

♦ Thoughts on the work *maisema, muistuma, enne* (landscape, reminiscence, omen)

When I began working on this piece together with choreographer and visual artist Anne Naukkarinen, the first mystery I faced was the translation of the script into music. I had previously composed many vocal works, with singing and lyrics, but how could text be conveyed when it is absent from the performance itself?

What angle could one find, or how could it even be possible?

Text, especially the text of this work, contains immense amounts of information and meaning. Music, by contrast, is usually only capable of communicating very simple, fundamental meanings or learned, shared topoi. Topoi are like musical archetypes: a fanfare, an elegy, dances like the waltz or polka, and so forth. They are types of musical language to which we strongly attach meanings, recognizable enough that we can detect those meanings even across different musical contexts.

Yet music's strength, I believe, lies in its ability to convey affects, feelings and sensations, even when precise meanings remain more ambiguous than in text. I think that translating these family stories into music in a way also preserves them for all times, languages and cultures. It makes them universal, archived. Perhaps the ambivalence, the deliberate uncertainty of this translation process, makes touching and being touched more widely possible.

The script collected by Anne Naukkarinen is full of affect, memories, wishes, regrets, even fears. Each contributor gave something very intimate. Together, the stories of Anne, Milja, Helena and Kerttu form a fragmented yet recognizable image of a family. I found many parallels to my own family, hidden relationships and emotions between the lines. Our families are very different, yet many families share certain traits and dynamics. When the work was finished, I felt as though I knew not only Anne but also all the others, just a little, even though what I truly know is the script itself, these particular stories.

For me, too, hometown and family have always been close and important. During the composition process, I encountered sadness about Eastern Finland as a whole, thinning out, aging and changing, perhaps also about its unchanging parts.

Last summer, driving toward Kerttu's house, which we visited with Anne and the curator of the work, Riikka Thitz, I saw dozens of detached houses along the roads, some inhabited, some already empty. I ponder the same thing when traveling by train: who lives in all these houses, are they happy, are they lonely? I wondered what would happen to my parents' house, 130 kilometers away, and what would remain of them, of me, of us after 130 years. Archiving began to feel both good and necessary.

Archiving is fascinating because it can both filter out information and add to it. False memories, for example. In interviews, the interviewer's methods and questions shape what gets written down. Taking a photograph defines what is visible and what is not. What is blurred, what stands clear. Is the dark shape at the edge of the picture a cat or a bucket. Drawing a picture filters reality through the artist's hand. What was ever truly real? Often only the recorder, the archiver knows. Yet they are always partial, unconscious choices cannot all be accounted for. Archiving is always incomplete and subjective, and that is what makes it interesting.

In this piece I used many archiving techniques as compositional methods. I was interested in how memories distort, color and transform, and how photographs, often considered the most truthful form of documentation, are in fact full of errors and oddities. Part of this work was composed by writing a basic musical material lasting, say, thirty seconds, then rewriting it from memory every day.

I followed the principle of focusing as little as possible on whether my new version matched the original, and instead simply wrote what felt like the same. I deliberately allowed meanings to accumulate, and to be filtered away. Comparing and mixing different versions became raw material for the composition.

Another key technique was photography. I photographed the notated material I was composing, intentionally introducing glitches. For example, when photographing notation on my computer screen, I would move the notes mid shot so the image contained multiple overlapping layers. I then transcribed these photographs as precisely as possible back into notation and used them as material. In this way the work contains the feeling of the same material, the same idea or thought, reappearing at different times, in different places, for different people. Something persistent, showing itself in different forms. Conversely, some materials appear only once, but the form in which they appear is itself a processed version, perhaps the third iteration of the photo transcription cycle. Even some musical ideas exist only in their archived form, just as the original family stories cannot truly be captured.

I am at an age where I am building my own life. Piece by piece it feels more my own and less shaped by society's expectations. In the countryside, where I come from, it feels easier to live a life of one's own and to make one's own choices. At least, one must often make more of them.

It is easy to move to a mass produced city apartment filled with Ikea furniture and live without truly choosing much at all. In the old family house every choice is visible, those made out of necessity and those freely taken. Being there feels like examining a life, planted trees, laid stones, mown grass, collected objects. There is something tightly woven, so much self built and self shaped that every part holds the network together. Life is there!

There is something similar in composition. Certain things come from the spine, they do not need to be consciously chosen. Yet the content must be weighed carefully and stretched across the entire work so it does not loosen. Every part must hold together so that every gesture belongs to the piece and strengthens it. Everything must be chosen.

When I began composing this piece, I had little, just the script that Anne had gathered, some knowledge of modified bits of the text, and memories from the artistic team's visits to Kerttu's house. Often, when composing, I receive a strong initial image that grows in the subconscious until it demands to be realized. For this piece, the image was an upward reaching figure of a thick tree branch, or perhaps a broken trunk, maybe at the bottom of a lake, or half on the shore, whose gradually thinning spine spreads into branches and finally disappears into the whiteness of the paper. This figure, which recurs around Kerttu's house and the shores of Pappilanlahti close to it, I began to translate into music, an ancient song. The ancient song moves slowly, steadily upward, dipping downward only to climb again.

It leads, and at the same time marks vanishings and arrivals, giving the strongest feeling together with the other tones.

One motivation for using string instruments was that, like the family itself, they are different in type, sound and size, each equally valuable, each with a distinct voice. Strings are also among the oldest instruments, played and composed for over centuries. The rocks and landscapes of the Saimaa region may have looked the same for millennia. I wondered what music, what vibrations were once released by strings 200 or 300 years ago, when the whole area was far emptier and wilder than now.

Though less than before, nature still abounds there. My music often uses micro intervals, pitches smaller than the steps of the piano. Combining these intervals in certain ways causes instruments and the air itself to react, producing new combination tones beyond the ones played. That feels magical to me, the impression of a new sound born from relationships among others. There is great power in that.

One of these intervals is the natural seventh from the overtone series, one of the most beautiful to me. Because the overtone series is a natural phenomenon present everywhere and in every human made instrument, it connects this piece to reality. Through it, it is as if nature itself could vibrate within this music and create further wonders around us.