory emphasises some aspects of the past while others are forgotten. Reminiscing is closely related to producing identities. The Rautavaara Monument repeats several clichés of national imagery and makes nostalgic interpretations easy. Referring to a certain interpretation of national identity the monument also forms local identity. Even though the picture or idea of the past is a product formed in discourses, performances and social practises, it would be over-simplifying to think that the reality or true historical events and the past produced in social practises are two distinguishable things, of which the former is somehow more genuine and valuable. The past produced in social practices is real and true for those who produce it and those who believe it.

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