

”METAL INTELLIGENTSIA ASSEMBLES IN HELSINKI” – NOTES ON THE MEDIA VISIBILITY OF METAL RESEARCH¹⁶

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“I used to trust the media to tell me the truth, tell us the truth.”¹⁷

Despite the support of many good people involved in the MHM planning and execution, setting up this event has been a very personal path for me. Not just because of the fascination and coolness related to actually doing a conference on heavy metal research, but also because this project has walked hand in hand with the transition of my own research focus from design management to “metal management,” both time-wise and in terms of project activities.

When I decided to take on this challenge – during the “Heavy Metal and Popular Culture” Conference in Bowling Green, Ohio, April 2013 – I had already been conducting some research on metal. It was, however, still a minor project amongst my other, “original” research activities within design management, brand communication, and related views, which fit within various “traditional” commercial product categories. To move more strongly towards music and other creative fields, in general, and heavy metal and hard rock, in particular, I actively sought new funding possibilities. I sent applications to different places, the main ones to the Academy of Finland, in quest for the quite-respected but highly-competitive position of Academy Research Fellow.

Regardless of the positive and promising reviews, including those from the international committee used by Academy of Finland that led to a couple of “almost there” proposals in 2012-2013, I remained somewhat sceptical about my possibilities. In particular, I was quite unsure how reviewers saw the heavy metal and rock industry context as relevant and how the Academy decision makers judged the soundness of my main topic – “trade of cultural narratives in the rock music industry”. Even though it was relatively easy to justify the role of heavy metal and rock music export in building/advancing the reputation and the brand of Finland abroad, as well as the existing research gap in this regard, this whole thing still might have been seen as mainly “entertaining” and not really a serious topic to be studied. I thought, perhaps it is – after all – not up to whatever standards or admissible subject matters of academic research.

Luckily my worries proved irrelevant, eventually. Many good things started to unfold in late 2013. First, I managed to receive small funds from the HSE Foundation of the Aalto University School of Business to enable a few months of research in the spring of 2014, including early preparations for the MHM

¹⁶ My introductory keynote at the MHM Conference addresses the main themes and contents of the event. Here I decided to make a rough review – and very personal remarks – on the unexpected media buzz around both the conference and my own metal research during the last ten months. I’ve been asked by some colleagues to tell how and why it occurred in the first place and what were the topics that the journalists were interested in. Perhaps these “autoethnographical” notes ignite some further discussion on the media connections of metal research during and after the MHM conference.

¹⁷ “Revolution Calling” by Queensrÿche, from *Operation: Mindcrime* album (lyrics by Geoff Tate & Michael Wilton)

Conference. Thanks to this, I was able to focus on working on some existing data and putting forward new research ideas. Also, I could travel to present my metal research in interesting places: “Heavy Metal Music and Communal Experience” Conference in Puerto Rico and “Metal & Rock Encounter” Conference in Jaén, Spain, in particular.

And then, right in a middle of one of the Jaén sessions, a couple of hours before my own presentation, I checked my emails and there it was: the long-awaited message from the Academy of Finland. It stated that I had been awarded the position of Academy Research Fellow for five years, starting in September 2014. That moment and day sure were among the most cheerful ones ever! The third time and third year of applying for that position finally paid off. The MHM Conference was written in the application as the main deliverable of the fellowship’s first year. So now, at last, everything seemed promising in terms of building a good event. But more than that, this new position meant that I could finally start considering myself a full-time metal researcher. Cool!

“Thought disorder, dream control, now they read my mind on the radio.”¹⁸

Quite soon, I found out that the Finnish media also seemed to regard this as a cool thing. Well, at least as a very interesting topic to write about. Before the actual start day of my new position, I already began to receive interview requests from the media – something that had been very rare in my previous 15 years in the research life. And to date, quite a number of news items and articles have appeared in the Finnish media reporting on my research profile and the upcoming MHM Conference. Table 1 lists the main appearances (that I have tracked myself).

Table 1: My metal interviews in Finnish media.¹⁹

Media	Date	Length	Main title in Finnish	Main title in English ²⁰
Inferno (MAG)	Feb 2014	1 page	Metalli – tiedettäkö?	Metal – science?
MTV3.fi (WEB) (Interview by STT)	July 28 2014		Tutkija: Hevi on väkevä osa Suomi-kuvaa maailmalla	Researcher: Heavy metal is a strong part of Finland’s image abroad
NEWSPAPER/WEB (Interview by STT): <i>Helsingin Sanomat, MTV3.fi, Iltasanomat.fi, Turun Sanomat, Savon Sanomat, Kouvolan Sanomat, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat, Karjalainen, Keski-suomalainen, Iltalehti, Kaleva, Satakunnan Kanssa</i>	July 28-29 2014	From a few lines to a few columns	Heviälymystö (/hevitutkijat) kokoontuu ensi kesänä Helsingissä (/Suomessa) & Helsinkiin puuhataan suurta hevitapahtumaa - tällä kertaa tutkijoille	Metal intelligentsia (/metal researchers) assembles next summer in Helsinki (/Finland) & A big heavy metal event is again being planned in Helsinki – this time for researchers
NEWSPAPER: (Interview by STT) <i>Turun Sanomat, Pohjalainen, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat</i>	July 29 2014	Half page	Suomi kiillottaa kilpeään raskaalla metallilla	Finland polishes its shield with heavy metal
NEWSPAPER: (Interview by STT) <i>Savon Sanomat</i>	July 29 2014	Half page + front page caption	Suomi kiillottaa kilpeään, hevitutkija Toni-Matti Karjalainen tutkii raskaan musiikin vientiä	Finland polishes its shield, heavy researcher Toni-Matti Karjalainen studies the export of heavy music

¹⁸ “Voices” by Dream Theater, from the *Awake* album (lyrics by John Petrucci).

¹⁹ The February 2014 interview by Inferno (Finnish metal journal) is also included, as it was really the first media to release news about the MHM Conference. The news based on the STT news agency interviews were reported in different lengths and with different emphases by different media, and some did additional editorial work as well; those with similar contents and titles are bundled in the table.

²⁰ My translation

Media	Date	Length	Main title in Finnish	Main title in English
NEWSPAPER: (Interview by STT) <i>Etelä-Saimaa, Kouvolan Sanomat</i>	July 29 2014	2 pages	Heviä taivutetaan tutkimukseksi	Heavy metal is being bent to research
NEWSPAPER: (Interview by STT) <i>Kaleva</i>	July 29 2014	Half page + front page caption	Raskaan metallin vientimaa	The export country of heavy metal
NEWSPAPER: (Interview by STT) <i>Keskisuomalainen</i>	July 30 2014	Half page	Raskaalla kädellä. Hevi kelpaa virallisellekin Suomelle vientituotteeksi. Jyväskyläläinen Lost Society on hyvä esimerkki uudeltauksesta.	With a heavy hand: Heavy metal fits the official Finland as an export article. Lost Society from Jyväskylä is a good example from getting into new territories.
NEWSPAPER: <i>Aamulehti</i>	Sept 24 2014	Two pages, "People" column	Metallimies kestää kokkarit	Metal man tolerates cocktail parties
NEWSPAPER/WEB: (Interview by STT) <i>Turun Sanomat, Aamulehti, Savon Sanomat, Karjalainen, Pohjalainen, Ilkka</i>	Sept 24 2014	From few columns to half page	Kirja: Kansainvälistymisen mallia kannattaa hakea pelifirmoilta ja heviväändeiltä & Yksin jurottamalla ei päästä maailmalle & Pilke silmäkulmassa myy Suomi-heviä maailmalle	Book: model for internationalisation can be taken from game companies and heavy metal bands & One doesn't get abroad by sulking alone & Twinkle in the eye sells Finnish metal abroad
<i>Radio Rock</i> (RADIO) + WEB	Sept 24 2014	Half an hour visit at the morning show		Various topics and titles
<i>YLE aamu-TV</i> , Finnish National TV + WEB	Sept 26 2014	10 minute interview in the morning show	Millaista on suomalainen hevivienti?	What is Finnish heavy metal export like?
<i>YleX radio</i> (RADIO) + WEB	Sept 30 2014	Half an hour visit to the "Etusivu" Program)		Various topics and titles
NEWSPAPER: <i>Helsingin Sanomat</i>	Oct 19 2014	One page ("Ihmiset/Tänään" page)	Raskaan sillan rakentaja: Toni-Matti Karjalainen tutki, miten heviväändit rakentavat Suomi-brändiä	Builder of the heavy bridge: Toni-Matti Karjalainen studies how heavy metal bands build the brand of Finland
<i>Teostory</i> (teosto.fi) (WEB)	Nov 20 2014	Few columns	Miksi metallimusiikin vienti vetää hyvin?	Why is the export of metal music doing well?
NEWSPAPER/WEB: <i>Etelä-Saimaa, Kouvolan Sanomat</i>	Feb 16 2015	Two pages	Melankolia ja melodia myyvät heviä, Suomalainen metalli menestyy maailmalla	Melancholy and melody sell heavy metal, Finnish metal succeeds abroad
<i>Yle.fi</i> (WEB)	Feb 17 2015	Few columns	Metallimusiikki rakentaa Suomi-brändiä: "Valtaosalle tulee ulkomailla Suomesta hevi mieleen"	Metal music is building the brand of Finland: "most people connect Finland with heavy metal abroad"
<i>Sverigesradio</i> , Swedish National Public Radio (RADIO) + WEB + Further referred by the websites of a number of major and minor Swedish newspapers.	Feb 19 2015	Short clip in the main business news, few columns on the websites	Finsk metal rockar ekonomin	Finnish metal is rocking the economy
<i>Tiedoksi.fi</i> (WEB)	Mar 19 2015	Few columns	Hevi rakentaa Suomi-kuvaa maailmalla	Heavy metal builds the image of Finland abroad
<i>Yle.fi</i> (WEB)	May 2 2015	Few columns	Akateemiset hevarit valloittavat Helsingin – Maailman suurin metallimusiikin konferenssi Suomeen kesällä	Academic heavy rockers conquer Helsinki – the world's largest metal music research conference comes to Finland in summer

The Academy Research Fellowship was obviously the main impetus that got the snowball rolling. It is a rather well-acknowledged position in the Finnish system, and the media also pays attention to new projects and topics. Especially, it was the twist of heavy metal in my case that seemed to catch the greatest attention. Also, this interesting academic meeting was going to bring a bunch of metal scholars – and, yes, they are numerous – from many different countries to Finland.

In addition to these two newsworthy occasions, we were also finishing a research project called FLUID at Aalto University School of Business. The project explored Finnish gaming and music fields and resulted in two books published by Talentum (Helsinki) in autumn 2014. The English version titled *The Playing Finn: Stories on successful game development and music export* (edited by myself, Miikka J. Lehtonen, and Jani Niipola) included my own chapter on metal export, focusing especially on the annually-organized Finland Fest in Tokio and its 2013 edition. I particularly focused on the case of Mokka, a Finnish thrash metal band who made their first visit to Japan.

The bundle of these three factors (the funding, the conference, and the books) first woke the interest of *STT-Lehtikuva*. *STT* is a traditional independent news agency providing journalistic content (text and images) widely to different Finnish media, newspapers in particular. A friend of mine who was working for them spotted some of my Facebook status reports – social media, we salute you! – and suggested a profile story of a “heavy metal researcher” who she thought might interest their media partners. So we did a couple of interviews, she wrote the story, and it was released for the media on 28 July 2014. Immediately, different versions of the story were picked up and published by newspapers and ’net sites, including major and local media outlets.

“Doomed to crumble unless we grow, and strengthen our communication.”²¹

The second big rush happened when *The Playing Finn* book was launched, and the publisher’s PR person sent out a press release around at the end of September 2014. Several media got interested in the book and the research behind it and asked for interviews, including: newspapers, journals, TV and radio, as well as *STT* again. Interestingly, and a bit contrary to our expectations, the music and metal contents of the book seemed to be the bait that the media grabbed, more so than the game industry stories – even though Finland was still in the middle of the game industry hype receiving widespread media attention. Perhaps, and quite likely I assume, heavy metal was seen as something fresh and interesting. Again. Metal had had its media fame about 7-8 years ago in Finland but had faded in popularity in subsequent years. So suddenly I found myself talking regularly with journalists about heavy metal research, Finnish metal exports, the MHM Conference, and other topics. And the stories found their way on the pages of numerous newspapers, in the morning show of the national TV, on radio broadcasts, and so on.

Really, it felt like some kind of a snowball effect: one interview led to another. In February 2015, for example, another interview was visibly released by *Etelä-Saimaa* (a regional magazine in Southeast Finland) as well as the national broadcast company *YLE* on their website, in relation to my public speech at the library of Lappeenranta city. Soon after this, I got a call from Stockholm; a

²¹ “Schism” by Tool from the *Lateralus* album (lyrics by Tool)

Swedish journalist wanted to do a short news story about Finnish metal exports to the main Economy News in their national radio. Jättecool!

When preparing this book for print, there is yet another round of interest occurring. I have been getting some new interview requests thanks to the official press release of the MHM Conference we launched with the communication office of Aalto University on 28 April. The first press contact arrived by email only one minute after the release was out: a reporter of MTV (Finnish main commercial TV and news channel) promised to send their reporters to the event. This was soon followed by an interview by *Sunnuntaisuomalainen* (the Sunday supplement of a number of Finnish regional newspapers, such as *Keskisuomalainen*) for a larger story that is supposed to appear later during May 2015. Furthermore, the national broadcast company *YLE* again interviewed me for an article that appeared on their website on 2 May. This seemed to spread rather well; the article was shared over 800 times on Facebook during the first three days. And another interview is going to be conducted for www.goodnewsfromfinland.com.

“Caught in a web, removed from the world.”²²

Looking back at these interviews and the topics that seemed to interest the journalists the most, the contents have been quite consistent. Of course there is a natural cause, as my research on Finnish metal export and the MHM Conference have been the main things the media has been interested in the first place.

In reporting on the MHM Conference, the media has been first and foremost interested in this seemingly odd combination of academic research and heavy metal that may have not been very well known before. The journalists have generally been somewhat surprised to find out there exist quite a number of studies and researchers that work around the topics of heavy metal and hard rock – and really around a wide variety of topics and within different disciplines. Heavy metal studies are still clearly taken as an exotic thing. Nevertheless, the minority has really been interested in hearing more about different themes that are studied and will be presented in our conference. Most reporters have been mainly interested in this “phenomenon” in a general sense, perhaps wanting to hear only a couple of themes as examples and “bait” for their readers.

Titles such as “metal intelligentsia assembles in Helsinki” and “academic heavy rockers conquer Helsinki” suggest that part of the interest is perhaps created by the assumed tension between the stereotypical – and out-dated, yep – recognition of heavy metal as a somewhat vulgar music genre and the elitist image of academic research. How do these two fit together? And some of the reports were, at least indirectly, playing with the stereotypes of a long-haired and black-dressed bunch of scholars that clearly differ from the “typical” academic appearance. Assuming that in order to study metal, one must fancy metal and look like a metal fan. Well, yes, this appears to be the case quite often, although we are very different. Metal scholars may be considered quite a consistent community in many respects; it is sort of a subculture itself within the academia – and within the metal community, as a matter of fact. This may appear slightly peculiar for people outside the community, just like metal communities in general tend to do.

²² “Caught in a Web” by Dream Theater, from the *Awake* album (lyrics by James LaBrie & John Petrucci).

In addition to the amazement that there really exists such a clearly recognized body of academic research called metal studies and the global community of people organised around them, the Finnish media of course has paid attention to the event's location: it is organised here in Finland. As commented in one report, "Helsinki is a natural place for the meeting place of metal music scholars, because those sturdy riffs have grinded their way to the bedrock of the Finnish national brand" (iltasanomat.fi, 28 July 2014).

"Tahdon pohjoisen taivaan. Tahdon alleni graniitin."²³

Finland is a metal country, yes, that is what we have learnt to recognise. Naturally the majority of interviews have also focused on the national identity and the role of Finnish metal in communicating our culture and shaping our country's image abroad, because that is my own area of interest. When discussing this topic, attention has often been on trying to assess the significance and magnitude of the Finnish metal exports, if not in economic terms (which is difficult and also still marginal) at least with regard to their symbolic and indirect impacts.

In terms of individual bands, a typical question has also been how big a business they are really involved in, how much money are they really making nowadays. The media must know how difficult it is for bands to cope with very limited incomes, so such a question may be regarded as a rhetorical one. There are, however, still surprisingly strong presumptions that if you are in a band that gets to play abroad on a constant basis, you must be pretty well off. And this is totally false, of course. Only a handful of Finnish metal bands are doing sound business with their music and touring. But the symbolic significance on the recognition of Finland has not really come as a big surprise for the Finnish media. The success stories of bands like Nightwish, HIM, Children of Bodom and Apocalyptica have been rather actively reported over the last 10 years and more. But it seemed to be quite fresh news for the Swedish media, if judged on the basis of my tiny intervention there. Grin.

Journalists have been eager to find particular reasons for the success of Finnish metal. And in our discussions, we have indeed gone through some of the probable ones, with a wide range: the strong metal boom that emerged in Finland in the 1980s – when most of the current "export leaders" were teenagers and exposed to that magnificent music, by the way; the positive Finnish climate for metal – both in mental and practical senses, wink; the good work ethic and technical expertise of many Finnish artists; the capable metal managers; and strong team spirit of our small country; and so forth. These research "results" have also been used as the main catch in some of the stories: "Heavy doctor: this is the reason why Finnish heavy metal succeeds in Japan" (*Ylex* radio, title on their website).

Moreover, we have talked about characteristics that might make our metal music interesting abroad: the emergence of specific "Finnish" traits in the bands' musical and lyrical contents, and if Finnish metal is saying something particular about Finnish culture or mentality. There is a oft-repeated joke in Finland – and not only a joke but a fact, in effect – that we Finns are almost pathologically interested in knowing how our country, and everything coming from here, is seen through foreign eyes. This applies to metal export, most certainly, and is one of the lasting topics in the Finnish media, too.

²³ "Sydänjuuret" by Mokoma from the *Sydänjuuret* album (lyrics by Marko Annala)

“You got me on the line. Now you’ll think twice.”²⁴

In addition to the topic and substance of music export and heavy metal research, the media has been quite keen in adding a personalized touch to the stories. In many cases, they have been interested in the person doing this research, more so than the contents of the research itself. This might reflect the seemingly increased focus of media on personal stories in general, but it also connects to the aforementioned tension of the metal+academia combo, which in the eyes of the media is already an aspect worth reporting. Quite funnily, instead of my official academic title (Doctor of Arts, Academy Research Fellow, or the former Research Director) the reporters have preferred to use titles like “heavy doctor” (“hevitohtori”), “heavy researcher” (“hevitutkija”), “metal doctor” (“metallitohtori”), “metal researcher” (“metalli-tutkija”), or something similar. I have been very rarely called “design researcher” or “brand researcher” during my 15-year-long research life (well, the media interventions have been very rare, as well).

Journalists have often been very interested in hearing about my own metal fandom and history, as well as asking about my favourite bands and recommendations for readers. I have also been frequently asked to predict which bands might become the next notable export names for Finnish metal. Such “top three” lists are considered to make the stories more concrete and, yep, more personal. Another interesting aspect is the localisation that some regional magazines in particular have included in their reports. For instance, as I mentioned Lost Society as one of the interesting bands, *Keskisuomalainen* – located in the city of Jyväskylä from where Lost Society also comes – wrote a story about them and connected it with my interview. And *Etelä-Saimaa* featured the local heroes Stam1na in their version of my *STT* interview. Then there are sometimes a bit more obscure bands or photos chosen to illustrate some stories, but let’s not go into that now.

Trying to search for some cool or funny angles to their stories, some journalists have begun playing with stereotypes in a less serious manner, like asking and writing a side story about “why metal men have beards” (*Etelä-Saimaa*, 16 February 2015). This story also included pictures of bearded bands; the caption of Mokoma picture noted, “One could make several wigs from the joint quantity of hair from Mokoma’s musicians.” Right.

“Seen my diary on the newsstand. Seems we’ve lost the truth to quicksand.”²⁵

And then there have been some headlines following the principles of click journalism, highlighting some seemingly minor issues that weren’t really the main points of discussion in the interviews but perhaps are considered attractive to readers and listeners. In particular, my visit to the Radio Rock morning show resulted in podcast titles like “Heavy researcher: Lordi’s Eurovision victory irritated the metal people” and “Academy Research Fellow of music industry: the success of Cheek²⁶ restored the faith in the possibilities of music”.

²⁴ “Got Me on the Line” by Ratt, from the *Invasion of Your Privacy* album (lyrics by Stephen Pearcy & Robbin Crosby)

²⁵ “Voices” by Dream Theater, from the *Awake* album (lyrics by John Petrucci).

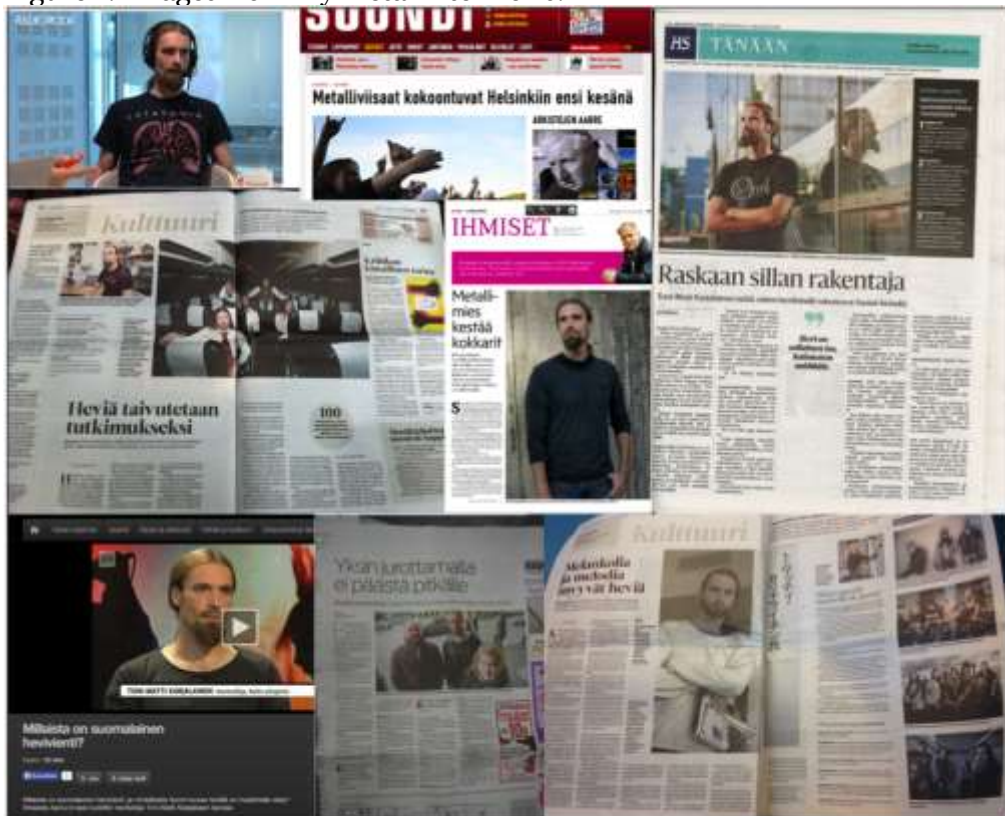
²⁶ Referring to the hugely popular Finnish mainstream artist Cheek that they asked about (!?) in the interview.

These random observations and thoughts of mine are really related to the interest that the Finnish media in particular have shown. This wide interest, as said, is largely explained by the strong Finnish context of my research and the location of the MHM Conference. The international media, in turn, has not shown so much interest leading up to the event. There will, however, most likely appear reports on the conference after the event is held; many metal media have promised to write about it. And we will probably have quite many journalists attending the event itself, both Finnish and non-Finnish ones. It will be extremely interesting to see how will they write about the event, what topics and viewpoints they will lift up from the wide variety that the papers and keynotes include, and how they will treat the metal academia overall.

So far, personally speaking, this process has been a very interesting one. And the media attention has certainly brought some clear benefits as well. The increased visibility of metal studies, my own research, and the MHM conference has made it much easier to make new connections within and outside academia, find collaboration partners, get access to artist interviews, and so on. One of the most rewarding things has also been that many people in different academic circles have showed and told about their interest in the field and the various topics of metal studies. If I was unsure of their ultimate reactions in the beginning, I am certainly no longer in doubt.

Speak the word, the word is all of us!²⁷

Figure 1: Images from my metal interviews.



²⁷ "Speak" by Queensrÿche, from *Operation: Mindcrime* album (lyrics by Geoff Tate & Michael Wilton)