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The Socio-Cultural Conditions of the Avant-Gardes in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s

Stefan Nygård

Abstract
As a geopolitically strategic and newly independent country recovering from the trauma of a civil war in 1918, the socio-cultural constraints on artistic freedom were considerable in Finland between the wars. Art and literature were to a varying extent connected to political projects on the left or the right. Leading critics played a key role in the negotiations between art, politics and ideology. Few artists or writers, however, adjusted uncritically to external ideological demands. Those that challenged the subordination of art to political agendas or the national imperative often relied on the accumulation of symbolic capital abroad.

With its separation from Russia in the winter of 1917–1918, and a civil war that involved active participation from German and Russian troops, Finland was more directly affected by World War I than its Scandinavian neighbours. The climate of post-war cultural and intellectual debate was partly determined by the violent beginning of independence, in addition to the increasingly totalising claims of the state throughout Europe between the wars. At the time Finland was a semi-democratic country with relative freedom of expression. Socialist parties were only partially tolerated, and approximately 4,000 people were sentenced in the so-called communist trials between 1919 and 1944 (Björne 2007: 498–499). Besides the tension between east and west and "red" and "white", linguistic struggles between Finnish and Swedish added to the disintegrating forces.

In the context of a desperate search for national unity and political stability in what is sometimes called the "white republic", there was limited tolerance for the kind of radical questioning of core values in liberal bourgeois society that was common among the early twentieth-century avant-gardes. Even translations from Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk*, in the journal *Tulenkantajat* (Torch Bearers), led to the imprisonment of the publisher Erkki Vala (Sevänen 1994: 132–134). "Cultural bolshevism" was the most common

accusation directed against avant-garde writers and artists. Some of them did indeed lead a dangerous life owing to the overlapping socialist and avant-garde networks during and after World War I. Insofar as critics tended to underline the entanglement between the politically radical and the artistically formal aspects of avant-garde art, the pervasive fear of bolshevism goes a long way towards explaining the hostility to radical cultural experimentation.

A tension between national pride and awareness of Finland's vulnerable international position as a small, peripheral state was notably present in the cultural debates of the period. The artistic and literary fields were split between demands for art to support national pedagogy, on the one hand, and Europeanising efforts and cultural import, on the other. As before the war, the major cultural capitals such as Paris and Berlin continued to function as structuring symbolic markers for rivalling groups within the domestic cultural field. Copenhagen and Stockholm played the role of "semi-centres", when they were not rejected as part of a nationalist critique of the Scandinavian filter in cultural transfers between Finland and the European continent. While artists, writers and intellectuals continued to travel to both France and Germany, there was a general tendency among the predominantly pro-German intellectual elite to dismiss cultural imports from France.

Art and Politics on the Left – Elmer Diktonius's Critique of Detached Intellectuals

Despite inevitable political constraints, neither cultural radicalism nor the modernist quest for the autonomy of cultural production was absent from inter-war Finland. But freedom of artistic expression had to be constantly negotiated with respect to ideological demands. Cultural institutions were supported by the state as part of the larger project of national integration after the civil war. Artists and writers had, to varying degrees, of course, internalised this project. Leading critics and art historians such as Onni Okkonen and Ludvig Wennervirta were swift to remind those who had not internalised it of their social responsibility. They were not particularly subtle in propagating the submission of art to the national imperative.

The extent to which the critics succeeded in influencing artistic production is an altogether different question. Few artists or writers adjusted uncritically to external ideological demands. Even national

icons such as the composer Jean Sibelius distanced himself from national themes in his last symphonies in the 1920s. And the leading sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen did not necessarily pay attention to the advice of his adviser Onni Okkonen, from 1927 professor of art history in Helsinki (Kallio 1999). In painting, especially in the early part of the 1920s, we can, at least for a limited number of painters, observe a broad spectrum of styles, including cubism, futurism and constructivism. Some of the artists and writers of the Tulenkantajat group were at the time explicitly uninterested in producing art to boost national self-esteem (Saarenheimo 1966: 38–39; Arras 1980: 77). On the other hand, radical writers and artists were constrained by the ideological nature of art discourse and the weak autonomy of the cultural field in relation to national politics. The national-romantic critics regularly dismissed abstract or, as it was sometimes described, "negative" art as unsuitable for national pedagogy. Not only for the nationalist critics but also on the left, the idea of social art was predominant. One of the key figures of literary (and musical) radicalism in the 1920s, Elmer Diktonius, developed his artistic ideals in close dialogue with Otto Ville Kuusinen, the Finnish communist who in the 1950s made it all the way to the Soviet politburo after a long career in the Soviet Union. Kuusinen, who had studied art and philosophy in Helsinki before World War I, showed considerable interest in the role of revolutionary art. He helped Diktonius not only with his first publications but also to gain access to European leftist intellectual networks (see Henrikson in Vol. 1).

Diktonius acknowledged Kuusinen as his mentor, artistically and politically (Diktonius 1995b: 68). In an early expository statement in the underground socialist journal *Sosialistinen Aikakauslehti* ("Taiteilijat ja yhteiskunnallinen kysymys" (1 August 1919), in Diktonius 1995b: 26–27) Diktonius discusses the social role of art and questions the idea of free-floating intellectuals and artists, urging them instead to form an organic link with the people. Ten years later he took a much more pragmatic view of the connection between art and politics. But notwithstanding the stagnation of modern art forms in the totalitarian states of Italy and Russia, he still maintained that "in our times – if ever – art cannot live as a separate, absolute phenomenon". Art for Diktonius was work, and in the end it was perhaps not altogether a bad thing if politics, by recognising the commercial value of art for whatever political goals, could provide a stable source of income for

"cultural workers" like him. To deny these constraints, he seems to suggest, was hypocritical. Moreover, he regretted that, as things stood in Finland at the time (1929), only the bourgeois side took advantage of the propagandistic value of art – notably film and radio – and he encouraged the socialists to do the same ("Taide ja politiikka", *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti* (6 October 1929), in Diktonius 1995b: 132–135).

Diktonius's position was complex, and there were many sides to his intellectual profile beyond his position as a leftist writer. One of them was related to his role as a cosmopolitan looking for international recognition to support his position in Finland (Zilliacus 1997; Donner 2007; Nygård in Vol. 1). Furthermore, he crossed the linguistic barrier between the Finnish-speaking majority and his Swedish-speaking minority by being more involved in the Finnish cultural scene than Swedish-speaking writers in general (see Tidigs in Vol. 1). His struggles in this regard point to a key feature of the Finnish intellectual field and the predicament of the avant-garde within it: the fact that the cultural space was split into parallel linguistic universes weakened the position of those who challenged hegemonic positions in the politicised cultural field between the wars.

Diktonius was certainly not the only writer who collaborated across the linguistic divide, but as a rule trans-linguistic initiatives were not common. They may, to some extent, have been more prominent among the avant-gardes, where many, after all, published in the magazines of the "opposite" group. And some of them clearly demonstrated through their biographies, networks and trajectories the futility of cultural nationalisation. There was, among others, the famous example of Henry Parland, the "Swedish-speaking" Finnish writer (see Stam in Section 5), who originated from the city of Viborg, once described – by Johan Jacob "Jac." Ahrenberg in a letter to the Danish critic Georg Brandes in 1892 (cited in Ekelund 1943: 119) – as Europe's most polyglot city after Constantinople. Having spent part of his childhood in Kiev and St Petersburg, Parland grew up in a multilingual cultural *mélange* of German, Russian, Finnish and Swedish before moving to the suburbs of Helsinki after the revolution. The family maintained relations with eastern Finland, and Henry was surrounded by Russian *émigrés* and political exiles. In Helsinki in the late 1920s he became a member of the Quosego group, which met in the Opris restaurant (see Hertzberg in Section 2). Economically and mentally

exhausted, he then moved to Lithuania to live with his uncle, a philosophy professor in Kaunas, where he was taught French by a Russian-Lithuanian ballet instructor, who in turn was well acquainted with the Russian literary avant-garde (see the epilogue in Rahikainen 2009). Parland's biography may have been particularly varied and transnational, but in a cultural, political and linguistic border territory such as Finland at the turn of the twentieth century we often come across identities that were anything but monocultural. The enduring struggles for cultural uniformity should also be seen in this context.

Apart from the experience of civil war and the resulting strong presence of fascist groups also – and perhaps particularly – within the intellectual field (Ekberg 1991: 162–163, 232–233), the linguistic divide set Finland apart from its Nordic neighbours. Moreover, the relationship between political and cultural radicalism was closer in Finland, where the phenomenon of "cultural radicalism" (*kulturradikalism*) was comparatively weak. Whereas Scandinavian leftist cultural radicals either had established their position as an oppositional counter-power, as in Norway (see Brandtzæg in Section 4 and this Section) and Denmark (see Fjeldsøe and Abildgaard in Section 4), or worked within the parliamentary structures, as in Sweden (Forser 1993: 150–151; see Gustavsson in Section 4), in Finland this form of opposition was effectively sidelined as cultural bolshevism, a concept that became widely used by leading nationalist intellectuals and critics for discarding a wide variety of undesired cultural forms. Communism, as Matti Kurjensaari satirised it in 1937, was "modest progressivism, the word radicalism, radical literary movements, psychoanalysis, the League of Nations, modern literature and a Scandinavian orientation" (from the book *Pidot Tornissa* (1937), quoted in Karjalainen 1990: 33). Finally, unlike the other Nordic countries, the attempts to found a Finnish section of Clarté never succeeded in Finland (Svensson 1979).

Art and Politics on the Right: National Modernity

For the most part, the ideological constraints did not imply a direct politicisation of art. It was more a question of steering the younger generation onto the right (national) path, under the guidance of a variously defined common good. There was a general sense among the academic elite of certain shared, national core values beyond party divergences. In this respect it is justifiable to speak of quite a high

degree of ideological homogeneity, for example, in the field of Finnish art criticism (Kallio 1987: 236). Up to a certain point there was even tolerance for radical cultural forms, at least right-wing populism in Finland reached its peak around 1930.

Modern literary and artistic movements were not categorically rejected, but they needed to be nationalised and to prove their social utility. Leftist and nationalist commentators alike emphasised the social function of art. As opposed to the class-based critique from the left, others sought in culture a higher form of politics beyond class discourse. Finland was no exception to the general distrust of parliamentary politics among the early twentieth-century European intellectuals. As a reaction to rapid democratisation, in society in general and in higher education and the cultural field in particular, as well as to the diminished status and difficult social conditions of European intellectuals in the inter-war period, culture was increasingly seen as a nobler substitute for politics (for Germany, see Lepenies 2006).

Literary and artistic debates were moreover influenced by an ideological discourse that revolved around the "people" and the humble agrarian, Christian values represented by the mythologised peasant. In simplified terms, the distinction between "good" and "bad" art – or in the inter-war vocabulary "healthy" and "unhealthy" art – did not change but was rather sharpened in comparison with the situation before the war. In painting, moderation was recommended in both the use of colour and the choice of subjects, just as topics inspired by the national epos Kalevala still thrived in music. All things Russian were not only avoided, as before the war, but sometimes actively persecuted. Socially and artistically radical writers such as Diktonius were excluded from state funding – in Diktonius's case until the 1930s, when he distanced himself from the political and artistic radicalism of his youth. Avant-garde art was commonly rejected as subjectivist, individualist and unsuitable for national education etc., not least because its representatives were known internationally for their ideological radicalism. Only German expressionism, and to some extent cubism, were accepted (Sevänen 1998: 317). In his article "Kubismista klassisismiin" (From Cubism to Classicism, 1925), the poet Aaro Hellaakoski claimed that the Germans would always remain indifferent

to the French cult of form, and described cubism, futurism and dada as extremes of expressionism (Ahtola-Moorhouse 1996: 122–123).

In Finnish art history, the domestication of expressionism has been portrayed as an example of the way cultural forms were adjusted to the ideal of moderation and to symbolically crucial values such as the agrarian way of life and national landscapes (e.g., Reitala 1990: 234–236). In the writings of Wennervirta and other dominant critics, expressionism had been incorporated into national art by the mid-1920s, and cubism was occasionally accepted. Most other modernising currents were described pejoratively – futurism and dada especially – by the leading critics. Wennervirta claimed in 1925 that the fact that Finnish expressionism remained closer to nature than its equivalents in, for example, Germany or Sweden, spared the Finns from the disruptive extravagances encountered elsewhere: "We are slow and in the field of art, it seems, prone to conservatism" (cited in Levanto 1991: 156). Commenting in the following decade on the internationalist, non-national character of cubism, Wennervirta rated artists according to their ability to move away from cubism (Levanto 1991: 164–165). On the opposite side of the art field, a pro-French and pro-cubist critic such as Heikki Tandefelt dismissed nationalist expressionism and maintained that the task of the critic was to serve rather than steer the direction of art.

In this context it is important to recognise that "the national", as the steering principle of cultural transfers, according to the leading critics, was not a stable standard against which to measure good and bad art. It was rather a constantly renegotiated concept, which was often instrumentalised for the purpose of introducing novelty by labelling it "national". Surrealism, for example, was occasionally positively described as national (see Anttonen 2006: 96; Huusko 2007: 118–122; Karjalainen 1990: 38).

Within the general framework of fostering national unity and combating bolshevism in art as well as politics, freedom of artistic expression was, as mentioned, relative. Harsh criticism was often enough to discourage artists from radical experimentation. Having seen his early exhibition of constructivist paintings thoroughly rejected in Helsinki in 1932, Birger Carlstedt, for example, did not return to non-figurative painting until the 1950s. Upon his return to Finland from Paris, where in 1930–1931 he had come into contact with *art concret,*

Carlstedt exhibited paintings that were described as a mixture of cubism, purism, constructivism and surrealism. He positioned himself as an urban intellectual who despised national romanticism and mocked the grey, nationalised Finnish expressionism for its "shitty colour scale". The critics and the public rejected his own paintings as extravagant and perverse (Vihanta 1987: 50; Kruskopf 1987: 10). Ten years before Carlstedt, the Turku-based painter Edwin Lydén had a similar experience in Helsinki. His abstract paintings were dismissed in the daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (News from Helsinki) as theoretical and imitative works contaminated by the "Jewish-cubist" disease. (Kruskopf 1987: 11–12; Karjalainen 1990: 39); anti-Semitic references were not uncommon in art criticism at the time. Lydén had been inspired by dada, among other things, through Kurt Schwitters, whom he met in Berlin in 1920. After his rejection in Helsinki, Lydén did not exhibit in the capital until 1929.

Painters such as Lydén, Carlstedt and the surrealist Otto Mäkilä did not constitute a group large enough to mobilise a serious avant-garde opposition to challenge the authority exerted by the critics and the art institutions, which remained in the hands of the previous national-romantic generation and academic intellectuals. In a small country where radical artists and writers suffered from a lack of critical mass, the only avant-garde strategy that seems to have had some success was the accumulation of symbolic capital abroad. When Lydén's painting *Tuonela* (Hades) was acquired in 1929 by the National Museum in Stockholm, he was celebrated by the very same critics who seven years earlier had dismissed his abstract paintings as non-figurative nonsense (Arras 1980: 77, 96). Similarly, the Scandinavian reception of the Finnish "November" group in Copenhagen in 1919 significantly contributed to the idea of a successful, particularly Finnish, form of expressionism, and in the canonisation of Tyko Sallinen as the leader of national expressionism. The primitivist grey colour scale of the group matched the image of Finnishness abroad (Reitala 1990: 234; Huusko in Vol. 1).

The dialogue between Finnish and other European cultural movements was to some extent constrained by the implicit or explicit limitations of artistic freedom. Criticism of core national values such as the church, the army, the national anthem, the flag or the winners' account of the civil war was illegal (Björne 1977). Leftist magazines

were terminated, books confiscated, editors imprisoned and theatre performances prohibited (Sevänen 1994: 123–147, 436–439). In the field of modernist theatre, Ella Tompuri's *Vapaa näyttämö* (Free theatre) was persecuted for the sympathy shown by its director towards "the reds" in the civil war. In cinema the avant-garde film club Projektio was closed down by the authorities one year after it opened in 1935 (Mickwitz 1995). On the whole, censorship was effective, but not 100 per cent; leftist criticism of right-wing nationalism was published, for example, in Erkki Vala's magazine *Tulenkantajat* (Sevänen 1994: 132–134; see Kaunonen in Section 5).

Disciplinary measures and institutional factors were thus crucial in delimiting the boundaries of art and literature and in defining what counted as healthy art. The central funding institutions were in the hands of an elite network that, beyond political and aesthetical disagreements, shared the fundamental concern of fostering national unity. In comparison with other Nordic countries, leftist intellectuals were to a much higher extent excluded from the leading journals, funding possibilities and prizes. After the civil war five boards of art had been established in order to supervise the cultural field (literature, theatre, music, art and architecture). The socialists were for the most part, although not entirely, excluded from key positions in these boards and in cultural administration, professional organisations and funding bodies in general. Members of the Swedish-speaking linguistic minority were more successful at keeping their positions in these institutions, despite the fact that criticism of nationalism was more common within this group (Sevänen 1997: 316–321). Moreover, the post-war period witnessed a shift from the dominance of private galleries and the authority of their owners to state and privately supported art galleries such as the Taidehalli (Kunsthalle Helsinki), which opened in 1928 and became an important supporter of modernist painting. Other important modernist institutions were: Vapaa Taidekoulu (the Free School of Painting), established by Maire Gullichsen; the Artek company, founded by Gullichsen with Aino and Alvar Aalto and Nils-Gustav Hahl in 1935 with the task of promoting art, art industry and Aalto's furniture; and finally a society for contemporary art in 1938, founded by some of the same people.

In addition to being potentially illegal in the semi-democratic Finland of the 1920s and 1930s, the symbolic actions of the cultural

avant-gardes challenged the boundaries of cultural tolerance. Certain avant-garde features, such as the performance pieces or anarchic public readings by the Russian and Italian futurists, were virtually absent from the Finnish scene. The carnevalesque nature of such events would undoubtedly have produced a shocking effect. In a country where the use of public space was always very controlled and organised and even public demonstrations transpired in an orderly manner (Alapuro 1997: 25–54), a responsible artist should, the critic Okkonen warned in 1931, stay away from "[u]ncontrolled rowdyism" and "fruitless café politics" (Kallio 1997: 67). A minor exception to this rule was a "whistling concert" staged by the Tulenkantajat group in 1927, for the purpose of disrupting an academic poetry reading in the Old Student House in Helsinki, shouting, among other things, "Down with the young nationalist poets!" The event, which, according to one of the biographers of the group, was possibly the only literary-artistic demonstration of the period, has been described as a mildly shocking late import from Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich a decade earlier (Saarenheimo 1966: 212; Riikonen 2014: 75–76).

Art as National Therapy

Unable to make sense of the civil war of 1918, the intellectuals and educated elite for a long time experienced the war as a betrayal by a category they had been struggling to define since the early nineteenth century: the people. Different measures were taken in the 1920s and 1930s to restore social peace, including a mixture of disciplining and idealising the people, now defined more narrowly by excluding the urban working classes. The academic intellectuals at the University of Helsinki continued to claim their historic role as the spiritual leaders of the people, articulating nostalgic sentiments for a lost past within an "Academic Karelian Society", which was widely supported also in the cultural field. Some actively participated in giving artistic expression to the dream of national unity and greatness, emphasising the country's position as a bulwark against the east. The painter Axel Gallén-Kallela was one of the central figures in the battle against political and cultural bolshevism, which eventually developed into dreams of a "Greater Finland" (e.g., Karjalainen 1990).

Inspired by the fashionable and biologically coloured *Lebensphilosophie*, the nation was depicted as an organic whole, in

which groups and categories had their designated roles. Gallén-Kallela – who was also a prominent designer of national symbols, and who had been adjutant to the war hero General Gustaf Mannerheim in 1919 and chairman of the Finnish academy of art since 1922 – disapproved of peasants abandoning traditional ways of life and taking up painting in the city in search of a comfortable existence. In the context of economic depression and diminishing art markets, these newcomers formed the backbone of the artistic proletariat, portrayed in the novel *Suruttomain seurakunta* (The Congregation of the Carefree, 1921), by Viljo Kojo. Gallén-Kallela, who supported the fascist movements that came close to overthrowing the government, argued that a firm grip on social questions promoted by these movements was needed to purify the art field. Apart from reflecting the ideological orientation of dominant cultural authorities, Erkki Anttonen argues that Gallén-Kallela's fierce criticism gave expression to a defensive stance in the later stages of a generational battle within the art field (Anttonen 2006: 71–73).

Influential critics such as Onni Okkonen (writing in the conservative daily *Uusi Suomi* (The New Finland)), Edward Richter (in *Helsingin Sanomat*) and Ludvig Wennervirta (in the fascist journals *Ajan Suunta* (The Course of the Times) and *Ajan Sana* (The Word of the Times)) continued to stress the social responsibility of art with respect to national pedagogy. They did so not by turning their backs on modern cultural forms, although some of them did suggest that national isolation was to be preferred to poor imitations of international models. In a broader perspective, the question of translating "European modernity" to the Finnish periphery had been a highly politicised question ever since the nationalist philosopher J. V. Snellman in the middle of the nineteenth century outlined a programme for a Finnish people. Universalism in art, wrote Okkonen in *Uusi Suomi* (1929), had always posed a threat to the art of small nations, by providing them with schemes and moulds that they were unable to control (cited in Karjalainen 1990: 34). The key principle was, once again, moderation. Following the latest art trends was encouraged, as long as one took care to avoid the extremes. Wennervirta, nominated as "Future art dictator" in the *Tulenkantajat* magazine (1934) by his ideological opponent Nils-Gustav Hahl, saw great potential in German expressionism for religious and national rejuvenation. Moreover, he emphasised that art should not be too complex but should be intelligible even by uneducated peasants

(see Levanto 1991: 114–115; Karjalainen 1990: 32) His colleague Okkonen, only a few months after the end of the civil war, had outlined a guiding principle for relating art to society: the newly independent country needed a healthy and vital art, which was to be achieved through rebirth, national integration and growth. The fact that this ideological programme persisted throughout the inter-war period does not imply that artistic production would have been anywhere near as unchanging. In fact, as mentioned before, the early 1920s, in particular, saw a surprising degree of stylistic diversity in Finnish painting (Kruskopf 1987: 8; Huusko 2007).

Centres and Peripheries, Nationally and Internationally

With respect to the linguistic and geographical diffusion of avant-garde groups in Finland, eastern Finland (Karelia) continued, as in the preceding period, to play an important role as a cultural border region where modernism thrived in a multicultural and multilingual setting (see Baschmakoff in Vol. 1). The Swedish-speaking cultural section was, on the one hand, almost predisposed to take oppositional cultural positions, as it was over-represented in higher education, increasingly excluded from the project of national unification and included a tradition of "cosmopolitan" intellectuals who went against the grain in nationalist Finland. On the other hand, some of the most prominent nationalist painters and writers also emerged from this group, Axel Gallén-Kallela and the writer Bertel Gripenberg being the most famous examples. The cultural struggles took place predominantly in the capital. Beyond Helsinki, the city of Turku, where the younger generation had more power in the local art institutions than in the capital, was important for avant-garde painting. Artists such as Wäinö Aaltonen, Einari Wehmas and Otto Mäkilä studied in Turku, many of them with Edwin Lydén; the architect Alvar Aalto established his first office there in 1927 (see Pelkonen in Section 1); and the less nationally conservative critics such as Heikko Kokko, Antero Rinne and Lars-Ivar Ringbom wrote in the city's newspapers. It has been said that, while the art scene in Helsinki was more rigid and defined by the authorities (Sakari 2005), the oppositional position of artists from Turku in relaton to both the capital and the Swedish-speaking cultural sector seems to have driven them towards modernism. Lydén, in fact, declared Turku

to be the centre of Finnish modernism (Reitala 1990: 231; Arras 1980: 9).

In the 1920s, in particular, the Swedish-speaking opposition groups voiced their criticism of the dominant emphasis on the moral and social responsibility of art and literature. Members of these groups provocatively promoted values external to the national canon: internationality, urbanism, radicalism and experimentalism. In her manifesto for the magazine *Ultra* (1922) Hagar Olsson opposed the self-satisfied backwardness of national-romantic culture:

> In this country, where only painting has just barely succeeded in acquiring a certain (but oh so limited!) right to modernity, but where literature still continues undisturbed, dreaming the dreams of Topelius and echoing the rhymes of Runeberg (the manly poem, the urge to heroism!) or cooking some popular national soup on some moral ingredient – in this country we are *forced* to be ultra … ("En slags prenumerationsanmälan", *Ultra* 1/1922).

(See Hermansson in Section 5.) In the Finnish context, *Ultra* was, during its brief existence, a rare bilingual initiative. Some of its members continued the opposition between "the young" and the previous, more academic, generation in the journal *Quosego* (1928), where the writers Rabbe Enckell, Henry Parland and Gunnar Björling were inspired by dada. This time, however, the political dimension was less marked, and the language was Swedish only (see Nygård in Vol. 1).

On the Finnish side the opposition between the Tulenkantajat group and the dominant intellectuals was less intense, although around 1930 the writer Olavi Paavolainen was attacked for his fascination with futurism, cubism and surrealism, and the general anti-national tendencies within the group were also debated (see Kaunonen in Section 5). Some of its members rejected the dominant agrarian ideals and lamented the neglect of their own urban middle-class environment in Finnish art (Sevänen 1994: 272–273, 341–344; Huusko 2007: 183–184). When the group dissolved, its politically radical faction gathered around Erkki Vala and his journal (also called *Tulenkantajat*) and another group of leftist intellectuals (Kiila). Besides politics, recurring disputes between these groups and the nationalist intellectuals concerned the isolation or openness of the Finnish cultural field, as well

as the separation or unity of art and society. When Ludvig Wennervirta condemned the Taidehalli gallery for exhibiting non-Finnish and even Soviet art, his opponent Nils-Gustav Hahl warned of the consequences of isolationism. Often the ideologically sensitive question of cultural imports was framed in a triangle between France, Germany and Russia/the Soviet Union. For the dominant German-oriented intellectuals, France and Russia stood for intellect, theory and internationalism. When Fernand Léger exhibited at the Artek gallery in the late 1930s, leading critics and the public denounced his paintings as "bolshevik nonsense", whereas Antti Rinne in the Social-Democratic press praised the exhibition as a most welcome contrast to "our warm national sauna art" (Karjalainen 1990: 33, 45).

In positioning Finnish art between the perceived centres and peripheries of European artistic space, both the conservative and the liberal or leftist critics assumed that the local art field was isolated from the rest of Europe. They disagreed on whether this was a good or a bad thing. Even radical cosmopolitan intellectuals in Finland tended to underline the marginal position of their country, in order to position themselves as the peripheral representatives of the modernity of the cultural centres. Considering such converging pressures to stress the peripheral nature of Finnish art and literature, we should indeed look critically at the perception of Finland and other European peripheries as the backwaters of modernism, where there was only national art and delayed superficial imitations of a selection of modern cultural "-isms", in eclectic combinations. But nor should we uncritically accept the other extreme of interpreting the European avant-gardes as de-centred interactive networks, where cultural hierarchies hardly mattered at all (see Nygård and Strang 2016). Instead, we arguably do better justice to the historical actors themselves if we take into account the social constraints that conditioned their modernising efforts. Writers and artists in different local, national or linguistic fields dealt with different patterns of constraints involving, among other things, the degree of autonomy of their cultural field, the social role and economic status of artists and writers within it and the geo-cultural position of this local or national space internationally. There are other variables, naturally, but considering only these three, Finnish artists and writers operated within a cultural field characterised by a relatively low degree of autonomy in relation to politics, journalism and the state – but where the social status

of the artist was in many ways high, because of the importance of culture in small-state nationalism – and within an intellectual field in which a non-dominant status internationally was part of the collective self-understanding.

With respect to the latter, it is perhaps worth stating the obvious fact that the cultural flows and the travels of intellectuals and artists had a clear direction, towards the centres – Berlin and Paris notably, sometimes via Stockholm and Copenhagen – and rarely the other way around. Novel cultural forms such as creative appropriations of dadaism and futurism reached Finland only a few years after dada had finished in Paris and Marinetti had already gone a long way towards de-radicalising futurism in Mussolini's Italy. The perspective of cultural diffusion from centres to peripheries is thus not completely mistaken in the history of the artistic avant-gardes. On the other hand, we should also acknowledge that centres are to a large extent construed by the peripheries, and that radical innovations have often been introduced by "outsiders in the centres", such as Marinetti and Tristan Tzara.[1]

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