

# Transnational artist challenging central power structures

Rita Dahl

In this article I argue that governmental funding in Finland favours the art and cultures of majorities, although it also addresses special funding for national minorities. It creates kind of centralized model of linguistic immigration which does not favour transnational artists, who cross the borders of various arts and languages. I argue, that governmental funding should abandon completely this kind of thinking of giving support to only official minorities, and give funding only to the most sustainable art and artists. Finally I argue, that poetry could perhaps provide a apolitical third space outside officially supported art forms.

\*

Governmental discourse creates a psychocultural center-periphery type of thinking, in which center is of primary value. As far as culture is concerned, this is obvious in the principles of Ministry of Education and Culture. Our ministry declares to support language and cultural minorities and the possibility of their participation in creating culture and bringing out their own creativity. Finland has its specific linguistic and cultural minorities, sexual and religious minorities, whose cultural traits the Ministry of Education and Culture wants to support.

Sounds merciful: with little help from the government, will all sub-cultures have the possibility of a carnival every day? As an act of benevolence, the majority homogenous culture will support the mosaic of sub-cultures, in order to take care of the pseudo-heterogeneity of cultures and languages.

The use of the word “minority” always implicates a majority. The rhetoric of ministries and art councils is homogenous thinking, expressed from the majority point of view. The most successful artists of the cultural sphere are formally supported because this is necessary in a “western democracy”, in a “civilized country”.

Our cultural governance ponders and thinks art from some kind of “sublimate juridical

point of view”. All is well, when commonly accepted norms and clauses are fulfilled. Bureaucrats create different programs in order to increase the “accessibility of culture”, by making cultures of minorities more easily accessible. But these minorities are only official minorities: Sami people, Swedish-speaking minority, many minorities fall outside this category. I argue, that governmental funding should abandon completely this kind of thinking of giving support to only official minorities. The most successful cultural policy would not need to even think about any minorities. This kind of cultural policy would be also automatically free from majority-minority-kind of thinking and unbiased in respect to the art and artists.

The cultural program of benevolence hides the tragic reality of freelance artists (the ones who do not receive art council’s grants), which means they need to achieve a position in the work market or become customers of the social and health care service. It is impossible for creative entrepreneurs and almost impossible for the self-employed to receive temporary support from the government when they become unemployed or when they have other kinds of health problems.

Globalization has brought up themes such as cultural security and sustainable development. The Finno-Ugric program (“sukukansajelma”) of the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to support cultures of Finno-Ugric folks in Russia. Northern partnership is developed by the Russian program in art and literature and by enhancing the execution of the roadmap between Russia and European Union.

Practically, the co-operation with Russia is executed through cultural institutes, the Finno-Ugric program and the Finnish-Russian Society. The official cooperation has created a better understanding of “Finno-Ugricness” in Russia. But besides this concept, there can be found a lot of essential, everyday life aspects, different from the official uniculture.

Has our central government created the centralized model of linguistic immigration, in which being here is valued more than coming here?

Transnational artist – official power cancelled?

The role of the transnational artist is to question this mental map by exploring the place of center and periphery, by border-crossing again and again and by respecting becoming more than being.

One can question it, for example, by choosing an art form from the position of “the other”

as a medium of producing the so-called marginal. Marginality means small audiences and small print-runs in the first place. Art can be in the margins because of small public funding: poetry belongs to publicly less supported art forms and only few people receive yearly grants. An exception is opera (the National Opera), which is supported to a great extent. There are a lot of classical singers. However, only few have the possibility to enjoy support by the state in the form of a salary.

My own art genres are poetry and classical singing. It is possible to question the central-margin dichotomy by crossing borders and globalizing the local: I translate poetry from Portugal, Brazil, Mozambik, Angola and from the U.S.A. This has been a real cultural activity, as I have worked for years without a yearly grant, except a guarantee for freelance artists. I have had enough force to edit and translate the first anthology of contemporary Portuguese poetry in Finnish at poverty line: this is enough.

The real transnational artist does not need to travel to the country they long to, because they can travel from the couch, like the poet Fernando Pessoa. Pessoa did not travel outside Lisbon during his life, but in his literary reviews and pages of unpublished books he brought dozens of unknown writers and poets to the readers.

When we talk about anything related to nationality, culture and art, we always talk about something obscurely associated with totality. An ethnic community and country are imaginary communities, as Benedict Anderson has shown. This totality, as an imaginary community, does not have clear boundaries and secure, common features. It consists of individuals, it is the sum of its individuals.

### Apolitical “third space”

The Government presents a normative, juridical ideal stance. This ideal stance can never be realized as it is wished.

Among various normativities – official rhetorics of power and practical politics, the so-called support – poetry is one of the few neutral and apolitical states where background does not matter. A poem can be thought to represent some kind of topos, a place, a third space, which welcomes every reader, in spite of their cultural and linguistic background.

Poetry taking stances is of course openly political. (For example, Pentti Saarikoski defended the socialist world in his 1960s poetry collections. During the cold war, the poet who declared to

be communist looked above the head of Stalin somewhere further. Poets should see further, they should have the sixth sense of going beyond daily politics and economic realities.)

Could poetry and arts in the margins be probably the only honestly national and global dimension which values and documents such a reservation? (Otherwise than EU and official politics.) The global and transnational dimensions would represent, for example, different influences, from international to local poetries and language itself, and “Finns” would mean “native population” or “new Finns”. The transnational artists would be the maintainers and reproducers of the local dimension. Without them the arts would not be documented and transmitted beyond the borders.

**Rita Dahl**, Freelancer, Master of Arts (Comparative literature) and Maste of Social Sciences (Political Science)  
ritdahl@gmail.com