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Foresightfulness in the creation of pop music

Songwriters' insights, attitudes and actions

Doctoral dissertation, to be presented for public discussion with the permission of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Helsinki, in Festive Hall, Language Centre, on the 18th of June, 2021 at 12 o'clock.

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Abstract

This thesis is about awareness of change in music, as well as future-oriented thinking, and their role in the creative actions and rationales of pop songwriters. My aim is to build an understanding of *foresightfulness* in the context of creating pop music. I analyse the ways in which pop songwriters relate to changes in music and music trends, and their attempts to foresee alternative musical futures or to influence them. In addition, I investigate the conceptions, values and beliefs of pop songwriters that relate to trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking.

The research materials for the study consist of eight (8) interviews with Finnish professional songwriters in the field of pop music as well as three (3) field observations and the related documentation of songwriting sessions at international songwriting camps known as Song Castle and A-Pop Castle in 2015, 2017 and 2018. The resulting ethnographic research data are subjected to directed content analysis. In line with the phenomenographic approach, my main interest is in how my informants experience things, not in how things actually are. The concepts directing the analysis derive from futures studies: *foresight*, *future consciousness* and *attitudes towards the future*, as well as from sociological concepts applied in studies of popular music, such as *space of possibilities*.

On the theoretical level my study is built on systematic or confluential approaches to creativity. I investigate the creation of pop music as a psychological, social and cultural action, and *domain-specific future consciousness* as a component of creativity. More specifically, I bring popular music studies, futures studies and creativity studies together in the context of songwriting, examining foresightfulness as an ability, attitude or action that enhances or restricts creativity and thereby broadening current understanding of the concept. From this perspective, my study contributes to dismantling the opposition between creativity and commerce.

My main finding is to show the significant role of future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness in pop songwriting, aspects that are scarcely recognised and explicated by the writers. They anticipate continuity or change consciously or non-consciously in ways that resemble formalised futures studies or fashion forecasting. The "targets" of foresight range from other songwriters and artists to expectations of the audience and of gatekeepers. Almost all songwriters emphasise the importance of making up-to-date music, and they prove to have foresight, but very few of them apply foresight consciously. Music trends are observed individually, but knowledge about them is shared with colleagues, and in this way emerging trends are strengthened collectively. Foreseeing and influencing the future are often inseparable.

I also demonstrate how several contradictory conceptions, beliefs and values relate to, or influence foresightfulness among songwriters: their thoughts about the dynamics of change in music, audience expectations, individual abilities and being a songwriter, as well as being a pioneer or maintaining autonomy and honesty. The songwriters struggled with foresight, not least because of the new modes of consumption and fragmentism in musical trends. Some of them felt as if they were losing honesty in their creative process in attempting to follow trends, whereas for others, following and anticipating trends inspired them in their work.

A significant finding in this study was the lack of a strong belief among several Finnish songwriters in their chances of influencing international pop music. On the other hand, songwriters have contradictory conceptions about the role of record companies in creating and diffusing musical phenomena, for example. In light of the recent and ongoing structural changes in the music industry, even agents who are big players in the business struggle to understand how the system functions. Their understanding of the openness of futures, as well as low beliefs in their agency, are manifestations of how they perceive systems, which is a crucial aspect of future consciousness extending beyond the following year, for example.

On the theoretical level, I show how futures studies and fashion-forecasting terminology are applicable to future-oriented thinking in the context of creating pop music, but they do not adequately describe it. The concepts should be developed further for the benefit of musicology and the music industry.

KEYWORDS: making music, songwriting, pop music, music trend, change, fashion, creativity, future-oriented thinking, future consciousness, attitudes towards the future, foresight, foresightulness, music industry, popular music studies, futures studies, creativity studies, fashion studies, directed content analysis, phenomenographic approach

Tiivistelmä

Tutkin väitöskirjassani musiikin muutosten huomioimisen ja tulevaisuuteen suuntautuvan ajattelun roolia popmusiikintekijöiden luovassa työskentelyssä ja ajattelussa. Näin rakennan ymmärrystä *ennakoivuudesta* popmusiikintekemisen kontekstissa. Analysoin niitä tapoja, joilla musiikintekijät asennoituvat musiikin muutoksiin ja *musiikkitrendeihin* ja ennakoivat vaihtoehtoisia musiikillisia tulevaisuuksia tai pyrkivät vaikuttamaan niihin. Tarkastelen myös musiikintekijöiden käsityksiä, arvoja ja uskomuksia, jotka liittyvät trendien havainnointiin ja tulevaisuuteen suuntautuneeseen ajatteluun.

Tutkimukseni aineisto koostuu kahdeksan (8) suomalaisen ammattimaisesti työskentelevän popmusiikintekijän haastattelusta sekä kolmen (3) musiikintekotilanteen havainnoinnista musiikkivientiorganisaatio Music Finlandin järjestämillä Song Castle- ja A Pop Castle -musiikintekoleireillä vuosina 2015, 2017 ja 2018. Lähestyn etnografisin menetelmin hankittua aineistoani etsimällä siitä ennalta määrättyjä teemoja teoriaohjaavan sisällönanalyysin avulla. Lähestymistapa muistuttaa fenomenografista tutkimusotetta: kiinnostuksen kohteena on informanttien tapa kokea ilmiöitä niiden todellisen olemuksen sijaan. Analyysiani ohjaavat tulevaisuudentutkimuksen käsitteet *ennakointi*, *tulevaisuustietoisuus* ja *tulevaisuusasenteet* sekä populaarimusiikintutkimukseen sovellettu sosiologinen käsite *mahdollisuuksien tila*.

Teoreettisesti tutkimukseni rakentuu systeemisen luovuuskäsityksen varaan. Tarkastelen musiikin luomista psykologisena, sosiaalisena ja kulttuurisena toimintana sekä *toimialakohtaista tulevaisuustietoisuutta* luovuuden osa-alueena. Tutkimukseni erityispiirteenä on tuoda populaarimusiikintutkimus, tulevaisuudentutkimus ja luovuustutkimus yhteen popmusiikin tekemisen kontekstissa. Tutkimukseni laajentaa käsitystä luovuudesta tarkastelemalla ennakoivuutta yhtenä luovuutta edistävänä taitona, asenteena tai toimintana. Näin se myös purkaa kaupallisuuden ja luovuuden välistä vastakkainasettelua.

Tutkimuksen tärkeimpänä tuloksena osoitan, että tulevaisuuteen suuntautuneella ajattelulla on merkittävä rooli musiikintekemisessä, vaikka se onkin pitkälti tiedostamatonta ja verbalisoimatonta. Musiikintekijät ennakoivat tietoisesti tai tiedostamattaan jatkuvuutta tai tulevia muutoksia ajatuskaavoilla, jotka muistuttavat formalisoituja tulevaisuudentutkimuksen ja muotiennakoinnin menetelmiä. Ennakoinnin kohteena ovat niin muiden musiikintekijöiden ja artistien tekemiset kuin myös yleisön ja portinvartijoiden odotukset. Lähes kaikki musiikintekijät korostavat ajankohtaisen musiikin tekemisen tärkeyttä ja osoittavat kykenevänsä ennakointiin, mutta vain muutama heistä kertoo tekevänsä tietoista ennakointia. Trendejä havainnoidaan yksilötasolla, mutta tietoa niistä jaetaan myös kollegoi-

den kesken, jolloin nousevia ilmiöitä vahvistetaan kollektiivisesti. Tulevaisuuden ennakointi ja siihen vaikuttaminen eivät aina ole erotettavissa toisistaan.

Osoitan myös, että useat keskenään ristiriitaiset käsitykset, uskomukset ja arvot liittyvät tai vaikuttavat musiikintekijöiden ennakoivuuteen. Näitä ovat käsitykset musiikin muutosdynamiikasta, yleisön odotuksista, tekijän omista kyvyistä ja omasta asemasta musiikkiteollisuudessa sekä pioneeriuden, autonomisuuden ja rehellisyyden ihanteiden tärkeydestä. Tekijöiden mukaan etenkin musiikkitrendien pirstaloituminen sekä musiikin kulutustapojen muutokset tekevät ennakoinnista vaikeaa. Osa musiikintekijöistä kokee, että musiikkitrendien tarkkailu vie tietyn aitouden luovasta prosessista, mutta toisten työskentelyä trendien seuraaminen ja ennakointi puolestaan inspiroivat.

Yksi keskeisistä havainnoistani on, että useiden suomalaisten musiikintekijöiden usko omiin mahdollisuuksiinsa vaikuttaa kansainväliseen popmusiikkiin on alhainen. Toisaalta musiikintekijöillä on keskenään ristiriitaisia käsityksiä esimerkiksi levy-yhtiöiden roolista musiikki-ilmiöiden luomisessa ja levittämisessä. Käynnissä olevien musiikkialan rakennemuutosten vuoksi jopa näiden systeemin keskellä työskentelevien toimijoiden on vaikea hahmottaa systeemin toimintaa. Ymmärrys avoimesta tulevaisuudesta ja tekijöiden alhaisista vaikuttamismahdollisuuksista on osoitus systeemiajattelusta, joka on olennainen osa pidemmälle ulottuvaa tulevaisuustietoisuutta.

Tutkimukseni teoreettiseen kehittelyyn liittyvänä tuloksena on, että tulevaisuudentutkimuksen ja muotiennakoinnin käsitteistö on soveltuva, muttei riittävä kuvaamaan tulevaisuuteen suuntautunutta ajattelua popmusiikin tekemisen kontekstissa. Käsitteitä on mahdollista kehittää edelleen sekä musiikintutkimuksen että musiikkialan tarpeisiin.

AVAINSANAT: musiikintekeminen, laulunkirjoitus, popmusiikki, musiikkitrendi, muutos, muoti, luovuus, tulevaisuuteen suuntautunut ajattelu, tulevaisuustietoisuus, tulevaisuusasenne, ennakointi, ennakoivuus, musiikkiteollisuus, populaarimusiikintutkimus, tulevaisuudentutkimus, luovuustutkimus, muodintutkimus, teoriaohjaava sisällönanalyysi, fenomenografinen lähestymistapa

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A preface

In the autumn of 2013 I read a column written by Finnish fashion editor Liisa Jokinen (2013), in which she wondered how some of the most unfashionable pieces of clothing could suddenly become fashionable. She had noticed that the "coolest" people in Japan were suddenly wearing Crocs, the plastic shoes that just recently were the un-coolest footwear possible. Non-fashion had become fashion. The majority of consumers probably still considered Crocs un-cool but Jokinen, observing fashion phenomena as part of her job, was able to recognise forerunners, "the coolest people" walking on the streets. She had identified a weak signal[1] in clothing fashion, which was to become a larger fashion trend[2].[3] Furthermore, she fell in love with the very shoes she had earlier considered ugly.

A few years earlier I had spent a year studying songwriting in an adult education college. When we presented our songs to the teachers they frequently asked which radio channel would play it. The aim was to teach us to create songs that could become commercially successful and reach airplay, yet the teachers never asked us what was trending then, or what might be trending in the near future. Nor did they teach us how to monitor such emerging music trends.

Jokinen's fashion column made me wonder whether professional songwriters in the field of pop music paid attention to similar factors. When 80s clothing is back in fashion, 80s influences are also evident in contemporary pop music. If clothing fashion can be forecast, could not musical phenomena be as well? Change is as constant in pop music as in clothing, the audience's taste is somewhat enigmatic, and it may take a long time for songwriters to get their songs released. Several songwriters and producers in Finland are attempting to create songs for international pop stars. Do they know something about future music trends that ordinary consumers do not? Is it not, in fact, necessary for songwriters creating songs for large audiences to direct their ears towards the future, to observe emerging trends and to anticipate what will be fashionable tomorrow? Might some songwriters consciously attempt to influence music trends themselves?

I did not know it back then, but I was to spend a considerable amount of my time pondering on these questions during the following years.

---

1 An early sign, which may be either the first sign of change, or the trigger that makes the change happen (Ansoff 1975; Heinonen et al. 2017: 312).

2 Trend may refer either to a prevailing popular style or to the general direction of a phenomenon.

3 Indeed, it did. For example, luxury fashion brand Balenciaga announced collaboration with the Crocs brand in 2017, and these shoes became hugely trendy (Krause 2018).

1. CHASING A MOVING TARGET

1.1 Setting the scene

> **Patric Sarin:** If you listen to the radio, it is pretty clear that "four on the floor" stuff is the thing at the moment. If you create songs for other people, you must do what they want and then there's also the aspect that those who do not do four on the floor, they write themselves [laughter]. That's why composers are needed, in order to create songs for pop artists.
>
> **Interviewer:** [...] Do you already see, as songwriters, what could be the next wave?
>
> **Jaakko Salovaara:** Well, dubstep is becoming the fashion widely.
>
> **Patric Sarin:** Yep, dubstep will be, yep.
>
> (YleX 2011, translated by the author.)

This radio interview with two Finnish songwriter–producers from 2011 covers some major issues in pop songwriting. Pop music is in a constant state of change, and professional songwriters must know what is expected of them and what is "the thing" at the moment. They might even think about what will be "in fashion" next. Alternatively, they could be inventing something that will initiate a new phenomenon in pop music. Although the media have been somewhat conscious of the need for these creative workers to have an orientation towards the future, and of their abilities in this regard, this aspect of pop songwriting has remained unexplored in academia.

The music industry has gone through significant changes in recent decades, and technological developments have influenced both production and consumption (Durant 1990; Taylor 2001: 3–4, 16; Warner 2003: xi; Rojek 2011: 3–4; Burnard 2012: 227; Watson 2015: 32). Creative work in the industry has been transformed in many ways. Single songs have (again) become more important than albums, the creative process and authorship are increasingly shared and the lines between composing and producing have become blurred. Social-cultural theorist and ethnomusicologist Timothy D. Taylor (2016: 140–145) also points out that, as technological developments have facilitated more efficient music-making, composers are facing demands to create music faster and more voluminously. On the other hand, more affordable studio technology and new online modes of distribution have enabled amateur songwriters and musicians to create and release songs to wide audiences (Wikström 2009: 156; Sawyer 2012: 6–7; Taylor 2016: 121). The pace at which new

popular music songs are created and the quantities involved have led to the speedy and simultaneous development of various kinds of new musical phenomena. The music industry is becoming ever more competitive (Steininger & Gatzemeier 2018). "Fast fashion", a term borrowed from the clothing industry (see e.g., Kim et al. 2011: xiii) might well be apposite to describe the dynamics of pop music. Musical styles quickly become outdated (Burnard 2012: 75).

Musical innovations[4] in pop music may attract followers and lead to short-term or more permanent changes in what is heard on hit lists. Such topical musical features are often referred to as *music trends* in colloquial language. Given the importance of music trends in the organisation of popular music as an industry (see e.g., Toynbee 2000: 26), their dynamics and role in creative practices have been investigated surprisingly little in the literature. Sociologists Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger (1975) touch on the theme in their influential research on innovation and diversity in the music industry, which has generated several follow-ups (e.g., Lopes 1992; Christianen 1995; Scott 1999). However, musical diversity is understood in a rather limited way in these studies, as the number of new artists or albums, or as variation in lyrical content. More recently, popular music scholar and teacher of songwriting Joe Bennett (2012; 2014), as well as researcher and teacher of audio engineering and songwriting David Tough (2013; 2017) investigated music trends by analysing the characteristics of previous hit songs. Musicologist Nate Sloan and journalist/songwriter Charlie Harding study sixteen pop hits from 2000 to 2019 in their book *Switched On Pop. How Popular Music Works, and Why it Matters* (2020), and they identify some characteristics of modern pop. In Finland, musicologist Jari Muikku's (2001) historical research on the production of Finnish recordings focuses primarily on so-called commercial pop and also recognises past musical trends. Nevertheless, trends in pop music are not of particular interest in musicology, perhaps because both the music and the trends are considered superficial, instantaneous and not serious enough for academic research (see e.g., Jones 2003: 47).

Fashion theorists and trend sociologists, on the other hand, have theorised trends and the dynamics of change more thoroughly (e.g., Blumer 1969; Lynch & Strauss 2007; Vejlgaard 2008; Aspers & Godart 2013). Constant change is an essential feature of fashion mechanics, which is well acknowledged by clothing designers, fashion editors, fashion researchers and consumers (Nuutinen 2004; Lynch & Strauss 2007; Kim et al. 2011). Fashion professionals therefore have a strong future orientation. Knowledge about the mechanics of change is also useful in fashion forecasting, a practice executed both in academia and in the clothing

4 Innovation is understood here as the successfully distributed output of creative work (cf. Tschmuck 2006: 181).

business and part of the curriculum in many design schools. There are also several enterprises and professionals offering forecasting services (Nuutinen 2004: 97–100; Kim et al. 2011: 20). Anticipating counter trends, for example, also directs the behaviour of forerunner consumers who wish to differentiate themselves from the mainstream.

Where does the domain of pop music fit in here? How are songwriters able to cope with the constant change, or provoke changes themselves? Whereas fashion journals scream out loud that yellow is the colour of the next season, future phenomena are less openly discussed with regard to popular music. This applies to the media and academia, and even to the music industry. In 2018, I asked the Head of the A&R (Artists and Repertoire) department and the managing director in two major recording companies, Sony Music Finland and Universal Music Finland, whether systematic foresight[5] or using the services of professional futurists was among their business strategies. Finland is a country in which academic futures research is vivid and productive, in which foresight has been applied on the national level, and corporations such as mobile phone company Nokia have integrated foresight systematically into their strategies (Dufva 2015: 53; Hines & Gold 2015: 101; Tapio & Heinonen 2018). All this led me to believe that some record companies in Finland might practise systematic foresight.

Although my informants emphasised the importance of being anticipatory in their work and discussing evolving trends constantly with their colleagues, neither of them had experience of using explicit foresight as a method, collaborating with professional futurists, or working on other projects based on systematic foresight[6] (Kuoppamäki, Feb. 28, 2018; Valtanen, Feb. 6, 2018)[7]. One of them did joke about the secret rooms at Sony Music international headquarters, in which the employees probably know everything about future trends, but he added that it was probably not true (Kuoppamäki, Feb 28, 2018).

Foresight in pop songwriting seems to be similarly non-existent, or at least invisible or hidden. Connections between songwriting and a future orientation in songwriters remain unexplored in academia. Although the future-oriented nature of the music industry, musicians' subjective orientation towards futures and even the prophetic nature of music do not go unnoticed by music scholars (see e.g.,

5 Foresight is a practice-oriented area of futures studies: it refers to attempts to use information about the past, the present and the future to understand the present (Heinonen et al. 2017: 304).

6 Instead, they collect data on music consumption and audience preferences.

7 I use exact dates when referring to research interviews, in order to distinguish them from literature references.

Hennion 1982; 1983: 171; Attali 1985; Negus 1999; Toynbee 2000: 42; Jones 2003: 152; 2005: 243–244; Rojek 2011: 92; Wilson 2015: 4), thus far there have been no detailed investigations into how awareness and assumptions of possible future changes in music affect the work of those who create the essential content of the popular music industry, namely pop songs.

As sociologist Antoine Hennion (see e.g., 1982; 1983) remarks in his influential studio ethnographies, anticipating the reception is part of the creative process in the recording studio. He also suggests that following fashions is usually not enough to be in fashion – if one follows, one is already late (Hennion 1983: 187, 197). David Tough (2013: 111; 2017: 108) points out this major challenge for songwriters: "a hit is a moving target". He emphasises the importance of knowing the prevailing phenomena and being aware of the constant change, yet he does not advise students of songwriting even to attempt to look forward and to recognise trends that are fading out, for example. Instead, he collects the common traits of songs that have already become hits.[8] In analysing recent hit songs, in fact, he is seeking yesterday's hit formula. As Hennion (1983: 155) states: "The gimmick of yesterday soon becomes the boring tactic of today, as far as public taste is concerned". Studies focused on the products often ignore the process of creating songs or the rationale of the creators. Media and journalistic books, on the other hand, reveal the stories behind hit songs, based on retrospective interviews (e.g., Zollo 2003).

Research on songwriting, and especially contemporary hit-oriented pop songwriting, is an underrepresented area in the study of popular music (see e.g., Jones 2005: 231; Morey & Davis 2011; Wilson 2015: 21; Long & Barber 2017).[9] Many studios have opened their doors to researchers, although studio ethnographies have focused more on production practices, observing specifically how the recording, rather than the song, is created (see e.g., Hennion 1983; Greene & Porcello 2005). The main emphasis in my study is on the rationale related to creating a song, although nowadays the songwriting process and the record production frequently overlap and are indistinguishable (Moorefield 2005; Tough 2017: 80; Auvinen 2017; 2018; Burgess 2020).

Songwriting has been the focus of research in music education, music pedagogy and music therapy in particular, and the informants have been mainly students

8 A similar approach is applied in a concept known as "hit song science" (HSS), which has a foothold both in research and in commercial applications. The aim is to create computer programs that can predict which songs have the potential to become hits.

9 The two-year project Songwriting Studies Research Network (2020), however, shows that this area of research is becoming more established and unified.

or amateur composers (Bennett 2014: 31–35). The few earlier examples of research on professional hit-oriented songwriting include Joe Bennett's (2012; 2014) study on constraint, creativity, copyright and collaboration in popular songwriting teams, as well as musicologist Christopher Edward Wilson's (2015) dissertation on songwriting practices and tactics in Nashville, specifically concerning the relationship between commerce and creativity. Musicologist Ingrid M. Tolstad's (2016) dissertation comes closest to my study both geographically and genre-wise: she observed pop songwriting in a Swedish music-production company.

My aim is to narrow the gaps addressed above *by focusing on how songwriters orient themselves towards futures*[10]*, and how thinking about current and possible future music trends affects their work*. Examining this previously unexplored topic requires an interdisciplinary approach. This study, which is rooted in research traditions in popular music, also draws from the fields of futures studies, creativity and fashion.

Following an emerging trend in futures studies, specifically emphasised in a new orientation that is still in development, "Discipline of Anticipation",[11] I do not attempt to foresee alternative futures, being more interested in understanding *how futures are used and created* in today's decision-making. Such anticipation involves both thinking about futures and acting upon them. Compared to more traditional futures studies, the focus in these approaches is rather on the present (see e.g., Godet 2012: 47; Miller 2015; Poli 2017). The main starting point in my research is the assumption that, in order to succeed in pop-music markets, songwriters must, to some extent, anticipate or influence changes in music.

As implied above, in many ways the music industry resembles the fashion industry, in which foresight has a more visible role. Theories of fashion mechanisms relate mainly to clothing, but as some scholars point out, fashion as a mechanism concerns almost any human action, hence pop music could be theorised as fashion (see e.g., Blumer 1969; Denzin 2004 [1970]; Aspers & Godart 2013). Pop music has its cyclical patterns, for example, as does clothing fashion (see e.g., Warner 2003: 4; Steininger & Gatzmeier 2018). Nevertheless, many previous studies (e.g., Hebdige 1979; McLaughlin 2000; Reynolds 2011) focusing on the relationship between music and fashion use the latter term as a synonym for clothing fashion instead of also conceptualising music as fashion. In my study, fashion as a mechanism serves to explain the relationship between pop music

10 Following a custom that is becoming increasingly common in futures studies, I refer to futures mainly in the plural. One of the main principles is that there are always several alternative futures, because the future is open, and it can be influenced (e.g., Poli 2017: 59).

11 The Discipline of Anticipation is a development project led by The UNESCO Chair in Anticipatory Systems since 2012: the aim is to develop and promote anticipation and futures literacy (Unesco 2020).

and time – namely the need to be up to date – and among its creators the possible need and ability to anticipate futures.

Complementing the individual insights, my research takes into account the systematic, social and collaborative nature of creating popular music. Co-writing is nowadays the most common way of creating Western pop music,[12] at least with regard to songs that become successful (see e.g., Tough 2013; 2017; Tolstad 2016: 208; Burgess 2020: 109). According to calculations announced by *Music Business Worldwide* (MBV), the web platform for the global music industry, the average number of songwriters creating the 10 most commonly streamed songs in the US in 2018 was 9.1 (Ingham 2019). The general opinion in the songwriting industry seems to be that it is practically impossible to create a hit song alone. There are also several other agents influencing the futures of pop music (cf. Scott 1999: 1974). Continuity and change are maintained and provoked by a triangle formed by the music industry, the audience and the creators. Although the focus in this study is on the creators, none of the above can be investigated in isolation from their sociocultural contexts. This system is theorised in this study through psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's (1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]) systems model of creativity.

The research materials for the study consist of eight (8) interviews with Finnish songwriters focusing on contemporary pop music, and three (3) documented observations of songwriting processes at international songwriting camps organised in Finland, namely Song Castle and A-Pop Castle. These camps date back to 2007, the purpose being to form co-writing teams of Finnish and foreign songwriters, as part of the song-export strategy of Music Finland. The aim is to create songs targeted specifically at European, US and Asian markets. Music Finland is a government-supported music-export non-profit organisation that was founded in 2011 to promote awareness and the export of Finnish music.

I observed or interviewed a total of 14 songwriters, including 11 Finns. I also observed the work of one Japanese, one German and one British songwriter.[13] The research material, collected based on ethnographic principles, is subjected to directed content analysis (see e.g., Hsieh & Shannon 2005). My approach is in line

12 Creating pop songs as a team is by no means a new phenomenon in the industry. The most famous early example of a "hit factory" in which creative teams worked to create popular songs is Tin Pan Alley, a group of New York City publishers and songwriters who played a significant role in the birth of the North American popular music industry from the end of the 19th until the beginning of the 20th century (see e.g., Garofalo 1997; Charosh 2011). Current practices arguably continue the Tin Pan Alley tradition (Rojek 2011: 1).

13 Unfortunately, in terms of diversity, my take is not the most representative, having a strong focus on white males, born in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. I will elaborate on some reasons for the gender imbalance in Chapter 2.

with the phenomenographic approach[14], which is widely used in the educational sciences in the Nordic countries and England in particular (Järvinen & Järvinen 1993). Phenomenography concerns how people experience things, rather than how things actually are (Marton 2015: 106). "Thing" in this context may be anything that could possibly have different meanings for different people (ibid.): in this research it covers trends and foresight in pop music.

In disciplinary terms, musicology intersects in this study with interdisciplinary research on futures, creativity and fashion. In its basic musicological orientation, my research represents the fields of popular music, music sociology and the study of the music industry. More specifically it belongs in the research field of songwriting.

1.2 Research task

I aim in this study to draw together the threads of phenomena that have previously been investigated separately: to that end I *explore future-oriented thinking and trend-spotting in the creation of pop music*. My interest is in the insights (including conceptions and other rationale), attitudes and actions of songwriters. Although the focus is specifically on the creation of the song, rather than the recording, I refer in the title to the creation of pop music in a broader sense, given that songwriting and production processes are often inextricably intertwined. Creation in this context refers to both creative thinking and creative actions.

I use *future-oriented thinking* as an umbrella term to describe the different ways of orienting towards and thinking about the futures of pop music. Future(s)-oriented thinking helps individuals to make decisions about, cope with and plan futures (Rubin 1998: 22). I argue that future-oriented thinking is an essential element in the creative work of pop songwriters, in addition to keeping them up to date with current phenomena. Future-oriented thinking[15] has been researched extensively in psychology, but less in futures studies in which psychological approaches are rather rare (Aspinwall 2005; Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 1). I use the term

14 Phenomenography could be confused with philosophical phenomenology, but although they are remotely related, "cousins-by-marriage", phenomenographers emphasise the remarkable differences in the basis and emphasis of these research traditions (Häkkinen 1996: 10–12; Marton & Booth 1997: 116–117).

15 Futures studies are characterised by related and overlapping concepts. Perhaps a more common term is futures thinking, which refers to "the way of thinking that is interested in and concerned about futures-related things and phenomena" (Heinonen et al. 2017: 306). I understand futures thinking as something more conscious and explicit than I assume is the case in the context of making pop music. For this reason, I use the less well-established and vaguer term future-oriented thinking.

slightly differently. In psychological research it is understood and investigated predominantly concerning the individual's personal futures, whereas the scope in futures research is often broader. I restrict the scope to a certain narrow area of culture and professionalism and use the term domain-specifically: I am interested especially in the songwriters' future-oriented thinking regarding the futures of pop music. In addition, my time span is different from that of the dominant research in both psychology and futures research. Whereas the psychologist might be interested in adolescents' orientation towards their adulthood, for example, and the futurologist in how people imagine the world in 2040, I seek to determine whether songwriters attempt to anticipate the kind of music that will be in fashion the following year, or whether they attempt to create something that will influence trends in the immediate futures.

Another central concept I have adopted from futures studies is *foresightfulness*, meaning the individual or collective ability to "cope with" alternative futures (cf. Tsoukas & Shepherd 2004: 138–139). Foresightfulness is related to action: an actor is foresightful "when it has the propensity to act in a manner that coherently connects past, present and future" (ibid.: 139). Agents' foresightfulness in this study is examined specifically in relation to the domain of pop music.

Within this interdisciplinary setting, I aim in my study to produce new knowledge about creative work and creative thinking, future-oriented thinking, and the relationships between them in this specific context. Implicit and explicit links between creative thinking or creativity and future-oriented thinking are to be found in the existing literature related to creativity and futures studies (e.g., Sternberg & Lubart 1996; Sternberg 1996; De Brabandere & Iny 2010; Lombardo 2011; 2017). However, I investigate the connection in practice, exploring future-oriented thinking as an essential part of creative work in the framework of the music industry. A further aim is to generate knowledge about songwriting and future-oriented thinking that may benefit the music industry and the music export business. Research on future-oriented thinking may increase its application among the informants and the recipients of this study.

My main research question is:

In what ways are pop songwriters foresightful?

In other words, I focus on how songwriters cope with changes and alternative futures in the domain of pop music, and through that I attempt to build an understanding of foresightfulness in this specific context. I approach the main question through three sub-questions:

1. *How do songwriters relate to, acquire and use information about changing trends and the alternative futures of music in the creation of pop songs?*
2. *What conceptions related to music trends and foresight do songwriters have?*
3. *Which factors relate to, or influence foresightfulness in songwriters?*

The first (1) sub-question refers to the songwriters' attitudes, rationale and actions related to music trends and its alternative futures. I explore the stands they take on trends and futures, possibly acquiring knowledge about alternative future directions of pop music or trying to influence them. I also investigate how they use this information in their creative work, including their creative thinking, creative decision-making and creative processes. This question covers the narrated rationale as well as narrated and observed actions. Through observation, I examine how foresightfulness manifests itself in co-writing situations.

The second (2) sub-question concerns the variation in the songwriters' conceptions related to music trends and foresight. Conception is a basic unit in the phenomenographic approach, through which I aim to enhance understanding of the songwriters' experiences of and outlooks on music trends and foresight, as well as of their own position in the songwriting industry.

Through the third (3) sub-question I aim to identify reasons for the variation in foresightfulness, and to investigate the relationships between conceptions, attitudes and actions. Specific conceptions, values and beliefs, as well as other factors such as specific songwriting situations, may explain these differences.

1.3 Constrained creativity within the music industry

The domain of pop music is a fruitful ground on which to investigate future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness in creative work. Pop songwriters execute their work in a specific framework: the popular music industry. They create products (songs) for the market, which is in constant change, yet which also demands familiarity. In addition to exercising their creativity, they have to be aware of demands and changes in the music industry and among their audience. At the same time as expressing themselves and creating something they find aesthetically pleasing, they also need to consider what sells and, as I suggest in this thesis, they need to consider what *will sell* in the near futures. The domain to which they release their songs is different from the domain that exists at the time of their creation, being constantly shaped by the actions and choices of different agents. The futures of pop music are built simultaneously by several different actors, which makes them uncertain and unpredictable (cf. Godet 1982: 296; Scott 1999: 1966).

The relationship between songwriting and futures is similar to the overlap between design thinking and strategic foresight as described by Adam Vigdor Gordon et al. (2019), scholars in the field of futures studies: design thinking is always future-oriented in that all the designed products and services will be used in times to come. Business history scholar Walter Friedman (2013: 1) describes capitalism as "a uniquely future-oriented economic system in which people make innovations, apply for patents, watch interest rates, and in other ways 'bet on the future'". Novelty in itself has a value in capitalist societies, and the commodity system gives satisfaction to consumers who desire new goods and services (Negus & Pickering 2004: 10–11).

The debate on the creation of popular music tends to be built around binaries: is it craft or art, calculation or creativity, autonomous or dictated from outside (see e.g., Negus 1999; Toynbee 2000; Jones 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Frith 2011a)? My research touches on these themes and shows that these discourses are also relevant in the creation of hit-oriented mainstream pop music. In relation to future-oriented thinking, the question specifically concerns the songwriters' experienced agency and autonomy: they may not feel free to invent something completely novel while working within the framework of the music industry. My study shows how these creative workers perceive and experience their working conditions, and how their perceptions and experiences affect their creative work.

The music industry, which in sociological, economic and musicological research has been assigned to the fields of culture and copyright (Hirsch 1972; Caves 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007; Wikström 2009), and more recently to the service or entertainment industry (Vogel 2014: 269), is concerned with creating "nonmaterial goods directed at public of consumers, for whom they generally serve an aesthetic or expressive, rather than utilitarian function" (Hirsch 1972: 641). New products are created not because people need them, but because people want them, and in order to have items to sell (Hirsch 1972: 127; Stratton 1983; Durant 1985: 97). In the words of A. J. Scott (1999: 1975), whose research focuses on the cultural economy: "Novelty is the lifeblood of the recorded music industry".

Songwriters thus need to keep up with changes and constantly search for something "cool", hip and fresh (Anderton et al. 2013: 50; Wilson 2015: 21; Hiltunen 2016: 21–24; Taylor 2016: 62; Tolstad 2016: 213; Tough 2017: 81). However, what audiences consider hip and cool changes all the time. Consumer taste is thus connected to fashion cycles in music (Steininger & Gatzemeier 2018: 167).

Music trends are concrete incarnations of "coolness" and freshness in pop music. Trends may be understood in two ways, either as prevailing popular styles or as processes of change (Nuutinen 2004: 20–21; Vejlgaard 2008: 8). Whereas in futures studies and trend sociology they refer to processes of change or develop-

ments following "the rule of continuation" (Vejlgaard 2008: 8; Heinonen et al. 2017: 311), in popular music they are usually understood as prevailing popular styles and conventions related to aspects such as tempo, sound or timbre, genre, introduction length, form or production (see e.g., Tough 2013; 2017).

In addition, coincidentally with producing something cool, fresh and novel, songwriters are required to produce similarity. In popular music as in any other domain, new products should have adequate similarity to existing products so as to be recognised as part of the domain. Jason Toynbee (2000: 35), a scholar in the field of media and cultural studies, puts this aspect of making popular music into a theoretical context, suggesting that the small creative act is "a common denominator in pop". His theoretical model "radius of creativity" (ibid.: 35–52) builds on sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) concepts of habitus, field and space of possibilities. Authors, or groups of authors, make their creative choices within a rather small and restricted space of possibilities, and they are lured into making choices that are similar to those made earlier by other creators.

> Musicians then work with possibilities that are given, rather than summoned up freely by the imagination. In this context it is difficult to make new or different music because possibility is so constrained – by the magnetic attraction of conventional patterns and choices near the centre of the radius, but also by the difficulty of hearing possibilities near the outside. (Toynbee 2000: 66)

Toynbee (ibid.) further points out that much exceptional music is created within these constraints. In innovatively combining other creators' previous ideas, some composers manage to invent something novel and unusual: the structure is not static (ibid.: 42). I assume that by perceiving evolving trends or anticipating alternative futures of music, songwriters might be able and encouraged to create something less conventional – impossibilities could become possibilities.

Other writers describe similar conditions using concepts such as convention or constraint. Constraint is extensively used in research on creativity to theorise conditions of creative decision-making (see e.g., Merker 2006; Bennett 2012; 2014; Rosso 2014; Malmelin & Virta 2016). In practice, constraints are understood as limitations on or preconditions of creative work, which could be restrictive or enabling, and often both (Malmelin & Virta 2016: 1042). As Toynbee (2000: 39) states, there is "no possibility without constraint". Constraints may be self-imposed or externally located (Bennett 2014: 219) and relate to the process or the product of creative endeavours (Rosso 2014). Presumably, factors that delimit or enable the work of songwriters are also related to their foresightfulness.

The creative constraints that direct the expectations of both audiences and gatekeepers, as well as the songwriters' understanding of what a pop song is, are

intimately market-related (Bennett 2014: 47). As Joe Bennett (ibid.) writes, a "popular song is defined, artistically and musically, by the market forces that perpetuate its survival". According to his "evolutionary model", songs that have survived on markets become part of the domain, and influence understanding of what a popular song is. Audiences and creators alike understand these constraints, which influences both the creative work and the audience's responses. They are the "rules" or conventions of the genre, which must be taken into account in the creative work. Bennett (ibid.: 48) gives the duration of pop songs as an illustrative example of the relationship between the constraints and the market. Commercial radio stations have preferred airing songs that last less than five minutes and this has affected the canon of popular music – which again constrains the creative process of songwriters.

Previous research on making popular music thus draws a picture of pop songwriting as a practice in which autonomy and creative choices tend to be strongly limited, and creators focus on the past rather than on futures. Some writers understand this focus on the past as specifically a phenomenon of the 2000s (see e.g., Reynolds 2011; Hogarty 2017). According to sociologist and music researcher Jean Hogarty (2017: 12): "Art today is marked by an inability to document present trends or to imagine potential futures. Instead, it recycles and reworks old ideas, borrowing stylistic traits and atmospheres of the past and juxtaposing them in a postmodern pastiche."

If pop songwriting is understood as merely re-creating and making small changes in rather constrained circumstances, one might assume that future-oriented thinking has a minimal role in the creative decision-making of songwriters. Yet, as Toynbee (2000: xii, 66) points out, innovations and exceptional music emerge all the time.

A further aim in this study is to explore the relationship between the experienced autonomy of songwriters and their experienced space of possibilities, constraints and future-oriented thinking. I suggest that their thoughts about alternative future changes may have a similar function as other creative constraints. Instead of merely restricting and making their work more difficult, thinking about possible, probable and desirable changes in future music may help them to expand or re-locate their space of possibilities in songwriting. On the other hand, previously acknowledged constraints such as genre conventions and time frames may also influence their future-oriented thinking. I assume that the influence is bi-directional.

1.4 Songwriting as an individual, social and collaborative creative act

Sociocultural explanations of creativity illuminate these aspects of songwriting. Creativity nowadays is generally understood as a phenomenon that cannot be separated from its social and cultural context. This is evidenced in the systemic and confluential approaches in research on psychological creativity, in the work of sociologists who have taken the social and collective nature of the arts into account especially since the 1980s (e.g., Becker 1974; Amabile 1983; Csikszentmihalyi 1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]; Gruber 1989; Sternberg & Lubart 1996), and in research on musical creativity. A product is never creative per se: its creative value is always estimated among its receivers. Even those who seemingly work alone build on the ideas of previous creators or think about their audience (Sawyer 2012: 343). The social nature of creativity is also incorporated into its so-called standard definition (Runco & Jaeger 2012): in addition to novelty or originality, it requires effectiveness as well as usefulness or appropriateness, all of which are assessed by social groups. In sociocultural terms, creativity is located among different agents rather than in the minds of the creators – and the mind itself is also social (Glăveanu 2011: 480).

In his extensive ethnographic research conducted in Australia Phillip McIntyre (2008; 2011a), scholar in the field of popular music, applies to Western songwriting the systems model of creativity developed by psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, a pioneer of the confluential approach (1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]). According to Csikszentmihalyi, creativity emerges at the intersection of *individual*, *domain*[16] and *field*. The individual contributes to the domain – a "set of symbolic rules and procedures" (Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]: 27) – in bringing novelty to the existing domain or *field of works*, which the field (people with the power to affect the domain) either accepts or rejects.

McIntyre (2008; 2011a) states that, in the context of popular music, creativity in songwriting comes about when an individual produces a variation to the domain, and the field of social organisation accepts novelty as part of the domain. Songwriters base their creative decisions on the body of knowledge they have about songs that belong to the domain, acquired through formal or informal training and covering lyrics, melody, rhythmic components and production. Gradually, this knowledge becomes intuitive. McIntyre (2008: 42) also uses Bourdieu's (1993)

16 Toynbee (2000), leaning strongly on Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) sociological ideas and concepts, uses the term field in a similar sense as Csikszentmihalyi uses domain. I have chosen to follow Csikszentmihalyi's terms in this study, and consequently use the term domain when referring to the full body of existing works.

concept *habitus* to describe the musician's intuitive feeling of how music should be made, a *feel for the game*. Domain acquisition is a major part of songwriters' creative work (McIntyre 2007). I assume that such intuitive feeling also extends to anticipating alternative futures for the domain.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]) model has been criticised for still putting too much emphasis on individuals and on the role of gatekeepers (Tschmuck 2006: 196; Miettinen 2013: 436; Barrett 2014: 7–8; Poutanen: 2016: 22). Almost without exception, the creative author in the field of popular music is a group of people (Hennion 1983; Heinonen 1995; Scott 1999: 1974; Green 2002: 45; Ahonen 2007: 172; Burnard 2012: 73), and questions of authorship are even more intricate in contemporary pop music. Art is socially produced, and in such cases creativity is also a collective process (Thompson 2019: 23). A&R people in record companies contribute to the creative content by changing the lyrics and the musical content, for example (Eckstein 2009: 241). In such cases the executives are not simply gatekeepers who accept or reject the ideas of creative individuals or groups, they may also share authorship with the songwriters, even if they are not the authors in terms of copyright. On the other hand, the creative individuals themselves – in my study the songwriters under investigation – are also members of the field given that they are able to alter the content of the domain (Thompson 2019: 123).

Researcher Susan Kerrigan (2013), who focuses on the creative industries, revised the model in her work on the production of a documentary film, replacing individual with agent and thereby extending the model to account for creativity in groups. Furthermore, she places "creative practices" in the centre, further highlighting the idea that these practices occur at the intersection of all the elements in the system.

In cases of collaborative or distributed creativity (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009), individual contributions do not determine the creative output, and interaction between individuals must also be taken into account. A new stream of research on creativity brought this to light in the 1990s (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009: 81). Researchers Stacy DeZutter and Keith Sawyer (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009; Sawyer 2019) describe improvisatory performance as "collaborative emergence", which is highly unpredictable and in which the contributions of each individual influence next steps and further creative decisions. Each individual may redirect the process. The framework thus illustrates how the creative result emerges simultaneously from individual creative acts and the group operating as a system.

I have attempted to take both the individual and the collective levels of creative work and foresightfulness into account in my research. My investigation concerns the insights of individual creators, which are firmly connected to and influenced by the social and cultural surroundings. These individual, yet social agents often

work in groups, and for this reason I also observe their collaborations. As musicologist Paul Thompson (2019: 33) notes, group creativity involves two distinct systems: the group and the domain, which is a system of symbolic rules.

Rather than investigating creativity as an individual's ability or quality, I focus on creative work, which involves creative processes and creative thinking. This emphasis on the processes and the rationale related to creation rather than the creative products or the persons reflects recent shifts in research on creativity and psychology more broadly (Sawyer 2003: 6; Chan 2013: 25). On the grounds that creativity is non-measurable and domain-specific, scholars have put forward the suggestion to "get rid of *creativity*, and look at *creative acts* [original italics]" (Deliège & Richelle 2006: 2).

A significant methodological difficulty in studying the creative act of songwriting is to define when the songwriting begins and when it ends. Scholars Irène Deliège and Marc Richelle (2006: 3) formulate the question thus:

> -- at what point in time does the sonnet begin in the poet's mind, or the symphony in the composer's brain? And how does the process develop in time? Is the time spent putting letters or notes on a piece of paper more or less important than the time spent before, maybe long before, in essential activities that leave no observable traces?

As Bennett (2014: 43) observed in collaborative songwriting sessions, "several creative decisions had already been implicitly made before the co-writing session began." Shira Lee Katz (2016: 183) also concludes in her research on the influence of the extra-musical in the composition of classical music, that "perhaps the most significant rumination or insight has been made *before* the composer actively works on their piece" [original italics].

In order to cover creative work, creative thinking and creative decision-making more broadly, I interviewed songwriters and I observed them collaborating. As Howard Gruber (1989: 5), psychologist and theorist focusing on creativity system, states, the creator is not merely someone who does the work, but also a person living in the world. Creation is not merely a "lightning bolt": a creative insight might appear after years of familiarising into a specific form of art, having breaks and forgetting about the work-in-progress (ibid.: 14, 18).

My study therefore also covers thinking processes and actions that are temporally and spatially separate from the moment when and the place where ideas evolve into a song. The creative work of pop songwriting is also about being a songwriter, observing the world as a songwriter and acquiring information about the domain of pop music in everyday lives. Creative work extends beyond the working process. I assume that, when it comes to future-oriented thinking, the time spent

outside the sessions has particular relevance. As they are doing their grocery shopping, songwriters might hear a piece that influences their understanding of evolving music trends. This, again, might have an influence in the next songwriting session, consciously or not. I further assume that songwriters observe their broader cultural environment in order to catch and anticipate changes in music. Trend sociologists and fashion scholars point out that stronger cultural trends often emerge first in visual culture (Vejlgaard 2008: 41). Music reflects the spirit of the times (Vinken 2005; Lynch & Strauss 2007: 106) and changes accordingly – thus, at least in theory it would be possible to know something about the futures of music by observing trends in other culture-related areas.

Previous research on songwriting and creativity in popular music provided the fruitful basis on which this study builds. The aim is to enhance understanding of the creative work of songwriting by bringing to light conceptions and rationales that have been hidden so far.

1.5 Grasping future-oriented thinking

The present study investigates songwriting from a specific perspective: that of foresightfulness. In order to grasp this phenomenon, I turn to the discipline of futures studies. The aim is not to produce knowledge about the futures of pop music, although a careful reader might be able to track some evolving trends from the discourses. My intention is rather to enhance understanding of how individuals or groups orientate towards futures in specific working conditions, which positions my study in the growing area of futures research. The interest thus far has been strongly in anticipating what futures might bring, in other words the contents of alternative futures. Less attention has been paid to how individuals orient themselves towards futures[17], or to how knowledge is created on an individual or collective level (Slaughter 2001: 408; Dufva 2015: 49; Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015b: 251–252; Tapinos & Pyper 2018).

My study draws most heavily on approaches that could be categorised as *athematic*. Psychologist Rachel Seginer (2009: 3) distinguishes between the athematic and the *thematic* approaches to futures, which Ahvenharju et al. (2018: 2) describe as follows:

> While athematic approaches consider aptitudes, traits or capabilities related to future-oriented psychological processes without considering its content, thematic

17 For research on future orientation in the field of psychology, see e.g., Seginer 2008; Beal 2011.

> approaches explicitly consider the content of the envisioned futures. Images of the future, visions and scenarios are examples of thematic approaches to the future, as they describe particular futures. (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 2)

This emphasis on the athematic approach is the first factor that separates my study from the most common streams of futures research. I lean on futures studies not to produce knowledge about alternative futures (albeit some of my informants did so in the course of the study), but to conceptualise songwriters' future-oriented thinking. Second, the relevant time scale in my research is somewhat shorter than in most futures studies, although the use of time scales is inconsistent in some of them, and many researchers do not even define the time scale they adopt (Nordlund 2012). Third, futures studies typically emphasise ethical concerns and adopt normative approaches, the aim generally being to envision and create a better world for humankind (Niiniluoto 2018: 10; on the main topics of futures studies see e.g., Malaska 2017: 19). My normative aims are more domain-specific.

My use of futures studies in this work is conceptual, both theoretically and analytically, in the sense that they offer a set of concepts through which the songwriters' future orientation can be understood, theorised and analysed in the research materials. A major inspiration for my study was the doctoral dissertation of Ana Nuutinen, a fashion scholar: *Edelläkävijät. Hiljainen, implisiittinen ja eksplisiittinen tieto muodin ennustamisessa* (2004) ("Forerunners. Tacit, implicit and explicit knowledge in fashion forecasting"): it has a similar approach. Nuutinen studied the work of Finnish clothing designers, and her research brought to light some aspects of designers' work that are rather well known inside the industry, although less so among consumers or in Academia, but are seldom verbalised or made explicit. I have a similar aim: I wish to shed light on some aspects of songwriting that have been less discernible and have attracted less discussion – perhaps not consciously identified previously even by the creators.

None of the existing terms and concepts in futures studies and psychological research is adequate in itself to describe or delimit the complex task of conceptualising and analysing future-oriented thinking within the context of pop songwriting. In general, the concepts addressed are broader in scope than in my study, in which the main interest is in the orientation of creative workers towards alternative futures in the domain of pop music. Psychological concepts, in turn, focus mainly on people's personal futures.

Furthermore, there is a lot of ambiguity in the use of terms and concepts in the areas of futures studies and corporate foresight. The emphasis in the former has been strongly on philosophical and epistemological questions (see e.g., Malaska

2017), or in developing methods[18] for acquiring information about possible, probable and preferable futures (e.g., Bell 2003: xiii), with less attention being paid to developing and sharpening the concepts used (Slaughter 1996: 87; Malaska & Holstius 2009: 85; Rohrbeck et al. 2015: 1; Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 3). Concepts are frequently used loosely: different concepts might refer to the same phenomenon, and one concept might carry several meanings (Rohrbeck et al. 2015: 1; Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 11). Futurologists Pentti Malaska and Karin Holstius (2009: 85–86) suggest that the diversity of terminology could reflect the richness of futures thinking, although they do call for clarification.

When it comes to the scope and focus of future-oriented thinking among songwriters with which I am concerned in my research, corporate foresight and fashion forecasting[19] are the areas of expertise and branches of knowledge that are closest to its thematic territory. These practical applications of futures studies focus on the short term and tend to be motivated by economic goals. As futurologists Franz Liebl and Jan Oliver Schwarz (2010) point out about the business world in general, early notions of change focused on avoiding crises and maintaining stability, whereas nowadays corporations see the potential in raising consciousness of alternative futures to gain sustainable competitive advantage (see also Rohrbeck et al. 2015: 2; Scheiner et al. 2015: 112).

Despite the similarities, foresight in the creative work of pop songwriting is rarely as conscious as in corporate foresight or fashion forecasting. Taking futures into account in creative work within a cultural albeit commercial framework is a complex matter: it also relates to the relationship between creativity and commerce, which is often understood as oppositional, as well as between authenticity and inauthenticity. I assume that motives for scoping futures may as well be aesthetic and expressive as economic. The self-reflection of lyricist and researcher Mike Jones (2005: 234) reveals something relevant about this ambiguity: "a musician can be in 'two worlds at once' – because his or her [sic!] work consists of consistently mediating, negotiating, and reconciling the shifting dimensions of 'art-making' and 'commerce-satisfying'". I assume that these different worlds are also linked to future-oriented thinking in the context of making pop music. Furthermore, I assume that the future-oriented thinking of songwriters and their attitudes towards futures are connected to their thoughts and hopes about their personal futures.

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18 Different methods are introduced in e.g., Gordon Glenn's & Theodore J. Gordon's The Millennium Project. Futures Research Methodology – Version 3.0 (2009) and Sirkka Heinonen & Kuusi & Salminen's How Do We Explore Our Futures? Methods of Futures Research (2017).

19 Fashion forecasting, developed in the 1960s in the clothing industry, is a practice-based branch of futures studies.

For the reasons addressed above, I have not delimited the perspectives of futures studies to corporate foresight or psychological thinking. Instead, I draw on various concepts from different approaches to build as multilateral a picture of the phenomenon as possible.

I use future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness in this study as umbrella concepts incorporating the different ways of thinking about alternative futures, using knowledge and orienting towards futures. I also lean on key concepts such as *foresight*, *futures knowledge*, a*ttitudes towards futures*, *prospective* and *future consciousness*. All of these have been used in futures studies to describe and enhance understanding of the future-oriented insights, attitudes or behaviour of individuals or organisations. Drawing from all of these, I investigate foresightfulness as phenomenon that could be understood as an attitude, as ability or as action.

FORESIGHT AND FUTURES KNOWLEDGE

Foresight is understood as an ability to recognise things before other people do, and to estimate their likelihood and developmental paths (cf. Tsoukas & Shepherd 2004: 137–138). People with foresight may be better able to act in complex and fast-changing environments (Sarpong et al 2013: 105). However, possessing the ability does not mean that it is automatically or consciously brought into use. When an ability is brought into use it becomes strategic, something that people do rather than merely having the ability to do it (Sarpong et al. 2013: 36). Foresight may be applied to catch up with trends or in an attempt to shape possible futures (Daheim & Uertz 2008: 331).

Foresight could also be described as a capacity, a practice, an activity or a process (Slaughter 1996: 99; Tsoukas & Shepherd 2004; Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015a: 112; Lombardo 2017: 604). It is built on three assumptions: many different futures[20] are possible; change and its drivers can be identified and studied; and actors can affect alternative futures (Rohrbeck et al. 2015: 2). Futures are multiple and uncertain, open and unknowable (Godet 1982: 295; Poli 2017: 59), yet they can be studied by means of foresight to produce knowledge about possible, probable or preferable futures (see e.g., Lombardo 2006: 34).

Information acquired by means of foresight methods is referred to as futures knowledge, which is interpretative and speculative in nature (Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015b: 264). The term is contradictory in principle in that one cannot know anything for certain about futures (De Jouvenel 1967: 5; Poli 2017: 62). According

20 For this reason, futurologists prefer to use the plural version of the term future, including in the name of the discipline

to futurologist Pentti Malaska (2017: 20), "the knowledge of the future refers to perceptual knowledge of contingent, intentional, and non-factual phenomena". Futures knowledge is visionary, based on a combination of facts and vision (ibid.), and it does not have a truth value: "at best we can now guess [original italics] what will happen in the future" (Niiniluoto 2017: 23).

Acquiring futures knowledge and practising foresight are thus not about making accurate predictions of what will happen. Even if knowledge about futures is "a contradiction in terms" (De Jouvenel 1967: 5), thinking about them is not meaningless to individuals or groups. Orienting towards and thinking about possible, probable and preferable futures helps individuals and groups to make decisions. "Knowledge of the future is a sine qua non for making good decisions or influencing the course of events in a desired direction or avoiding undue risk and threats" (Malaska & Holstius 2009: 89). Decision-making is a central element in creativity and in songwriting, too, thus it could be argued that futures knowledge is also essential in pop songwriting.

The clothing industry is an example of a commercialised branch of the arts, similar to popular music. As a "hybrid of cultural industry and consumer goods industry" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 14) it has adopted forecasting or foresight on many levels. Corporations do it, designers do it, fashion editors do it, and even consumers who wish to be pioneers and trendsetters choose their outfits based on their assumptions of what will be fashionable tomorrow.

Conscious and systematic foresight has attracted more attention in futures studies and it is also acknowledged in fashion forecasting, and although some scholars define it explicitly as "systematic and conscious examination of future alternatives" (Parkkonen & Vataja 2019: 61, transl. by the author), foresight may also be less conscious and practised non-methodically, without applying standardised methods or tools from futures studies (Hideg 2007; Tapinos & Pyper 2018: 292). As Hines & Gold (2015: 100) conclude: "Everyone, including corporations, uses foresight in their daily lives, but usually, they do not do so systematically. That is, such use is not based on concepts, approaches, and methods developed and used by professionals for formally studying the future." Futurologists Esfathios Tapinos and Neil Pyper (2018) refer to such foresight as *forward-looking analysis* and call for more research on similar non-professional foresight. Given the recognition of foresight as implicit, non-systematic and non-methodical, even if songwriters claim it is irrelevant to them it may well be part of their work. I therefore analyse their narratives and actions on a deeper level in order to recognise implied foresight.

PROSPECTIVE AND OTHER ATTITUDES TOWARDS FUTURES

An actor may be able to foresee without purposefully using the ability. Foresightfulness plays a more important role in creative work if the actor also has an active future-oriented approach. 'Prospective' is understood in this study as an active, often conscious, futures-oriented attitude. It is about wanting and attempting to identify drivers of change, or to influence the course of events.

Prospective as a term derives from the French school following the thoughts of philosopher Gaston Berger (1964). The prospective school could be described as one branch of corporate foresight, the other one being the US-based school of strategic foresight with its roots in Herman Kahn's work at the RAND corporation (Rohrbeck et al. 2015: 2–3). La prospective has also been characterised as the French version of, or term for futures studies (Roubelat 1996: 107; Poli 2017: 61; Heinonen et al. 2017: 309). Although the American and the French schools have distinct roots, the two approaches have significant similarities. According to Joseph Coates et al. (2010: 1423), strategic foresight and la prospective are, in fact, the same thing: "If we simplify, la prospective is foresight when we add the adjective strategic in English i.e. *strategic* foresight. [original italics]"

Berger (1964: 270–273) warned of the dangers inherent in prediction and linear extrapolation, and urged people to take a more active approach towards futures, to acknowledge that the future is not predetermined, but open and influenced by the actions of individuals. He explains the term prospective in relation to retrospective: the latter means looking back and the former means looking forward. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in the nature of these gazes. Because future possibilities are open, glancing forwards is rather a question of making plans or preparing oneself for possible futures. Forecasting and being prospective complement and require each other (Berger 1964: 270–273; Godet 1982: 300) According to Godet & Roubelat (1996: 2), the "first aim of *La prospective* is to illuminate the choices of the present in the light of possible futures [original italics]".

According to the prospective approach, futures explain the present, not the other way around. People want things tomorrow and that is why they act in a certain way today. Futures are the *raison d'être*, the reason to be, of the present, which Godet (1982: 296–298) refers to as anticipated retrospective. By being prospective, individuals can make their way to their desired futures and participate actively in creating them. I also assume that, in the context of pop songwriting, awareness of alternative futures influences creative work in many ways, as well as the various futures-related wishes and goals.

Futurologist Jean-Philippe Bootz (2010) also draws from Berger's (1964) concept, but he makes a distinction between foresight attitude and foresight activity. The former refers to the "cognitive dimensions of anticipation and of individual

learning", "more to an art, a philosophy and a state of mind than to scientific methods", and the latter to collective processes (Bootz 2010: 1588–1589). Both are under investigation in my research: my aim was to acquire knowledge about songwriters' mind-sets and rationale during the interviews, whereas the collective levels of foresightfulness may become visible in action during the observations.

My study therefore explores the ways in which songwriters balance conflicting demands, and the ways in which they might prepare themselves for changes or attempt to influence them. Although being aware of and interested in futures is characteristic of human beings (Lombardo 2017: 599), there is wide variation in how people orient towards them. In addressing this variation, I am guided in my analysis by French economist Michel Godet's (2006: 6–8) work.

Godet (2006: 6–8) categorises five basic attitudes towards futures: *passive*, *re-active*, *pre-active*, *proactive* and *anticipactive*. Pre-activity and proactivity in combination form la prospective or the prospective. Godet's work is based on Berger's ideas and has been used widely in strategic management as applied in business and politics. Futurologist Anita Rubin (2006) has also used these concepts in her research on futures images among teachers at Turku School of Economics. Below is a synthesis of these scholars' definitions of the five basic attitudes or outlooks towards futures (Godet 2006: 6–8; Rubin 2006: 43–45):

1. Being passive means accepting change, not being interested in futures and not believing that they can be affected.
2. Being reactive means adjusting to changes and acting only when the change has already happened.
3. Being pre-active means trying to foresee possible changes but not trying to affect them; preparing for possible future changes.
4. Being proactive means affecting futures; taking a creative and innovative approach.
5. Being anticipactive means combining reactive, pre-active and proactive attitudes, trying to foresee future changes and possibly attempting to affect them.

The most active of these is the proactive attitude. It is also often described as the most creative approach (e.g., Rubin 2006: 45). Godet (2006), and many other scholars emphasise the importance of proactive thinking. Psychologist and futurologist Thomas Lombardo (2009: 92) claims that if people do not have the desire for change or strive towards it, tomorrow will be the same as today and in that case the future does not exist. Stability will thus lead to death. Similar suggestions have been made in the context of popular music. Media and communications scholar Johan

Fornäs (1995) writes about the possible death of rock as a genre and concludes that the only way this genre will survive is if it stays open to change.

I use this classification as a tool to categorise the different ways in which the songwriters under investigation orient themselves towards and cope with possible futures. Nevertheless, my aim is not to categorise the songwriters in terms of attitude. I rather look for examples of different kinds of thinking processes, insights and actions that could be interpreted as reactive, pre-active or proactive, singly or in any combination.

Whereas Berger (1964) stresses the importance of looking far and wide and the responsibility of taking actions, "taking care of mankind" (Roubelat 1996: 107), Godet's (2006) applications of Berger's thoughts to the corporate context are more suitable for my research, in which the time span is short and ethical concerns are less relevant. However, I find Berger's original idea that prospective connotes an attitude rather than a method or a discipline relevant to my research. Action is directly related to attitude, however (Coates et al. 2010: 1424).

FUTURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Whereas prospective is understood here as having a conscious active attitude towards possible futures, foresightfulness also implies an ability or a capacity that is not necessarily taken consciously into use in creative work. In this sense it comes close to *future(s) consciousness* or *future awareness*, which refers to the "human capacity to understand, anticipate, prepare for and embrace the future" (Ahvenharju et al. 2021: 2). As I understand it, future consciousness may be a passive capacity, meaning that an individual may be future conscious without consciously using this capacity. In its simplest form, future consciousness is an awareness of the fact that this moment is followed by another moment. All human beings have some level of future consciousness and all goal-oriented action requires it, but there are notable differences among individuals (Lombardo 2006: 15; 2009: 85–86). Future consciousness can also be taught and developed (Lombardo 2009; Heinonen et al. 2012: 18).

Although being aware could be considered one of the keystones of futures research, the concept has been conceptualised and empirically studied surprisingly little within futures studies. *Future orientation* as a neighbouring concept has attracted attention in psychology (e.g., Seginer 2009), but my focus here is on its definition in futures studies.

Future consciousness as a term is mentioned in literature classics by futures scholars such as Alvin Toffler (1970) and Frederik Polak (1971), but since then only a few have attempted to define the concept more thoroughly. The first attempt was in an article written by psychologist Oystein Sande (1972), in which he divided the concept into six dimensions.

In the 2000s, psychologist and futurologist Thomas Lombardo (2006; 2007; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2016; 2017) wrote several books and articles addressing future consciousness. The author is very comprehensive in his approach, and defines future consciousness as:

> -- the total set of psychological abilities, concepts, and experiences humans use in understanding and dealing with the future. Future consciousness is part of our general awareness of time, our temporal consciousness of past, present, and future. It includes the normal human capacities to anticipate, predict, and imagine the future, to have hopes, dreams, and fears about the future, and to set goals and plans for the future. Future consciousness involves thinking about the future, evaluating different possibilities and choices, and having feelings, motives, and attitudes about the future. It also includes the total set of ideas, visions, theories, and beliefs humans have about the future – the cognitive and theoretical content of future consciousness. (Lombardo 2007: 1–2)

Lombardo's writings have been praised for their holistic perspective (e.g., Malaska 2009), but they could be criticised for almost the same quality. Described as involving "[a]ll the major dimensions of human psychology, from cognitive and behavioural to emotional and personal" (Lombardo 2010: 35), future consciousness as a concept is hard to grasp and not systematic enough for the purposes of empirical study (see also Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 3).

A current research project on future consciousness at the Finland Futures Research Centre (University of Turku) aims to operationalise the concept in a simpler model (Ahvenharju et al. 2018; 2021), as well as to develop a practical tool with which to measure it in individuals. The research group has reviewed the literature related to future consciousness and its neighbouring concepts (*future orientation*, *prospective attitude*, *anticipation*, *prospection*, *projectivity*, *futures literacy*), listed features connected to the phenomenon in previous literature and grouped them in five dimensions to form a model of Futures Consciousness[21]. The dimensions are named time perspective, agency beliefs, openness to alternatives, systems perception and concern for others. (Ahvenharju et al. 2018)

Although I find it slightly confusing that these different neighbouring concepts have been paralleled to build a picture of future consciousness, the Futures Consciousness model, and especially the first four dimensions, is helpful in terms of grasping and understanding this complex and so-far unoperationalised phenomenon in the context of pop songwriting.

21 These scholars differentiate their theorisation from earlier versions by using capital initials and the plural form, futures. I use this version merely when referring to their model.

The first dimension, the time perspective, which refers to long-term thinking and an individual's general sense of time, is the foundation stone of Futures Consciousness (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9). According to Ahvenharju et al. (ibid.), "understanding the concept of passing time and being aware of tomorrow are the basic prerequisites for being conscious about the future."

The second dimension, namely agency beliefs, refers to the individual's belief or trust in being able to affect futures and to achieve desirable results (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9; 2021: 3). It is also strongly related to the different attitudes towards futures: passive and reactive attitudes are related to low experienced futures-related agency, whereas pre-active and proactive attitudes indicate a stronger belief in one's own agency. This dimension is particularly relevant in my research: I assume that songwriters' agency beliefs about influencing pop-music futures strongly affect their creative decision-making.

The third dimension, openness to alternatives, means acknowledging that the future is never determined by the past. The actor who is open to alternatives is aware that changes, sometimes surprising, are always possible (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9–10). Ahvenharju et al. (ibid.) also connect creativity and imagination to this dimension, which comes close to the meaning of prospective that emphasises the unpredictability of futures and the unreliability of extrapolations (Berger 1964: 270–273; Godet 1982: 295–296).

The fourth dimension, systems perception, refers to the holistic view of issues and understanding the complexity of systems (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 10). A future-conscious actor understands that, because of system complexity, outcomes of decisions can never be predicted reliably.

I focus particularly in my analysis on the cognitive dimensions of future consciousness as discussed in earlier research. Several of the cognitive processes listed by Lombardo (2006: 42–43) also feature strongly in creative work, including decision-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, planning, hypothetical thinking – and foresight.

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The concepts presented above helped me to organise and analyse my research materials. Drawing from all of them, I will build a comprehensive picture of this previously unexplored phenomenon, in which capacities, attitudes and practices are interconnected. According to futurologist Matti Minkkinen (2020: 69), anticipation and other related phenomena could be considered processes that follow from future consciousness. Lombardo (2017: 599) describes foresight as one of the capacities within future consciousness. Similarly, future consciousness is

understood in this study as a higher-level capacity, and as a prerequisite of foresightfulness in songwriting. Actors who take a prospective attitude become more conscious of future-oriented thinking and may practise foresight. I thus assume that songwriters may alternatively or simultaneously *have* the ability to *practise* foresight, they may *take* a prospective attitude towards futures, or they may *be* future conscious without using this capacity in their work.

SHARPENING THE FOCUS: THE FUTURES OF A SPECIFIC DOMAIN

This study explores future-oriented thinking in songwriting, which I assume is not as conscious or systematic as corporate foresight and fashion forecasting. On the other hand, it is not as broad and all-encompassing as future consciousness or future-oriented thinking as understood in psychology and futures studies. Thus, none of the existing concepts as such is applicable in my study. The focus has to be sharpened and re-directed through the further development of concepts to describe the phenomenon under investigation.

Given the lack of a better term, as demonstrated above, I use future-oriented thinking as a general umbrella term to cover the different ways of thinking about alternative futures. However, unlike in most previous studies, future-oriented thinking and future consciousness are also understood here in relation to a specific domain.

Sande (1972: 274) distinguishes different levels of interest in future consciousness, namely the personal level, the national level and the world level. Seginer (2009: 12), in turn, defines six domains of personal future orientation, one of which is work and career. My primary research interest is not in the future-oriented thinking or future consciousness of the songwriters in relation to the nation, the world or their own lives. The main focus is on work and careers, but instead of investigating how my informants orient themselves towards their professional futures, I focus on their future-oriented thinking with regard to the complex system of pop music, the industry surrounding it, and in particular the products of the domain, namely pop songs. Fashion forecasting, in turn, operates on three different levels: the environment, the market and the product (Kim et al. 2011: 46). I assume that similar levels have specific relevance in future-oriented thinking related to pop songwriting.

Thus, in order to investigate a phenomenon that is situated somewhere between a more general orientation towards futures and systematic corporate foresight or fashion forecasting, I use the terms *domain-specific future consciousness and domain-specific future-oriented thinking*.

The figure 1 combines Oystein Sande's (1972: 274) levels of interest in future consciousness, Rachel Seginer's (2009: 12) domains of personal future orientation and Eundeok Kim et al.'s (2011: 46) levels of fashion forecasting to illustrate domain-specific future-oriented thinking in relation to these levels.

Figure 1. Domain-specific future-oriented thinking or future consciousness. Synthesis produced by the author, combining levels of interest in future consciousness (Sande 1972: 274), personal future orientation (Seginer 2009: 12), and fashion forecasting (Kim et al. 2011: 46).

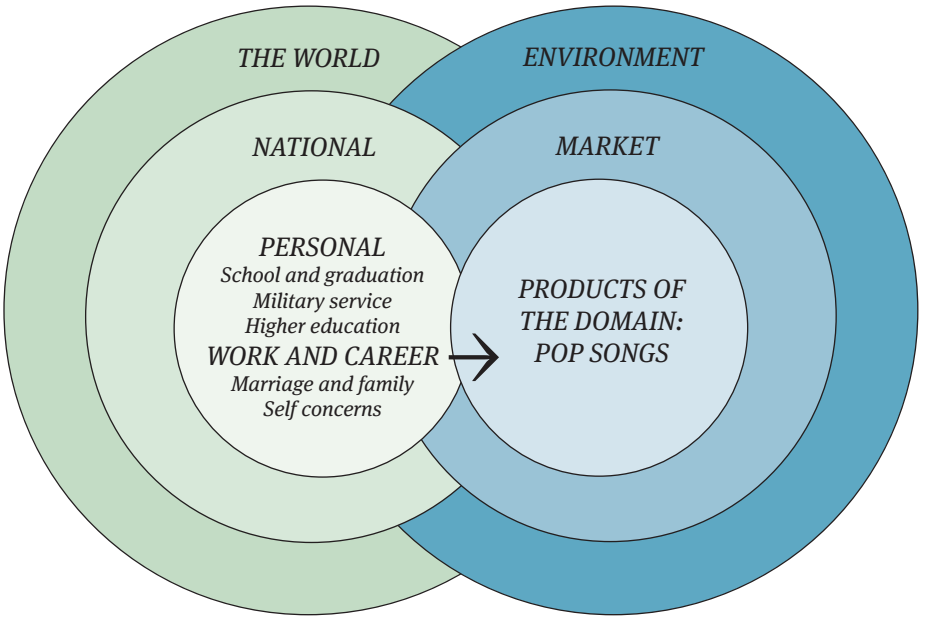

Figure 1 presents the products of the domain as the focus or target of domain-specific future-oriented thinking or future consciousness. The level of interest is related to work and career, but domain-specific future interest is in the market and in the domain rather than in personal career futures. The products of the domain again influence the market on the national and the world level.

These different levels of future consciousness or future orientation are presumably also connected in the context of pop songwriting. Songwriters might see children in their preferred future, for example, which could motivate them to aim at writing hit songs in order to survive financially. To do this they would have to anticipate pop music phenomena, which are presumably connected to broader cultural trends, that in turn are connected to global megatrends. I will observe such conjunctions in my research material, even though when I was acquiring it I did not pose questions concerning the songwriters' personal lives, for example.

In addition to (and also because of) the level of interest, the time scale is also different than in most futures research. The relevant scale in fashion forecasting – and presumably also in pop songwriting, is months or a few years, which in most futures studies is considered the near future.

1.6 Creative thinking meets future-oriented thinking

A central theoretical starting point and assumption in this study is that creative thinking and future-oriented thinking are interconnected in the context of creating pop music. More specifically, I suggest that domain-specific future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness are essential components of the creative thinking and creative work of pop songwriters. Studies implying that futures thinking enhances creative thinking support this assumption from a psychological perspective. Brandon Koh and Angela Leung (2019), for example, found that individuals who are in a "future-oriented condition" produce more novel ideas in tasks requiring creative insight, and according to Fa-Chung Chiu's (2012) findings, the more distant the imagined futures are in tasks requiring creative imagery, the more creative the results will be. However, these psychological studies differ widely from my research in terms of the setting, the scope of futures thinking, the participants and the creative tasks given to them. My aim in this sub-chapter is to elaborate on how the relationship has been addressed, explicitly or implicitly, in the disciplines of futures studies and popular music in particular, and thereby to support and build on this hypothesis.

Creativity as a term is rather frequently encountered in futures literature. However, few of these writings deal with the connections between future-oriented and creative thinking, or then the connections remain theoretical. Future-oriented thinking and foresight are assumed to benefit from creativity (Lombardo 2017: 604; Pouru & Wilenius 2018: 19): creativity is considered essential in the search for weak signals[22] (Schwarz et al. 2013: 67), and the future is understood as the result of ongoing acts of creation (Lombardo 2011: 37). Futurists should be able to imagine futures that differ from the past and the present, which requires creativity (Rubin 1998: 23; Glenn 2009: 3; Sarpong & Maclean 2016: 2814). Attempts have been made to foster future-oriented thinking by developing and building specific Creative Foresight Spaces (Tapio & Heinonen 2018: 117–118).

The arts in general have assumed increasing significance in futures studies in recent years (see e.g., Davies & Sarpong 2013). Futurologists use design fiction and drama methods in workshops, for example, to free participants from rational thinking so that they will use imagination and creativity in envisioning possible futures (e.g., Myllyoja 2017). In most cases the participants are not artists themselves. Futures scholars further suggest that artists are better than other people at foreseeing futures (see e.g., Metsämuuronen 2005: 265–266; Glenn 2009: 3).

22 This is a key concept in futures studies, defined as either an early indication of change, or the trigger that makes change happen (Ansoff 1975; Heinonen et al. 2017: 312).

According to futurologist Jari Metsämuuronen (2005: 265–266), artists, innovators and moguls in the music and entertainment business might well have developed better skills to sense early signs of change. Professionals such as these could also act as agents who bring emerging trends to the attention of larger audiences. Futures knowledge and weak signals appear in science fiction and environment-conscious poetry, for example (Glenn 2009: 3; Schwartz et al. 2013; Lummaa 2019).

The aim in many of these approaches is to harness creativity with a view to facilitating and advancing future-oriented thinking or producing futures knowledge based on works of art. My perspective is rather the opposite: I focus on how domain-specific future-oriented thinking might facilitate and inspire the creation of works of art in the form of pop songs. Alternatively, futures thinking may also constrain creative work. Music as an art form is neither a method nor a research subject in my study: it is the domain of pop music that is the target of the domain-specific future-oriented thinking I investigate.

Thomas Lombardo (2011; 2017) has written extensively on future consciousness and has also elaborated on creativity, listing psychological capacities that are connected to both. Ascribing certain personality traits to creative people is one aspect of creativity research (Sternberg & Lubart 1996: 682), but the implicit assumption that some people are creative and others are not, which is present in large amount of the literature (see Amabile 1983: 360), is open to strong criticism.

Lombardo (2006: 29, 43) defines creativity as a component of future consciousness, but he does not emphasise this or any hierarchical order between these attributes. He rather seems to see them as entangled in a complex way, often parallel and coexisting: he writes of "creative qualities of heightened future consciousness" (2011: 39) and of creativity as a component of future consciousness (2006: 29, 43), but on the other hand states that future consciousness stimulates creativity (2017: 651). In his view: "heightened future consciousness requires a creative dimension. Many of the psychological capacities and virtues of heightened future consciousness -- are distinctly conducive, if not intimately and essentially connected with, creativity" (Lombardo 2017: 649). He seems to focus more on what these attributes, or the people possessing them, have in common than on explaining how they are connected in theory or in practice. I intend to delve more deeply into this relationship by investigating the role of foresightfulness and future-oriented thinking in creative work.

Jason Toynbee's (2000) theorisations on creativity in popular music, which lean on Bourdieu's (1993) sociological concepts, also take future orientation into account. Toynbee does not use concepts from futures studies, and he does not refer to future consciousness, but the idea is detectable in his writing: "-- to produce popular music is not at all an intuitive act of expression, but rather something

which depends on planning, research and the constant monitoring of the outcome of the decisions." (Toynbee 2000: 35, 42)

The cognitive processes Toynbee mentions are also reflected in Lombardo's (2006: 42–43) definitions of future consciousness. Goal setting and planning, "the ability to construct a hypothetical series of connected actions that lead to the realization of an identified goal" (Lombardo 2006: 43), are the main cognitive processes involved in both future consciousness and the creative practice of songwriting. Monitoring the outcomes of decisions also requires future consciousness.

Furthermore, Toynbee's (2000) notion of "possibles" from which creators choose refers to their ability to spot something that is possible in immediate futures. Today's possibilities may become the music of tomorrow, and today's impossibilities may become future possibilities.

> Possibility arises from the fact that these spaces and positions, through carried forward by the inertia of history, are constantly being transformed as possibles are actively perceived, selected and shaped to produce future music. Possibilities only become possibilities in the ear of the music maker. (Toynbee 2000: 42)

Implicit in some theories of creativity is the idea that creative people [sic!] are able to see emerging things before other people can. According to Robert J. Sternberg and Todd I. Lubart's (1996: 94) investment theory of creativity, creative people see growth potential where other people do not. Their ideas might seem bizarre to others at first, but in the end they "sell their ideas high" before moving on. Sternberg and Lubart (1996) do not refer to weak signals, but from a futurological perspective this kind of tacit knowledge could be perceived through weak signals. Sternberg (2003: 94) lists intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation and the environment as creativity-relevant resources, yet none of them incorporate future-oriented thinking, even though it is implicitly part of the theory. Lombardo (2011: 28) suggests something similar: creative people are ready to take risks and to jump into the unknown, and in that sense they live in the futures more than in the past.

The literature on innovation, corporate foresight and fashion forecasting literature brings out the connection more explicitly. Innovation and futures are strongly linked: products and services are created for future use, for example (Van der Duin & Den Hartigh 2009: 342; Gordon et al. 2019: 4). For this reason, as Patrick Van der Duin and Erik den Hartigh (2009: 334) express it, "every innovation process should take the future into account in an explicit way".

Futurologists Gordon et al. (2019) point out the overlap between design thinking and strategic foresight in a way that I assume resembles the relationship between creative thinking and future-oriented thinking in the context of pop songwriting.

The focus in previous literature has been on how design thinking could profit futures studies, whereas these scholars turn things around by focusing on how strategic foresight could profit design thinking. According to them, a clear future vision is a crucial factor leading to success in design (ibid.: 4). They use the term "future-fitness" (ibid.: 20), which could well be applied to pop songwriting. Songwriters considering the appropriateness and up-to-datedness of their creation in the domain of immediate futures, as well as its timelessness, must consider its future-fitness. Furthermore, as Gordon et al. (2019: 22–23) suggest, specific strategic foresight could be harnessed to improve design thinking: scanning, recognising trends and investigating alternative futures, for instance. Imagining unexpected futures may generate innovation in that it makes designers think about steps and even leaps towards them. A few other scholars have made similar suggestions. Thinking about alternative futures may serve as an inspiration for innovators, and the innovations form a "path" towards the futures (Van der Duin & Den Hartigh 2009: 342, 344; Gordon et al. 2019). Foresight may be "both an information tool and a stimulus to action" (Bootz 2010: 1590), or it may have an "initiator role" by facilitating innovations through the recognition of new customer needs (Rohrbeck & Gemünden 2011).

Similarly, research on the clothing industry and fashion forecasting reveals a strong link between future-oriented thinking and creation. Fashion scholar Mathilda Tham (2008: 184) even claims that fashion forecasting in itself is creative work, and vice versa: "the very practice of fashion design also constitutes a cognitive and tacit processing of possible, probable and desirable futures" (ibid.: 192). Nuutinen (2004) concludes that foresight is an essential part of the fashion designer's work and that foresight is often simultaneous with design: automatic and intuitive.

Despite the variation in how future-oriented thinking is understood in the studies referred to above, in the terms used and in whether the references are implicit or explicit, the proposed explanations of why it enhances creativity and invention could also hold true in the context of pop songwriting. Future-oriented thinking releases actors from pre-existing ideas and schemas and activates visons of change (Koh & Leung 2019).

There is therefore support of my hypothesis in previous studies concerning the beneficial role of future-oriented thinking in pop songwriting. I suggest that the songwriters' ideas of possible musical futures may stimulate them to make certain prospective creative decisions, and their imagined futures may serve as an inspiration for their creative work.

1.7 Outline

In the above Introduction I have delineated the main theoretical and conceptual approaches used in this study. I present my research materials in the following Chapter 2, and explain the methodological choices I have made. The presentation of the research materials also includes descriptions of the songwriting situations I observed and the songwriters' practices on a more general level. I also reflect on my own position as a researcher, as well as elaborating on other ethical considerations that are relevant to this study.

Chapter 3 contains analyses of the songwriters' varying conceptions, values and beliefs, which related to their future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness. In particular, it presents findings related to sub-questions 2 (What conceptions related to music trends and foresight do songwriters have?) and 3 (Which factors relate to, or influence foresightfulness in songwriters?). I deal with these research questions first, given that further analysis is more comprehensible to readers if they have a deeper understanding of the songwriters' conceptions, values and beliefs.

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which songwriters cope with changes in pop music and acquire knowledge about alternative futures. Although I identify different future-related attitudes throughout the dissertation, this chapter focuses on insights, attitudes and actions that could be categorised as reactive or pre-active. This chapter specifically addresses the first sub-question (How do songwriters relate to, acquire, and use information about changing trends and the alternative futures of music in the creation of pop songs?).

Chapter 5 investigates foresightfulness in three different co-writing sessions. In addition to answering sub-question 1, it explores these specific situations as factors that might influence foresightfulness, therefore also offering a possible answer to sub-question 3.

In Chapter 6 I investigate the insights, attitudes and actions of the songwriters with regard to making influential changes, thereby specifically highlighting their proactive thinking and actions. I also identify the conceptions, beliefs and factors that influence proactivity. The discussion also extends to other actors in the songwriting business in exploring the songwriters' conceptions and beliefs about who has the power to make influential changes in pop music.

Each of these chapters ends with a short conclusion, and these separate findings are recapitulated in the concluding Chapter 7. I also evaluate the methods used, the generalisability of the results and the study's contributions to different disciplines, and finally I give some suggestions for further research.

2. INVESTIGATING SONGWRITING IN AND OFF SESSIONS

I investigate the role of trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking in the creation of pop songs. To this end, I analyse the narrated rationale and actions of songwriters as well as my observed actions and interaction among them. The research material consists of documented observations of co-writing sessions as well as interviews with selected songwriters.

2.1 Trackers and topliners at Music Finland's songwriting camps

I refer to the creative workers I am researching as "pop songwriters". To put it simply, a songwriter is someone who writes a song (Anderton et al. 2013: 45). The meaning of the word has changed in recent decades, however, depending on the context (McIntyre 2001; Bennett 2014). Whereas traditionally the end result of the creative process of songwriting was a sheet with the lyrics, the melody and the chords, pop songs nowadays are presented in the form of demonstration recordings. In Finnish, the direct translation of the term songwriter, *lauluntekijä*, has a slightly different meaning than in English. *Laulu* in Finnish is understood as more traditional than a pop song. In colloquial Finnish, the term *biisintekijä* or *kirjoittaja* (writer) is perhaps the most frequently used, and in academia I have used the term *popmusiikintekijä* (pop music maker), referring to contemporary writers of pop songs (see Hiltunen 2016; 2021)[23].

Many pop songs are created in studios by groups of songwriters whose creative roles differ from those in the more traditional process of songwriting (see Hiltunen 2016; Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016; Auvinen 2017; 2018). In the context of popular music, the studio has been well recognised and researched as a site for creating

23 It seems that changes in the practice of making popular music have also forced the music industry and related professional associations in Finland to re-think the terminology. In 2016, I was part of a team writing a report on pop-song export for Music Finland, in which we also suggested some terminological definitions (Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016). At the end of 2017, The Finnish Society of Popular Music Composers and Authors changed its Finnish name from Säveltäjät ja sanoittajat Elvis ry (composers and lyricists Elvis Association) to Suomen Musiikintekijät ry (Finnish Music Creators FMC), to better comprise all the different roles involved in creating popular music (Musiikintekijät 2017).

recordings, but less so as a site for creating songs (see e.g., Morey & Davis 2011). Words other than songwriting may be used, such as producing or "making music". One of the case studies in musicologist Tuomas Auvinen's (2017; 2018) research on creative agency among three Finnish producers also focuses on pop songwriting in the studio, for example, demonstrating how composing and producing intertwine constantly in such a process.

In this study, the term pop songwriters means a group of professionals who create songs for mainstream pop music markets in a contemporary songwriting setting, in studios and in co-writing teams of songwriters with various roles.

I chose my informants from among songwriters who participated in the Song Castle and A-Pop Castle songwriting camps arranged by Music Finland, a non-profit music export organisation that promotes awareness and the export of Finnish music. It is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, as well as its eight member organisations[24]. In addition to organising songwriting camps, it supports song export by distributing grants among songwriters and publishers, and helping them to join international networks.

Music Finland's songwriting camps bring together professional songwriters from different countries. The aim at Song Castle is to create songs for European and US markets, and at A-Pop Castle for Asian markets. The practices and working models used also reflect songwriting and song-export practices beyond the camps. Indeed, the camps have influenced practices in Finland, and the settings in which pop songs are created on many other occasions (see e.g., Auvinen 2017; 2018).

In the context of these Finnish songwriting camps, the songwriter roles are those of *topliner* and *tracker*[25]. Topliners are mainly in charge of creating melodies and lyrics, whereas trackers record and produce the demonstration recordings (Hiltunen 2016; Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016). The term topliner is widely used in the contemporary songwriting industry[26] (see e.g., Samama 2016) and it is mentioned in the research literature (Bennett 2011; Tolstad 2016; Auvinen 2018), whereas tracker seems to be

24 Finnish Music Creators FMC, The Finnish Music Publishers Association, Finnish Musicians Union, Gramex – Copyright Society of Performing Artists and Phonogram Producers in Finland, IFPI Finland, IndieCo – Finnish Independent Record Producers' Association, Society of Finnish Composers and Teosto – Finnish Composers' Copyright Society.

25 Sometimes the Finnish translation "träkkeri" is also used.

26 The term topliner may be rather recent, but the method of composing is probably older. I contend, for example, that the "vocal composing" Andrew Flory (2010) describes as Marvin Gaye's method, also used for decades by many other R'n'B artists (ibid.: 84), is similar to what today's topliners do: creating melodies and lyrics by improvising in the studio with a backing track.

rarer outside Finland. The terms producer or beatmaker are more commonly used in many markets to refer to a similar role (e.g., Bennett 2011; Tolstad 2016; Bennett, Sept 5, 2019). The term tracker derives from the word *track*, which in this context usually refers to the sonic files the tracker creates, also referred to elsewhere as a *backing track or a beat* (see e.g., Bennett 2014: 38). It may also refer to a "combination of the song and the performance to a recorded medium" (Bennett 2014: 2). Ingrid Tolstad (2016: 209) recalls that in the sessions she observed, the songwriters used the term track throughout the process, referring to the musical pattern becoming a song.

Auvinen (2018: 92) suggests that trackerism may be a new breed of home studio production, but he also justifiably suggests that "it is possible that the term 'tracker' is only a new piece of terminology applied to a role which already exists. This role is the producer of urban pop." In my view, however, it is essential to point out the difference between a tracker and a producer, at least in the context of songwriting camps. It reflects the difference between the song and the recording (see e.g., Bennett 2014: 7), and the fact that the aim at the camps is to create the song, not the final recording. The song is tracked/composed, the recording is produced. In many cases, making the song and the recording are parts of the same process and are done by the same people, but in the songwriting camps, the final version is usually produced by someone else. This view is supported by the people working in music export and organising songwriting camps I interviewed for my study. They emphasised the trackers' role in the creation of the song rather than the recording (Häikiö, Apr 17, 2014; Sorsa, Jan 23, 2019).

The first songwriting camps in Finland were organised in 2007 by Music Export Finland, the predecessor of Music Finland. Record companies and music publishers organise their own camps nowadays, which focus on creating songs for one specific artist, for example. The organisers and participants of the Music Finland camps tend to categorise the music made there simply as "pop", but the songs written at the Song Castle and A-Pop Castle camps represent different genres such as hip hop and electronic dance or country music (see Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016; Hiltunen 2016).[27]

My research focuses partly on the creation of songs at the songwriting camps, but the camps also enabled me to find informants who worked professionally, who aimed at international markets, and who created songs in contemporary settings. Music Finland chooses participants from among applicants who meet

27 Academic research on co-writing at Finnish songwriting camps so far is limited to my own article (Hiltunen 2016), but Minna Liikanen, a scholar in the field of management and leadership, is currently finishing her dissertation on the creativity of culturally diverse teams within a rapid creative process, which includes a case study from a Song Castle camp.

specific criteria: international success, co-writing experience, success in Finland, language skills and social skills. The participants are required to have a contract with a publishing house or an agent. (Music Finland 2019) All of them – including my interviewees – work professionally: they have already published songs, they operate on international markets and they are used to the co-writing method. A total of 61 Finnish songwriters participated in the in the Song Castle and A-Pop Castle camps in 2014–2019, some of them several times.[28] Thus about 18 per cent of those songwriters constitute the Finnish participants of my study.

2.2 Accessing insights, attitudes and actions by ethnographic means

I acquired my research materials by ethnographic means, in interviews and through observation. It is an approach that helps the researcher to understand the work, insights and experiences of informants, and the motives behind their creative decisions. As ethnomusicologist Julio Mendívil (2013: 201) points out, "only ethnography grants us access to the categories and values of the people, which produce and consume the music we study. Only through these methods can we access their emic interpretations."

The ethnomusicological approach brings researchers close to the musical phenomenon, helping them to understand the meanings attached to a specific culture and to become aware of their own position in relation to the research object (Moisala & Seye 2013: 29). Whereas the research object in traditional ethnomusicology might be a music culture that is distant and previously unfamiliar to the researcher, in mainstream pop it is something that is almost impossible to ignore in everyday life in Western countries. My fieldwork thus differs from classic ethnomusicological field work, which may require researchers to immerse themselves in the culture in question for lengthy periods to familiarise themselves with it. I collected my research material in shorter time periods, which is typical in contemporary ethnomusicological fieldwork (Barz & Cooley 2008: 14–15; Moisala & Seye 2013: 32, 44).

The dominant methodology used in previous studies investigating the creative process of songwriting and songwriters has tended to be the retrospective interview (see Heinonen 1995; 2015; Bennett 2014: 32; Long & Barber 2017). According to Bennett (2012: 152), this is probably due to the fact that many professional songwriters are reluctant to be observed while working. Nevertheless, retrospective interviews have some disadvantages in terms of acquiring information about songwriting. As a creative act it is an individual experience, even if it is carried out collectively,

28 The calculations are based on materials given to me in confidence by Music Finland (Music Finland March 11, 2020).

and as such it is difficult, sometimes even impossible to describe verbally (Negus & Pickering 2000: 263–264). Keith Negus and Michael Pickering (2004: 1), scholars in the field of popular music, also point out that the extensive mysticism that is associated with creativity confuses attempts to understand the phenomenon. Moreover, authors are limited in their capacity to recall the creative process retrospectively.

For this reason, I decided both to observe the songwriters and to interview them in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the songwriting process and the thinking related to it. Consequently, I was also able to gain insights into both individual and collective decision-making, as well as to identify possible contradictions between what these songwriters say they think they do, and what they do in practice.

2.3 Interviews

The optimal method for acquiring information about people's conceptions or understandings of specific phenomena, and what makes them act in a certain way, is to ask them directly. The most common way of acquiring information in phenomenographic research, which is one of the approaches applied in this study, is via interviews (Ahonen 1994: 136; Niikko 2003: 31). Interviews have also been used in futures studies, for example, to find out how individuals imagine futures, what effects futures knowledge have on decision-making and how such knowledge is generated (see e.g., Rubin 1998; Pouru et al. 2019; Parkkonen & Vataja 2019: 66).

Given that many futures-related thought processes are not conscious, I wished to reveal something the songwriters had not previously talked or even thought about. This is characteristic of the phenomenographic approach: the aim is to awaken in the interviewees a new kind of consciousness about the researched phenomenon (Marton & Booth 1997: 130; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 168–169). The conceptions are pre-reflective in nature: the experiences exist even if the individuals are not conscious of them, and it is the researcher's task to interpret conceptions based on expressions and the meanings the informant attaches to the phenomenon (Häkkinen 1996: 47; Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 166). It is assumed that the individual is able to express unconscious conceptions without consciously reflecting on them (Häkkinen 1996: 47).

Rather than interviewing as many songwriters as possible, I decided to focus on a few and to conduct thematic interviews: this allowed me to explore their insights more deeply. In fact, it is common also in phenomenographic research to limit the number of interviews (Ahonen 1994: 127). The aim is to introduce qualitatively different conceptions about the phenomenon in question, and one expression suffices to form a category given that the interest is in the qualitative content, not the frequency of conception. (Ahonen 1994: 127; Häkkinen 1996: 5)

Thematic interviews focus on specific themes, but in form they are freer than the structured interview (see e.g., Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 48). I chose this method because I wanted to keep myself open to possible emerging themes and allow the informants to talk as freely as possible. The lack of information about the researched phenomenon made it challenging to design the interview questions, and some of them were reformulated between the interviews.

My primary research materials consist of eight thematic interviews, conducted in 2014–2019. I recorded them all and made transcriptions. In addition to everything the informants said, I transcribed the moments and events that seemed to have significance, such as longer pauses and laughter. The interviews lasted between 29 and 117 minutes. Three of them were conducted via Skype, and the others face-to-face in conference rooms, cafeterias or restaurants, and in a studio rest room. The site did not seem to influence the duration of the interviews very much. Each setting was rather calm and relaxed, but it was obviously more difficult to transcribe the interviews that were conducted in noisier places.

I decided to interview songwriters who had attended Music Finland's songwriting camps because I assumed they would need to take current and future trends into account in their work, at least to some extent. My aim was to find songwriters who could be considered professionals, who worked in contemporary pop songwriting settings and who aimed to create songs for international pop artists. In choosing my informants from among participants of professional songwriting camps I fulfilled these requirements.

Once I had determined the framework I set about choosing the eight informants, which was partly random and partly based on practical arguments. I conducted the pilot interview with a songwriter I had interviewed earlier for a journalistic article (Hiltunen 2014), and I knew he was willing to talk about his work. Afterwards he gave me the name of a songwriter he thought would also be appropriate. One of the interviews was conducted on the same occasion on which I interviewed the songwriter for an article commissioned by Music Finland, which was not related to my thesis (Hiltunen 2017). Four of the interviewees were participants in the songwriting sessions I observed. Also, I wanted to interview at least one non-male songwriter, given that not all Finnish songwriters at the camps are male, even though they are in the majority[29 30]. I contacted four female songwriters, and the final informant of

29 I based calculations on the materials I received from Music Finland (2020) concerning participants between 2014–2019: the proportion of participants I assumed female was about 23%.

30 In this thesis, I make some assumptions regarding the gender of songwriters, but I am aware that these are merely assumptions, since I have not discussed the issue with them.

my research was the first female with whom I managed to make an appointment.[31]

I also decided to focus on Finnish songwriters so as to be able to conduct the interviews in Finnish[32]. However, I believe that some of my results may reveal new aspects of songwriting that are also relevant internationally. These songwriters collaborate internationally, create songs for international markets and use songwriting methods and practices that are also common abroad.

I briefly described my research and the topic when I asked if the songwriters would agree to be interviewed, and therefore they were probably tuned in to a certain kind of thinking and mind-set during the sessions. There were moments when I had the impression that the interviewee was thinking about my research topic and planning a response accordingly. This problem is typical in directed research, in which the researcher designs the questions based on a specific theory: the questions might give the informant clues as to what the researcher is looking for (see e.g., Hsieh & Shannon 2005: 1283). At some point, too, I realised that using the word "future" directed the informants' thoughts to distant futures. Despite the possible influence on the interviews, however, I believe it was ethically appropriate to inform the interviewees about my research topic beforehand.

'Future' was not the only term to cause confusion in the interviews. Designing the research questions and choosing which words to use was challenging, in particular because I chose not to use overly explicit terms to avoid guiding my informants to give me designated answers.

One of the main terms I used in the interviews was foresight or foreseeing (*ennakointi*, *ennakoida*). In Finnish, the verb means "to take into account in advance" (Häkkinen 2004: 121), but it is often confused with the words predicting and forecasting (*ennustaa*). The songwriters understood this term in many ways, but I wanted to let them continue even if they began talking about something different to what I had meant with my question. In this way I discovered different ways of orienting towards futures in this particular framework, and ways that did not match my expectations. In their responses the songwriters replaced the word foresight with terms such as calculation, forecasting, predicting, guessing or speculating. Each of these word choices reveals something about their conceptions of foresight.

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31 Fortunately, there were more females among the songwriters I observed.

32 Finnish is my native language, and the native language of six of the interviewees. Two of them were native speakers of Swedish, the second Finnish national language: in both cases I conducted the interview in Finnish, but one of them also used English in his responses. This came as a surprise to me and I was not prepared to pose the questions in English or Swedish. This may have put this songwriter at a disadvantage compared with the other interviewees, who were more comfortable with Finnish.

I also had difficulties finding the right words in Finnish when referring to music that is 'up-to-date'. Sometimes I used the word *ajankohtainen*, which could be translated as topical or current, but this word sometimes directed the interviewees' thoughts towards lyrical content that is topical, even political, whereas I had meant music that is in fashion or trendy.

Themes related to my research topic emerged automatically in some interviews, whereas in others I had to be more explicit with regard to my research questions. In some cases, I also managed to awaken consciousness about the researched phenomena. Some interviewees said that they had not really thought about the issues before and had some moments of insight during the interviews. This kind of research could thus have a normative aim: to foster future-oriented thinking and future consciousness among individuals (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 3).

Four of the eight interviews were with songwriters I had observed at the songwriting camps. In these cases I began by asking questions about the session I had observed, and the song they had created, also going back to some specific situations and conversations that arose in the session. Later, I asked them about their working methods and insights more generally. Unfortunately, due to schedule-related challenges, many of these interviews were conducted several months after the co-writing sessions and some of the recollections were quite vague. However, these feedback interviews gave me the opportunity to conduct broader thematic interviews with the songwriters in question, and the fact that we had met each other previously made the situation more pleasant and easier for both parties.

The interviews were conducted at different stages of my research and in different situations, thus the contents differ slightly. Along the way I removed some questions that seemed irrelevant, reformulated some questions and added others. Early results influenced the contents of the last research interview in particular. When I listened to the interviews afterwards I also realised that, at times, I was focusing too much on making the situation pleasant and flowing. If the informant did not understand my question, for example, I moved on to the next one so as not to make them feel uncomfortable. This, of course, is a fault in my research material. There are several reasons why I acted that way. Not being the most extrovert person, I was somewhat nervous in each situation. I had a lot of previous experience of conducting interviews for journalistic articles, and perhaps I was not able to let go of that role, which is quite different from the researcher's role in an interview. I also felt that some topics might be uncomfortable for the interviewees, an awareness that also made me feel uncomfortable, and eager to move on to the next topic.[33] In some cases, I deliberately decided not to correct the interviewee if

33 Such themes included commercial motives. Even though through my research I am trying

they misunderstood a question or a term, because I wanted to stay open to emerging themes in my research material, and to find as many different conceptions as possible. I tried to give the interviewees lots of time to respond, and this often led to long and meandering answers. On many such occasions the songwriter asked me what the question was again – and I was not able to remember either.

I also conducted four shorter interviews with people working in the music industry and with song export: an A&R executive in a publishing company (Slangar, Feb 2, 2018), Music Finland's export manager (Sorsa, Feb 9, 2018), head of A&R at Sony Music Finland (Kuoppamäki, Feb 28, 2018) and the managing director of Universal Music Finland (Valtanen, Feb, 6, 2018). The aim was to get a picture of the future orientation and possible systematic foresight in this broader area of the music business. I use some of these interviews in Chapter 6 to mirror some of the songwriters' conceptions.

I made contracts with the informants I interviewed and observed, according to which I am allowed to use the interview and observation data. Nevertheless, before publication I asked the informants whether they wished to see the extracts in which I refer to them directly or use direct quotes, thus to give them the opportunity to anonymise specific comments. The interview recordings involving informants who have given their permission will be archived in Music Archive Finland, where they will be available to future researchers.

I refer to the songwriters mainly as informants because, as is typical of the phenomenographic approach, I wish to emphasise the phenomenon, not the individuals. Furthermore, the objective is not to follow the thinking of individual songwriters. Nevertheless, I have kept their names visible because they are experts in their domain, giving information about their profession that is not specifically delicate, and they did not wish to be anonymous. Thus, readers who wish to do so are able to follow the thinking of individual informants. I briefly introduce the songwriters in Appendix 1.

2.4 Observations from the co-writing sessions

What people say they do and what they do are two different things. To build a more comprehensive account of how these songwriters worked in practice, and to find out if there was evidence of trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking, I observed them in action at songwriting camps. Pop songwriting nowadays is almost without exception a collaborative effort, thus focusing only on individual insights

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to dismantle the opposition, awareness that there are so many pejorative connotations with commercialism made me feel uncomfortable.

would give an incomplete image of the process and the practice. The observations gave me the opportunity to analyse the collaborative creative process through the interaction between individuals.

Real-time observation is among the most fruitful methods applied to investigate how pop songs are written. According to Bennett (2012: 140–141, 147–148; 2014: 22), collaborative songwriting in particular offers a pragmatic setting in which to investigate creative processes and creative thought in real time. The conversations the writers have give valuable information about the process: "collaboration cannot take place without externalisation of creative ideas – reducing the need for retrospective verbal protocol methodology" (Bennett 2014: 40). Bennett refers to verbal protocol or think-aloud methodologies, which have been used in studies on creativity to investigate creative thinking (Lubart 2000–2001: 303; Collins & Dunn 2011): aspiring creators are asked to verbalise and explain each decision they make during the process. These methods might well be suitable for researching creativity in simple problem-solving tasks, but in the context of contemporary collaborative songwriting they would probably affect the process: when a decision is verbalised it becomes more conscious. They would probably also block any work flow. Nevertheless, some decisions are verbalised in co-writing sessions to explain and justify creative decisions.

I attended three international songwriting camps (Song Castle 2015[34], A-Pop Castle 2017 and Song Castle 2018) and observed one co-writing session at each one. These opportunities were exceptional in that organisers are usually not willing to allow outsiders into the sessions because of the delicacy of the situation. My close connection with Music Finland probably helped me gain access.

Each day, participants at the songwriting camps are divided into groups of three to four and are given the task of creating a song in one day. The end product of this creative work is not the final recording to be released, it is a composition, namely a song and a recorded demonstration version of it. The final version may be very close to the demonstration, but it may also change a lot. Some record companies also organise camps at which the artist is present, but this is not usually the case at Music Finland's songwriting camps, therefore the demonstration and final recording are performed by different musicians.

It is therefore essential for each co-writing team at the camps to have someone who is able to record and produce demonstration recordings. Team members include one or two songwriters whose main responsibility is to create the melody and the lyrics (topliners) and one songwriter who is responsible for recording,

34 My article "Luovia valintoja rajoitetussa tilassa: Popkappaleen tekeminen ryhmätyönä Biisilinna 2015 -leirillä." ("Creative choices in a restricted space. Making a pop song as group collaboration at Song Castle 2015 camp") (Hiltunen 2016) explains this session in more detail.

creating the backing track with a sequencer program and producing the demonstration version (a tracker). Nevertheless, these roles overlap: each songwriter may contribute to creating the melody, the lyrics and the harmonies, and share ideas on arrangement and production (cf. Bennett 2014: 160; Hiltunen 2016; Auvinen 2018). The same person may also act in different roles depending on the session, and many trackers also work as producers in other contexts.

The protocol used at the Finnish songwriting camps is close to what Bennett (2011) calls "top-line writing" in his categorisation of different models of collaborative songwriting. Ingrid Tolstad (2016), a scholar in the field of popular music, has observed similar models in her fieldwork. Bennett (2011) defines top-line writing as follows: "A completed backing track is supplied by a 'producer' to a top-line writer who will supply melody and lyric. The backing track acts as harmonic/tempo template but more crucially as inspiration for genre-apposite creative decisions, such as singability of a line."

Bennett describes a process in which the backing track is finished before the topliner begins working. This may be the case with star producers such as the Norwegian Stargate duo, one of Bennett's (2014: 155–165) case studies, as an example of consecutive co-writing: "a contemporary producer might consider that this represents the end of the songwriting process; a traditional songwriter might take the view that it is just the start" (Bennett 2014: 159). However, trackers and topliners work simultaneously at the songwriting camps, and often also on other occasions (see Hiltunen 2016; Auvinen 2018). The initial stimulus may be a backing track or a beat created by the tracker in advance, but in these cases, too, the tracker keeps working on it during the session, which could have a significant influence on the final product. The ideas for track and topline (lyrics and melody) alternately feed each other.

Before the sessions, the A&Rs of the record companies and the music publishers attending the camp give the songwriters "briefs"[35] about songs that certain artists are looking for (see Hiltunen 2016: 5), and often play sections of songs the artists have already released. Such "pitch lists" or "tip sheets" are common in the recording and publishing industry outside the songwriting camps (Anderton et al. 2013: 51; Bennett 2014: 217; Tolstad 2016: 202). Through these briefs, the record companies share information about the type of songs they are looking for, to be recorded by specific artists. Such information may include specific instructions concerning the topic of the song, the tempo and the musical influences, as well as some details about the artist (cf. Bennett 2014: 217; Tolstad 2016: 202). On the

35 In Finland, I have heard the terms "briiffi" (breaf) or "liidi" (lead) used in a similar way (see Hiltunen & Hottinen 2016).

other hand, it may be quite vague, referring to "awesome songs" or "songs with big lyrics", for example (Anderton et al. 2013: 51).

After listening to the briefs, the co-writing team gathers in a session room equipped with portable studio gear. Normally it chooses one brief and starts to create the song. In principle, it has one day to finish the song, but in practice it is also worked on afterwards. All the songs created at the camp are aired at a listening session organised on the last day.

If the songwriters manage to create a song that arouses the interest of publishers or record-company representatives, it may be offered, or "pitched", to the artists mentioned in the briefs, or to other internationally successful artists (see also Wilson 2015: 14). That may happen immediately after the camp, or the publishers may continue to pitch the song to different artists afterwards. The songs that are chosen and recorded by artists are referred to as "cuts".

The song may also end up "on hold" for a specific artist, meaning that it cannot be pitched elsewhere before the artists or their representatives decide whether to record it or not. The delay caused by this practice is one possible motivation for developing foresight.

I observed the songwriting sessions from the moment all the songwriters gathered in their working room, and I left when they decided to call it a day. The respective durations of the sessions were seven hours and 15 minutes, eight hours and 45 minutes and nine hours. In all the cases, the trackers kept on working on the demonstration recording afterwards. In total, I observed the work of ten songwriters: seven Finnish, one Japanese, one German and one British.

The research materials I collected from the songwriting camps consist of recordings, field notes and a final demonstration recording of one of the songs.[36] As is typical in ethnographic research (see e.g., Lappalainen 2007: 13), preliminary analysis during the observation directed my focus, especially the first time. In accordance with my main research question, my aim was to give particular attention to explicit and implicit verbal references to past, present and futures in the dialogue, as well as to music trends.[37] I made notes about the events and conversations I found relevant to my research topic and the songwriting process, and I

36 I also asked the trackers in the other sessions to send me the demonstration recording, but none of them did. It had a minor role in my analysis and thus it was not a significant problem.

37 In the first session I paused the recorder when I thought the talk was not relevant to my research topic. This was mainly due to the fact that I was not well enough prepared: I was worried that my recorder would run out of space or batteries. Later I realised this was not the best way to proceed because I might better understand the meaning and importance of some events or conversations only in retrospect.

also noted general remarks about the situation, the songwriters' facial expressions and the atmosphere. Afterwards I listened to the recordings carefully, filled out my notes and transcribed the most relevant conversations. I refer to my field diaries as "FD May 5, 2015", "FD May 24, 2017" and "FD May 22, 2018".

I intended to stay as invisible as possible in the songwriting situations so as not to affect the creative process, which is why I did not ask permission to videotape the sessions. It is easier for participants to forget about the presence of a small Olympus recorder than a video camera (see also Ahonen 1994: 141; Moisala & Seye 2013: 46). In any case, in light of my research questions I did not think videotaping was necessary.

It seems that the songwriters experienced my presence quite differently in the different sessions. In one of them I almost felt as if I was part of the co-writing team. I was invited to participate when the team was recording shouts in the chorus, and to be in a "selfie" photo to be shared among the camp's Facebook group. In another session I was almost completely ignored, apart from occasional eye contact. One of the songwriters said during the session that he had been uncomfortable letting me in at first, but then he managed to forget my presence and thus it did not affect the "flow" so much. He told me afterwards in the interview that it was important for him to say this out loud in the session, so that he could get over it and continue working. In another session, one of the songwriters suddenly remembered my recorder while they were joking about something and reminded the others, laughing a bit uncomfortably, that the recorder was on.

Much less was verbalised during the sessions than I was hoping for. The process advanced in an atmosphere of constant agreement in the last two sessions in particular, and the songwriters seemed to possess similar knowledge about the domain of pop music such that extra negotiation was necessary. Many creative decisions were made quickly, and things often advanced at such a pace that I found it difficult to follow the process. I wrote several times in my field diaries: "When did this happen? I didn't notice."

The feedback interviews shed some light on the creative decision-making in retrospect, but the time lag between the sessions and the interviews seemed to make it difficult for the songwriters to recall their mental processes in those situations. However, these observations of professional songwriters at work gave me some understanding of their working methods and roles. In addition, many "off-the-record" conversations conducted during the breaks deepened my understanding of their work and insights.

2.5 Directed content analysis and the phenomenographic approach

I use concepts from different disciplines to categorise and conceptualise the songwriters' rationale and practices. Cultural and literary theorist Mieke Bal (2009: 14) describes this kind of concept-oriented approach as characteristic of and even crucial to interdisciplinary research, given that it is impossible for a researcher to cover all the literature and every theory from different relevant fields. Concepts may "travel" between disciplines and periods, however, and offer "miniature theories" that serve the purposes of the study. (Ibid.: 15, 19–20)

The aim of the analysis in this study is to explore the rationale, insights, conceptions, actions and attitudes connected to current and future music trends that can be traced in the research material. The method I use is known as directed content analysis, in which the researcher searches for specific pre-determined themes in the materials (see Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The interpretations derive from a framework based on existing typologies, such as Godet's (2006) typology of attitudes towards futures, and previous theorisations related to creative and future-oriented thinking. These typologies also affected how I designed the interview questions, and the factors I considered when I was observing the songwriting sessions. Through theoretical familiarisation I formed an understanding of foresightfulness and related capacities, attitudes, attributes and actions, and attempted to identify their explicit or implicit manifestations in the songwriters' narratives and observed actions.

I also adopt ideas from phenomenography, which is an approach rather than a method or a theory (Marton & Booth 1997: 111), and is widely used in the educational sciences in particular (see e.g., Järvinen & Järvinen 1993: 48; Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 162). The analytical focus is on how the informants experience the researched phenomenon: "Phenomenography is focused on the ways of experiencing different phenomena, ways of seeing them, knowing about them, and having skills related to them" (Marton & Booth 1997: 117). The basic units of phenomenography are referred to as "conceptions" or "ways of experiencing" (Marton 2015: 106), and the approach may be used alongside other methods (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 170).

Following the phenomenographic approach (see Marton & Booth 1997: 118; Marton 2015: 106) I aim to find out how my informants experience and understand things, which is referred to as a "second-order perspective" rather than a "first-order perspective". These experienced and understood "things" in this research are music trends and foresight: the possibility of acquiring information about or influencing future trends. The focus in phenomenographic approach is on conceptions, understood as deeper and broader than opinions (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 164), the objective being to present qualitatively different ways of experiencing or see-

ing things. The researcher seeks similarities and differences in these conceptions, as well as rarities and borderline cases (Niikko 2003: 34).

Conceptions are expressed through language, and this applies both to the researcher and the researched. For this reason, phenomenographers tend to use direct quotations, and the analytical categories may be named in accordance with the informants' own expressions. Informants may describe the same phenomenon in different terms, and vice versa, different phenomena in similar terms. The researcher should be able to find the conceptions "behind" the linguistic expression. (Häkkinen 1996: 28–29, 41) In my case, an extra challenge related to language was the fact that most of the interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the research report is written in English. I have translated the quotations myself, and I have shown them to the informants who wished to see them.

Phenomenography is the study of phenomena of which people have different conceptions (Ahonen 1994: 115). Early on in my research I was surprised to find that my topic provoked quite different reactions among songwriters and people working in the music industry. Some seemed immediately to see the relevance of researching future-oriented thinking among pop songwriters, whereas for others the whole setting seemed irrelevant and "far-fetched".

Complementing the interview material, the observed sessions also shed light on some of the songwriters' conceptions, values and beliefs. I analysed the contents of their discussions in the sessions, and then I asked them in the feedback interviews about specific situations and word choices that seemed relevant to my research questions.

My aim is thus not to show how the complex system comprising pop music and the music industry functions, it is to find out how songwriters perceive and experience its functioning, and how they experience their own role in it. This knowledge could also help to explain why they act in a certain way.

> -- in order to make sense of how people *handle* problems, situations, the world, we have to understand the way they *experience* the problems, the situations, the world, that they are handling in or in relation to which they are *acting*. Accordingly, a capability for acting in a certain way reflects a capability *experiencing* something in a certain way. (Marton & Booth 1997: 111, original italics)

The way people act is related to what they think and the kind of conceptions or understandings they have about relationships between things and phenomena (Niikko 2003: 28). "Experiences are reflected in statements about the world, in acts carried out, in artifacts produced." (Marton & Booth 1997: 120). It could be assumed that this relationship has significant relevance in foresightfulness and in shaping attitudes towards futures. If one is to take an active approach towards

futures, one must experience having the power to influence them (Ahvenharju et al. 2018a: 9).

Conceptions are not static. Interviewees may express different views on the same phenomenon based on the context and the formulation of the questions. They may also change and re-form their conceptions during the interview. (Häkkinen 1996: 25) People also vary in their ability to express themselves (ibid.: 47). For this reason, I followed the conventions of phenomenography in emphasising conceptions rather than people. Nevertheless, I separated different songwriter roles to find out whether there were significant differences in thinking and conceptions regarding trends and foresight. I should also point out that some findings concern songwriters of different ages.

The focus of interest in my study thus resembles that of phenomenography, but there are also significant differences in the collection and analysis of the research material. First, interview questions in phenomenographic research tend not to be based on pre-assumptions (Niikko 2003: 31), nor is theory the starting point of the analysis. I formulated some interview questions that related directly to different future-related attitudes, my aim being to find examples. I had a preliminary idea of the categories when I was conducting most of the interviews, but I tried to be flexible and open to other emerging themes and categories. Of course, the analysis was ongoing during the collection of the research material, and that affected further collection (Ahonen 1994: 125; Marton & Booth 1997: 129; Niikko 2003: 32).

The researcher should be able to "bracket" pre-assumptions and pre-understanding of the researched phenomenon, and to focus on how informants understand and express their views (Marton & Booth 1997: 119, 121; Niikko 2003: 21). However, it is evident that the researcher's subjective position, earlier knowledge and pre-assumptions affect the research, and one can never completely discard one's own conceptions and understandings (Ahonen 1994: 122; Niikko 2003: 40–41; Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 166). In my case, for example, the fact that I had some experience of writing songs, and extensive experience of consuming music and observing music trends, inevitably made such bracketing challenging for me. Indeed, in that theoretical understanding of the researched phenomenon affects the collection of the material and the analysis, theoretical knowledge is both a necessity and a risk (Häkkinen 1996: 48).

Moreover, in phenomenography, the results are despricptive categories, derived from the research material (Häkkinen 1996: 14), which is not the case in this study. Although phenomenography does not usually extend to why informants see things the way they do, or why there are individual differences in perceptions (Niikko 2003: 26), I address such factors in my analysis. As I see it, mere descriptive categories do not suffice to build a comprehensive understanding of

the phenomenon. Whereas phenomenographic studies merely describe variation (Häkkinen 1996: 14), I identify some possible reasons for it. These perspectives are complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Häkkinen 1996: 32).

I carefully considered the different levels of interpretation in the analysis. What songwriters say they think and do might differ from what they actually think and do. Furthermore, the position from which they replied to my questions shifted during the interviews. On some occasions they pointed out their position or the role in which they answered: "as a listener...", "as a producer...", "in life in general...". Where it seems relevant, I reflect these different levels and positions in the analysis, and on some occasions I involve the reader in the interview situation by explaining in more detail how I posed the question, for example.

2.6 The researcher's position and other ethical considerations

When I first had the idea for my research topic I was afraid that it would be too delicate, that I would not be able to find informants who would agree to participate in the study and to share their professional secrets. I was proved wrong during the research process. Most songwriters were willing, and even eager to talk about their work, and none of them wished to be anonymised.[38] The research material is therefore not especially delicate, but other ethical questions arose during the research process.

The biggest ethical question concerns my position as a researcher, which changed radically during the thesis-writing stage. I had already decided to interview and observe songwriters who had participated in the international songwriting camps organised by Music Finland. I conducted my first research interview in October 2014, and as early as in January 2015 something happened that strongly affected my position: I ended up working for Music Finland. I had written some journalistic articles for the organisation as a freelancer, and I had discussed my research topic with its personnel. Then I suddenly found myself employed by an organisation that was closely connected to my research material. I did not even apply for the job. Until 2014 I was working for a music quarterly, which was published by another publisher. Music Finland became its publisher – and thus my new employer – in January 2015. Later, in 2016–2017, I also substituted for the Research Manager.

These turns both facilitated and complicated my study. I had to pause to consider carefully whether I would need to make changes in the design because of

38 One of them initially wished to remain anonymous with regard to the songwriting session, but after the feedback interview he changed his mind and said that I could use the material in whatever way best served my research.

possible ethical issues. It was, and still is, clear that from my new position it would be more difficult to approach the topic neutrally. However, I came to the conclusion that, because the intended focus of my research was not on the actions of Music Finland, but on the actions and insights of songwriters who had used its services, there was no need to make changes to my research setting.

This did not mean that I could forget the issue completely. These songwriters are in the sphere of influence of Music Finland, and I had to think carefully about whether my position would affect the way my informants saw my research. Would it affect their willingness to be interviewed or observed? Would it affect how they answered my questions?

In an ideal situation there is no unequal power relation between the researcher and the interviewee. In my case, the relationship was not neutral. It is possible that some songwriters agreed more readily, thinking that my connection with the organisation might influence their career. Of course, it could be perceived as positive that I might have gained access to these rather exclusive songwriting events partly because of my position. However, it is not desirable for informants to agree to participate only because they fear that refusing might lessen their chances of profiting from the organisation. When I was asking for interviewees I did not emphasise my position, and I believe that I made it clear that each informant had the right to refuse to be interviewed or observed.

I was constantly aware of these power relations and possible bidirectional filters when I was analysing the materials. My perspective on the actions of Music Finland can never be completely neutral, and my position may have affected my research material. Even the fact that I conducted two of the research interviews in the organisation's conference rooms may have influenced the songwriters, giving them a sense of trust.

Other possible power relations may have resulted from differences in age and gender. The youngest songwriter I interviewed was about 14 years my junior, and the oldest was four years older than I was. Most of the interviewees were male. However, my experience was that we were rather equal in the interview situation. We were of roughly the same generation, and given that they knew something about my background, they were able to use more specific musical vocabulary and to talk about the music industry knowing that I was familiar with the terms, the actors and the phenomena. One of the interviewees re-checked with me about my discipline before he began using terms related to music theory.

A topic that did not arise with all the songwriters was my own experience of songwriting, which was also part of my position as a researcher. My songwriting studies have given me several tools enabling me to understand the songwriting process both as an individual experience and as a collaborative effort.

Inevitably, my experiences of songwriting also made it more difficult to bracket my own experiences and pre-assumptions. Psychologist Liane Gabora (2016: 131) describes how academic and practical knowledge intermingle and influence each other when one is researching music-making, putting special emphasis on experiences:

> My interpretation of the music-making process may be biased by my academic view of creativity. I believe, however, that the influence works primarily in the other direction; my understanding of how the creative process works is derived from experiences creating. This intuitive understanding is shaped over time by the process of reading scholarly papers on creativity and working them into my own evolving theory of creativity, but the papers that I resonate with and incorporate are those that are in line with my experience.

Similarly, my intuitive assumptions about the role of future-oriented thinking are built on my own experiences of songwriting, as well as on futures-related literature.

Furthermore, as an amateur songwriter I had to be careful not to profit from any information I gleaned from the songwriters in my own creative work. Conveniently (but sadly), the period when I was writing the thesis turned out to be less creative in terms of songwriting. I did not finish any songs and thus I was not tempted to steal ideas from the songwriters.

One possible effect of my research is that my presence in the songwriting sessions may have had a negative influence on the songwriters' creative process. None of the songs created in the sessions I observed has been chosen to be performed and released. It is possible that some songwriters could not perform at their best because they were uncomfortable with my presence.

On the other hand, my involvement may have had a positive influence on the songwriters in terms of increasing foresightfulness, which was a normative aim in my study. I would like to think that by encouraging them to reflect on some issues they considered self-evident or had not previously thought about made them more conscious of becoming more actively future-oriented, which could be beneficial in competitive markets.

3. CONCEPTIONS, VALUES AND BELIEFS

The way people act is strongly related to how they understand their operational environment and their own position in it, as well as different phenomena and the relationships between them (Niikko 2003: 28). These understandings could be examined as conceptions. Conception is a basic unit in phenomenography, referring to the individual's subjective way of thinking or experiencing a phenomenon (Marton 2015: 106). My aim in this chapter is to analyse some of the key relevant conceptions that concern how songwriters relate to changes in music and to its alternative futures, including values and beliefs that could be connected to trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking. Values refer to mental schemas related to the perceived worth of something, "conceptions of the desirable", which play an important role in action, operating as "guiding mechanisms" (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004: 364–366; Sullivan 2009: 534). Beliefs are understood as propositions, convictions or ideas that are held to be true (Hahn 1973: 208; Sullivan 2009: 46). On the conceptual level, values and beliefs shed light on and explain the variation in the position of songwriters on trends and futures. Values also relate to the motives (Hitlin & Piliavin 2004: 380) that guide their creative work.

The analysis in this chapter is based mainly on the research interviews, but I also illustrate the songwriters' rationale with some examples from the songwriting sessions I observed. The specific focus is on the songwriters' insights with regard to audience expectations, their working environment, and the mechanics of change in music. I come back to underlying beliefs in Chapter 6, which focuses on the songwriters' beliefs concerning their own position and agency in the songwriting industry. Chapters 3 and 6 thus focus more on insights and creative thinking in general, whereas Chapters 4 and 5 put more emphasis on action. Nevertheless, insights, attitudes and action intertwine in my analysis, as they do in practice: insights become understandable through action, and vice versa.

3.1 Similar but different – assumed audience expectations

Although the act of songwriting could be considered autonomic because it is "taking place beyond the supervision of the firm for the most part" (Toynbee 2003: 39–40), autonomy is restricted by the assumed expectations of audiences and gate-

keepers. Songwriters need to consider what audiences want, and what they might want in their near futures (cf. Bennett 2014: 82). They might, of course, decide to act against what they think is expected of them, but even in those cases awareness of and assumptions about expectations and reception affect the creative process. In order to oppose one has to consider what is to be opposed (ibid.: 67).

Even the most solitary creators have some awareness of the receivers of their art (Sawyer 2012: 343), and the aim in pop music is to please large audiences. It is therefore evident that audience opinions matter. The audience is part of the field that selects which novelties are accepted as part of the domain. Creators must be aware of the preferences of the field if they wish to contribute to the domain (Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]: 47).

Assumed audience expectations were among the key factors guiding the work of the songwriters I interviewed. They were aware of different, often contrasting expectations, which many of them experienced as a challenge:

> The challenge is, as I said before, how you can recite the same song in a bit different manner. What would be the new angle? It does not need to be a big difference to what has been heard 300,000 times before, but there must be something there. (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

This songwriter's comment illustrates rather literally what Toynbee (2000) refers to as small creativity. Songwriters have a restricted space of possibilities in which to make their creative choices. They have heard a multitude of songs they know the audience finds pleasing, and they apply this information in their work. They attempt to create something similar yet different enough, firstly in order to avoid plagiarism and secondly to stand out. Creating a new pop song thus tends to be more about selecting and combining elements from previously created works than inventing something completely unprecedented (Bennett 2014: 128). Hennion (1982: 39) simplifies the process: "They [recording professionals] must use common words, stories, sounds and tunes – each ingredient in itself must be very simple; success depends entirely on the mixture, on the creation of something new from well-known materials."

Similar challenges were repeatedly mentioned in the interviews such that it seems most songwriters are more motivated to look for similarity than novelty in their work, based on their assumptions of what the audience wants. This echoes what several scholars have pointed out: "Instead of trying to produce innovative, different or unusual works, pop musicians clearly favour relatively minor modifications to existing musical parameters" (Warner 2003: 7). Yet, this kind of view is open to challenge: innovation and diversity are also sought after in pop music, but complexity should be defined in different terms than in classical music, for ex-

ample. Nevertheless, it is true that continuity is more characteristic of the popular music continuum than radical change is (Toynbee 2003: 43; Negus 1999: 25). As in clothing, changes in pop music also tend to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and creators build historical continuity by making small changes (cf. Sproles & Burns 1994: 32).

One of the songwriters elaborates on his thoughts about audiences being afraid of novelty. He explains that music is not as important to laypeople as it is to people working in the music industry, and therefore audiences are attracted to similarity.

> For them music is a minor thing in life [...] they do not want to renew themselves all the time. If they find a nice song that sounds a bit familiar, then they may listen to it. And after that [song] they do not want to hear something new that sounds completely different. They prefer something that sounds a bit like the previous one but is new, because they got tired of the old one. That's always the thing: we should make something as similar as possible but still different. Because laymen cannot stand something crazy and new all the time. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

This songwriter differentiates ordinary consumers and music professionals, suggesting that consumers only wish to hear small changes. The groups he distinguishes could be considered different representatives of the field of pop music (cf. McIntyre 2011a: 85). He also suggests that ordinary consumers need novelty to some extent because they get tired of listening to the same songs all the time. The novelty requirement is thus low on their agenda – it is adequate that the song is not exactly the same as any other. The topliner also mentions music enthusiasts who are in constant search of novelty, although they are a small minority.

When he is writing songs he rejects ideas that seem over-used, but at the same time he looks for similarity, trying to refine his skills to produce novelty by means of small changes and new combinations: "I'm not interested in doing copy-songs, but still, they need to sound pretty similar so that people will want to listen to them, because they want to listen to old songs in new packages." (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

One of the songwriters pointed out that the audience still needed challenges on a micro level (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). Music should not be too easy or predictable when it comes to the harmonic development of the song, for example. The listener may be challenged or surprised because both creators and audiences have similar knowledge of the domain (Becker 1974: 771): they know how chord progressions usually advance and are surprised and even emotionally influenced if the most obvious choices are not made.

This songwriter's considerations relate to specific situations in the Song Castle 2015 session he attended. There were instances when he stated that the chord

progression, or melody, was too predictable, making it "sound like 2012" (FD May 5, 2015). "The problem is that when you hear the beginning, you know how it's gonna end" (FD May 5, 2015). Later he reasoned: "Yeah, it is kind of like if you do it that way, it is like children's music, kind of like too easy. I argue that listeners want challenges." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015) This is something that Bennett (2014: 58) also contends: "Popular music may be culturally self-referential, but I contend that listeners require *some* originality, meaning that there is a balance to be struck between the expected and the unpredictable" [original italics]. The audience should not be underestimated, as one of the songwriters said (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). Novelty is necessary, to some extent.

The songwriters' considerations are in line with many theorisations: pop music is largely about making small changes because the audience desires similarity. This could be a constraint on proactivity and possibility thinking (Lombardo 2017: 604–605) in creative work. To exacerbate matters, it could be claimed that future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness have no role whatsoever in the work of these songwriters. If the future is invariably seen as similar to the past, there is no need to be prospective.

The issue is more complex than that, of course, as I show in the following chapters. Even small changes gradually alter the domain, and most writers of pop songs consider it important to keep up with these changes. Furthermore, keeping up with changes, and being up-to-date and in fashion require foresightfulness.

3.2 The significance of being up-to-date and in fashion

Being up-to-date and in fashion is the essence of pop. If something is "pop", it is popular, currently in fashion. Fashionable phenomena also shape the domain of pop music and reform market constraints, which songwriters need to take into account in their creative work. The space of possibilities in hit-oriented songwriting is dependent on which creative inventions the audience has accepted as part of the domain of pop music.

Fashion could be defined either as a prevailing style (Brannon 2000: 4; Nuutinen 2004: 60), or as a process of recurrent change (Nuutinen 2004: 71; Aspers & Godart 2013: 17). Some scholars even state that "now" in fashion can never be achieved: it is always either coming or vanishing (Noro 1986; Nuutinen 2004: 60). The dynamics of fashion derive from the fact that from the moment a new fashion is born, it is marching towards its death (Blumer 1969: 278).

Most of the songwriters I interviewed for this study stressed the importance of being aware of fashionable phenomena in music and making songs that are up to date. This is challenging, however, because according to their experiences

the delay between writing a song and having it released may be months, or even years (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014; Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015; Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017). One of them, with experience of working both as a topliner and a tracker, explains this at some length:

> Usually while writing a song you don't think that it will come out only after two years although it might. Usually, you do it for the present moment. But on some level you take it into account [...] you're careful not to sound old-fashioned and not to use references that are too old; something that was 'in' five years ago might sound really stupid after two years. So usually you try to be in the moment and hope it will carry. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

He uses the terms old-fashioned or outdated (*vanhanaikainen*) several times and points out explicitly that "the most important thing is not to sound out-dated". He also talks about avoiding "ranges of rocks" and "traps" and not sounding "so 2000s". For him, avoiding the risk of sounding outdated has more value than adopting a prospective attitude; trying to foresee or create future trends. Given the unpredictability of audience taste and behaviour, there is always risk involved in creating cultural commodities, which might suddenly become old-fashioned: the "'in' easily tips into a 'mega-out'" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 19; Liebl & Schwartz 2009: 315). This fear of becoming outdated is also the force that keeps fashion dynamics moving. Fashion does not want to become its own history (Van de Peer 2014: 323):

> Because fashion always aspires to be 'of the moment,' it seeks to depart from its own history. Yet when thinking of the fashionable we necessarily think of the unfashionable or even the old-fashioned, which as a notion carries the past upon its sleeve. Wanting to be 'in fashion' necessitates the continuous demonstration of up-to-dateness vis-à-vis the old-fashioned or the outmoded. (Van de Peer 2014: 323)

Up-to-datedness is always estimated in relation to the old-fashioned or the outmoded. Songwriters need to estimate how long the "fashion present" (cf. Van de Peer 2014) of each phenomenon is, so as to know whether they may still use tricks that have been in fashion for a while. The fashion present is, to some extent, easier to define in the clothing industry, because fashion changes are organised by the seasons (Van de Peer 2014: 328). Nevertheless, consumers have a major role in maintaining or abandoning fashions in any market, and this lowers the predictability. The question is more complicated in the music industry. Some musical phenomena last for years, others are shorter. Rap music, for example, was considered a short-term fad by many in its early years, but now it is the prominent popular music genre in Western countries (see e.g., Rojek 2011: 6).

One of the topliners told me that a big milestone as a songwriter for him was when his first song from a back catalogue was put on hold in Japan. He had written the song more than a year earlier, and he considered it a great achievement that such an "old" song was still interesting enough in Japan. As he understood it, it stood the test of time: "Because it would be such an unpleasant scenario that you keep on writing material and if it does not succeed right away, it becomes out-dated" (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018). He also said he had written or co-written songs that were put on hold for 18 months – and he no longer expected them to be released. Other songwriters also referred to timelessness as an important value. This, of course, also relates to revenue logic in the songwriting industry: the longer people are listening to the song, the more copyright revenue streams it will generate in the long run.

One songwriter who placed less importance on making up-to-date songs pointed out that being up to date also depended on the context and the location (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015). He had experience of writing songs for Japanese markets, in which many musical elements used by the Beatles in the 1960s are still considered fresh, the country having been "cut off from the rest of the world for a long time". He thought that every song had its place.

> Something that might feel really a cliché to me is considered pop somewhere else, so you can like, you never can tell. So it's all about, in the end it's all about finding the right scene and the right moment and that's, I think that's why it also takes like sometimes even many years for a song to find its home. And some songs never find a home but there always is a home. If you just keep looking for it. (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

For many songwriters their motive to make up-to-date songs relates to the fact that writing songs is their work. "The main motive is that it is my work. And I try to do my work, like... My work is well done when people are listening to music I made and radios play it..." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014) One songwriter, who has focused on creating songs for Asian markets, emphasises the importance of knowing the prevailing phenomena and demands of the audience and the industry in order to pass the first stage of song export: having cuts. "You must know these kinds of things when you're creating the song, you must know that currently in Korea they are looking for more simplicity. Then you kind of have to go along and give them what they want in order to get the songs through." (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019) In both cases, the songwriters mention gatekeepers: representatives of radio channels and agents who choose songs for artists.

Being adaptable to commercial constraints and being productive under specific circumstances are, according to musicologist Chris Wilson (2015: 21, 26–27), among the defining features of the work of Nashville songwriters. Songwriters

must keep up with the times and adapt to what is expected from them. However, by adapting they also simultaneously influence the futures of music. In making creative choices based on adaptation, songwriters produce works that further define future parameters to which they will have to adapt.

Another songwriter talked about songs getting "worn out" by young consumers (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). "In today's pop [...] that is where changes happen fastest, in the urban scene, and then also, those people consume so much music, and the songs get worn out" (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). This expression is interesting, given that music is a non-material good (Hirsch 1972: 127), even more so nowadays as it is decreasingly dependent on physical formats. Music and songs become "worn out" symbolically as they go out of fashion. Young people consume so much that new musical products are needed constantly. This is characteristic of consumer industries: new products are in constant demand, and they are created to ensure the supply of items to be sold (Durant 1985: 97; Hesmondhalgh 2007: 4). The industry both creates and satisfies the need for new products (Hirsch 1972: 127). Young consumers are constantly intent on differentiating themselves from other people, and they want to be the first to make a discovery. As a commodity becomes too popular its forerunners – in this case people "on the urban scene" (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015) – feel the need to find something new (cf. Lynch & Strauss 2007: 46).

This need for novelty is a key contradictory element in the working conditions of songwriters. On the one hand it means that there is a need for their work in the form of new songs, but on the other hand they would like songs they have written to stand the test of time and to have a listening audience for decades. The songwriters I interviewed were aware of the rapid changes in pop music and the possible delay in releases. However, they varied in terms of how much and how consciously this awareness affected their creative work.

3.3 Inspiring and avoidable trends

Pop music phenomena that become popular for a certain period are often referred to as music trends. The focus in this sub-chapter is on how the respondents understood music trends and their relevance in the work of songwriters. I discovered some contrasting views when I analysed the narratives. One songwriter said that spotting trends was an essential part of his work as a professional songwriter, whereas another one told me that he should ignore trends just because he was a professional songwriter.

In colloquial pop music discourse, music trends usually refer to musical phenomena that are popular at a given time. These songwriters also understood them in this way: "I guess it's like such genres and variations of genres and sounds

and new kinds of, like production-wise certain kinds of songs that are in fashion among youth at a certain time." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

In using the expressions "in fashion" and "at a certain time" he underlines the instantaneous nature of music trends. He also emphasises the role of young audiences in determining what is trendy in pop music. The role of young people as trendsetters is well acknowledged in the research (e.g., Vejlgaard 2008). Indeed, their need to differentiate themselves from older people has been the driving force behind many new trends (ibid.: 35). Other songwriters also highlighted this. One of them mentioned the "urban scene" in which trends change fastest, specifically referring to adolescents and people in their thirties, perhaps up to thirty-five years old (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015).

These songwriters connected music trends to genres and production in particular. However, when I asked which aspects of pop music were susceptible to trends they mentioned many other elements such as lyrics, song form and the image of the artist, as well as trends related to arrangements, topics and singing styles.

One of the songwriters defined a trend as "something someone begins and others follow" (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). Such a definition implies an understanding of trends as processes of change (e.g., Vejlgaard 2008: 8), as well as future consciousness (Lombardo 2010: 36). A trend is a tendency, a prevailing style that depends on the acceptance of others. Trendsetters are the first to adopt trends, and trends move towards the mainstream. (Vejlgaard 2008: 8) As the songwriter defined it, newness is also connected to music trends: a trend is the beginning of something new. It could also be used to describe the first signs of change (Vejlgaard 2008: 8). Another songwriter suggested that, in order to initiate a trend, something new is needed (Siitonen, Oct 10, 2014).

According to some of the songwriters, the pop-music scene is currently so fragmented that it is becoming more and more difficult to recognise trends. As a tracker pointed out, musicians mix all kinds of musical styles, and audience members may listen to songs from different genres. The most important thing is that the song sounds good and fresh. "Basically, any artist can make any kind of song and no one will stand in the back row on a gig as a jazz police officer and complain that this used to be a rock band and now they're making techno." (Tamminen, Jan 1, 2015)

This respondent refers, once again, to different musical genres, but also to the importance of single songs. The increasing importance of a single song in the music business has been acknowledged by the industry and the media (see e.g., Meier 2017: 63). The fact that artists do not need to postpone the release of a single song until the whole album is ready allows the songwriters to have their songs released sooner, thereby lessening the risk of sounding outdated. On the other hand, the continuous release of new songs accelerates change in music trends.

Another songwriter also refers to the fragmentation of trends as an enabling factor, pointing out that there are enough listeners to suit all musical styles, and "whatever you do, there is someone who likes it a lot, and then there are those who consider it untrendy." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015) Similar notions are discussed in fashion research: according to Eundeok Kim et al. (2011: 66), fashion forecasting in clothing is becoming more and more difficult as trends have become more diverse and fashion cycles shorter. There were already signs of fragmentation in popular music during the 1980s. Toynbee (2002: 157) refers to the diversification of the US market at that time as "the death knell of the mainstream". Technological developments in the 2000s and the rise of amateur creativity has probably boosted the phenomenon. At least in theory, it is possible for almost anyone nowadays to create and distribute popular music (Wikström 2009: 156; Rojek 2011: 5; Sawyer 2012: 6–7; Anderton et al. 2013: 12; Taylor 2016: 121), and audiences have easy access to a wider selection of music via streaming services. On the other hand, streaming services and the Internet help to keep previous styles "alive" (Reynolds 2011: 407; Hogarty 2017). As a result, several trends and styles may exist simultaneously, each with their own audiences.

Whereas the songwriters I interviewed understood music trends in a more or less similar way, they varied widely in their attitudes to and views on the relevance of catching them. For some, observing trends was an essential part of their work: "You must try a bit to surf on top of the trend waves, if you want to do this as a profession. You could be stubborn and trust that this will be in fashion at some point, but it might be that it will be in fashion only after you've passed away." (Siitonen, Jan 10, 2014)

Others did not think trends were important in their work, even though they were well aware of them. One had made a conscious decision not to follow them so much. He believed in the solid foundation he had built with the songs he had been writing for years, and did not "worry" much about current trends. He also referred to his age (almost forty at the time of the interview), stating that it was more for young people to follow trends. However, he could not completely ignore them:

> I'm not that worried about following time, like. But, of course, one must practice it a bit. You cannot always use the same sounds and same tricks. Yes, I follow to some extent what they do out there and so. But it's not a good way to mimic one or two months behind some trend someone came up with in the States or somewhere else. (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

"Following trends" is understood literally here, meaning imitating something someone else has already done – reacting. This songwriter did not think that "mimicking" was a good way to create music. He also believed that some elements

of pop music were not likely to change, such as chord progressions and the kind of relationship between melody and harmony that people find pleasing. This anticipation, produced by extrapolating continuity in taste from the past, influenced his work. He said he rather aimed at grand arches than short trends. When writing songs that he would perform as an artist he might dare to grasp more fleeting phenomena, but he "cannot put his livelihood on it. It is not worthwhile if you want to create music as your job until you retire, that's not how it works." (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

These are interestingly contrasting views. Whereas one songwriter considered spotting trends an essential aspect of his workmanship, the other had an almost a contrary view, even if he thought it was important to be aware of trends. There was a similar vagueness in the following deliberation of a topliner. He aimed at creating timeless songs.

> Sure, it would be good if you were always on top of the wave, knowing all the slang and trendy words [...] but then they are trendy songs, and of course it's good to make such songs too, but I prefer writing timeless, like lyrics that can be understood now and that can be understood in ten years and could have worked 20 years ago. [...] Sure, I actively follow trends, like what kinds of genres, sounds and so on, what's going on, and forms, singing styles, and the like, is it really electronic or organic. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

This informant reflected on the question mainly in relation to writing lyrics, which he considers one of his strengths. He praised the lyrical idea behind the Beatles' song "Eight Days a Week" (1964), for example, which has a "punchline that would be as fresh today as it was fifty years ago." (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017) He did not feel comfortable using trendy words because of the risk that the song would not stand the test of time. However, he did follow trends actively, especially those related to genres, sounds, song forms and singing styles.

Being aware of trends thus does not mean automatically reacting to or attempting to spot or catch them. The risks involved in reacting to a trend have to be considered, because nobody knows how long the phenomenon will last. In the above examples it might be a question of the songwriter's wish and ability to differentiate short-term fads from trends. Two interviewees described dubstep artist Skrillex's style as a typical example of a short-term trend, a fad in fashion terminology (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015; Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015).

> There are certain trend phenomena, which are big only because they are trendy, such as Skrillex some years ago or... Like something that has never been heard before. But they might not... their lifespan is not so long [...] they will not become

> songs that people will sing at their own weddings in 15 years. (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

A tracker also warns about the downsides of trend-spotting: "It is a bit dangerous constantly to research trend artists, then you don't create anything new but instead copy something someone else has invented." (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

According to futurologist Anita Rubin (2006: 44), people acting reactively, as opposed to pre-actively or proactively, choose their modus operandi randomly and impulsively, and they do not think about the consequences of their choices and decisions. This could be true in some sense in the context of pop songwriting. Songwriters who do not react to each fad might be future conscious in thinking about the consequences of their choices. This notion underlines the complexity of this phenomenon. Songwriters who may seem passive with regard to music trends might be proactive and future conscious with regard to their professional futures. An individual must balance long- versus short-term consequences should one goal be achieved at the expense of another (Aspinwall 2005: 204).

Another songwriter referred to trying to catch up with trends as a facilitating factor in his work. Having clear goals helps (cf. Bennett 2014: 63). Imitating someone else's work could also foster the creation of something new. He mentioned as an example one of his colleagues who was often praised for inventing "fresh" things in music: "Once he admitted that he was trying to copy a specific sound, but since he cannot do it properly, it results in something new. It's as simple as that." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014) This is not uncommon: many musicians begin composing by copying someone else's work or deliberately try to make errors in order to create something unique (Durant 1990: 191–192; Anderton et al. 2013: 80).

Spotting trends may also function as a creative inspiration. As one of the topliners said: "I think it's nice that the music business changes all the time, or trends and those change, because then I get to write different kinds of songs. I like different kinds of genres, so it's just fun to be able to make different kinds of music." (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017) In this example, prevailing trends define the space of possibilities for the songwriter, and as the songwriter perceives a new trend, the space is expanded or re-located.

3.4 Trends in relation to different elements of songs

Most of the songwriters I interviewed pointed out that some elements in pop music changed faster than others, and that was something they had to take into account in their creative work. My focus in this sub-chapter is on their views on being up-to-date and following trends in relation to the different elements of the song. These considerations and conceptions relate to their songwriter role, topliners

and trackers having different main responsibilities, and guide the focus in their trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking.

The songwriters I interviewed emphasised almost unanimously that the sound aesthetics and production in particular needed to be up to date, given that the aesthetics change faster than lyrical and compositional trends. This is in line with the view that popular music changes faster on the surface level than in its formal structures (see e.g., Kurkela 2003: 220–221; Warner 2003: 11; McIntyre 2008: 48; Serrá et al. 2012; Bennett 2014: 47). However, it surprised me that these songwriters made such a strong distinction between the song and its arrangement and production, given that current understanding of what a song consists of is broader than it was (McIntyre 2001). The essential song components in contemporary pop, in addition to the lyrics and melody, include form, rhythm, harmony, arrangement, performance and production (ibid.: 110). The sound may be the most distinctive element in a specific artist's releases, as integral as the melody and the lyrics for example, and inseparable from the music (Théberge 1997: 191; Burgess 2020: 109). It has been argued that the so-called surface elements in popular music changed drastically as early as in the 1960s (Théberge 1997: 193; Kurkela 2003: 220–221). Sound aesthetics have become so important that they can no longer be considered a surface element.

Interestingly, when these songwriters considered the dilemma of being up-to-date or creating timeless songs, almost all of them distinguished the arrangement and the production from the song. In their view, the main elements of the song – the lyrics, melody, and harmony – had to be good enough to stand the test of time, and the song had to sound as good with an acoustic guitar as with a piano accompaniment. On the other hand, the "topping", namely the production and arrangement, reflects current aesthetics (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018). This separation is in line with musicologist Allan Moore's (2012: 15) categorisation of a song as consisting of the melody, the lyrics and the harmony, whereas the arrangement, the production and the instrumental and vocal backing are all aspects of its performance. It is nevertheless relevant to ask whether it is meaningful to separate the song, the performance and the production in contemporary pop (cf. Bennett 2014: 4).

Several examples highlight the distinction the songwriters made between the song and its production:

> Perhaps it's like, if there is a fresh sound in the music, and the songs are good, in the sense that they also function as songs and are not merely about the sounds, then you know this might fly [talks about guessing which artists and songs become hits] (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014).

> Sometimes, regarding contemporary music, I ask myself: where is the song? The authors have resorted to so-called coding, as we say in the business, meaning that

> the production is full of tricks and gimmicks and sounds but the song is forgotten. (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

> It is pretty unfair that someone sits there, polishing some chord and making a production and not really writing the song. And the other two are fighting with the melody and the text. There the tracker is a bit useless, it depends a bit on the genre, but one might as well write the song and send it to a tracker. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

> Songs never get old, but productions get old. And productions are trendy or not trendy. In a way, songs are just songs. I would make the distinction. Of course, you may dig some song because of the cool sounds it has. Like Billie Eilish for example. Those productions are amazing. They are really weird and peculiar and I like to listen to her music just because of the production. But… and I don't know how it would sound acoustically, I don't know. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

These songwriters thus have a rather traditional view of what a song is – something separate from the production – and they emphasise the importance of writing the song instead of "resorting to coding". Admittedly, they also identify songs that are good because of the production, and according to one of them, both the song and the sounds need to be good to have any chance of success.

The songwriters also distinguished production-based from other songs, and many of them shared the view that attempting to catch trends was more relevant in production-based music. They pointed out, for example, that the song created in Song Castle 2015 was not production-based, thus aiming at being up to date was not as relevant: "the starting point was not to think about what the sound of 2016 would be" (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015).

The implication in this kind of view is that the responsibility of making a song sound contemporary and fashionable lies heavily on the shoulders of the trackers and producers. Yet, the songwriters also recognise trends related to lyrics, song forms and melodies. Two of them stressed the importance of having up-to-date lyrics in songs intended for domestic markets (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015; Oiva, Apr 27, 2018).

Topliners also contribute to production decisions, however. The songwriter roles intertwined all the time in the sessions I observed. The topliners helped in the making of production choices, and the trackers helped to write lyrics and melodies. With some of the creative decisions they made it was difficult to say whether it was a matter of production or composition. On some occasions the songwriters paid more attention to how the words sounded than what they meant, for example (FD May 24, 2017; cf. Tolstad 2016: 216). The topliners also used time to discuss how the lyrics should be sung, timed and performed rhythmically: writing lyrics also included planning performative elements.

One of the topliners gives an example of "giving a facelift" to a song he had

written for his own band, which in this case involved changes in arrangement, performance and production:

> We had one version of it in the spring, a version played with the band, but then we listened to it and realised it is not current anymore [...] Then we replaced the producer, changed everything, lifted the key 1.5 tones, slowed down the tempo, took new references [...] began looking for a new feeling. I searched for a new way of singing the song and we searched for a new atmosphere in its production, we added all kinds of tricks and thus the track became modern and interesting, and it had lots of ear candy and the song had a facelift. (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015)

Updating the song opened new doors for the band. It had airplay on channels aimed more at youth, whereas their earlier songs had been played on channels aimed at an older audience.

This experience is in line with suggestions made by a research group set up to measure evolutionary trends in Western popular music between 1955 and 2010 (Serrà et al. 2012). The most significant changes concerned pitch transitions, the homogenisation of the timbral palette and the growing loudness levels – in other words, elements of production.

> This suggests that our perception of the new would be rooted on these changing characteristics. Hence, an old tune could perfectly sound novel and fashionable, provided that it consisted of common harmonic progressions, changed the instrumentation, and increased the average loudness. (Serrà et al. 2012: 2)

Topliners in particular seemed to attach importance to distinguishing between production-based and text-based sessions and songs. As one of them stated, there is pop music in which the song is more important, and pop music in which the track is more important.

> If you look at Spotify's top 100, I just listened to it yesterday, number one songs there, they are 'track first' songs, and it's okay, it's good. But that [refers to the song they created in Song Castle 2015] is a song taken from another bin [...] That kind of sound-based music and track-based music is not my special know-how, because I am not a producer and I don't make music that would be that urban. (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015)

Another songwriter used the term "meta-data"[39] to describe the difference: "My

39 Later, when he checked his quotations, he said that meta-data is not the most suitable term since it is a copyright term and usually refers to author information. He said that perhaps he meant a deeper level of information.

position as a songwriter is to think about the meta-data, by which I mean the harmonic tension of the melody, the catchiness of the melody, the appeal of the melody, and the overall form of the song." (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018) This songwriter usually works as a topliner, thus he was probably referring to this role. He also valued the work of producers and trackers, referring to them as "haute couturierists" who "stay on top of the wave", "smell how the production aesthetics are changing" and are able to apply this knowledge in their work. He referred explicitly to a "future perspective" when he recalled that one of his tracker/producer colleagues had managed to create songs in which the meta-data was right, because he had had cuts with songs that were composed four or five years earlier. He seemed to be suggesting that, instead of anticipating what will be current in a few years, his colleague was able to create songs in which these deeper elements were good and timeless enough to stand the test of the time.

It thus seemed to be a rather general view among these songwriters that being aware of contemporary trends was more important in the work of producers and trackers than in the work of topliners, especially when creating production-based songs. I will keep this distinction in mind in my further analysis, and look for possible differences in foresightfulness between topliners and trackers.

3.5 An honest and autonomous creative process as a core value

The goal of the songwriters I interviewed is to create songs that would gain popularity among large audiences. "The desire to create something that affects a number of listeners in [sic!] implicit in all songwriting" (Bennett 2014: 79). Creating songs is their profession, thus their income depends on the success of the songs they write. Their workplace is the music industry (cf. Jones 2005), and their job is to be creative. Musicologist Nicholas Cook (2018: 38) even suggests that, for professional pop songwriters, the "primary concern is with how listeners will experience the song", rather than with self-expression.

Critiques of cultural industries and mass cultures, as well as romantic conceptions of creativity have influenced perceptions of creativity and commerce as opposites (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 20; McIntyre 2008b: 142). On the contrary, the music industry could be considered a structure that enables creativity (Frith 1978: 164). Several scholars argue against opposing commercialism and creativity, pointing out that their relationship could be considered complementary rather than contradictory. According to Keith Negus (1995: 330; 1996: 49), for instance, most recorded music is commercial to some extent, and creativity should be evaluated in relation to the constantly changing domain of popular music. Something that is considered creative and non-commercial could gradually become commercial. As Bennett

(2014: 22) points out, if the level of creativity is measured in terms of the influence of a certain song on other popular music songs – as defined in the systems model of creativity – it may be that the biggest hit songs are the most creative.

In this respect, it could be assumed that, in the framework of creating hit songs, opposing creativity with commerce and questions about authenticity have no relevance whatsoever. Yet, as I show in the following, they are in opposition in that how songwriters understand integrity influences the ways in which they observe and relate to music trends. Although they all talked rather openly about music trends and commercial aims in the context of their songwriting, some of them made a distinction between creating something "from within" and trying to catch up with trends. According to my interpretation, these conceptions relate to how they understand autonomy, integrity, authenticity and creativity in their work. I further suggest that trend-spotting and foresightfulness are not necessarily at odds with creativity, autonomy and authenticity, an idea that derives from literature that dismantles the opposition between creativity and commerce.

One of the topliners denied following trends, preferring to be true to himself.

> No. I don't try to catch up or anything. I try to, I still try to look at what I can, who I am and what like... I just lose myself trying to catch up with what everyone else is doing or trying to be the same like or trying to be the next big thing. I just lose myself in that game like, I get so lost. So what I try to do is just be as honest as I can with myself and like. Because that's the only way I can be original and fresh like, and on top of the market. (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

It thus seems that this songwriter does not consider being on top of the market unimportant, but he is afraid of losing honesty in his work if he tries to catch up with what others are doing. In his view, trying to be trendy makes songwriters lose their originality and turns them into "pretenders". His advice is to "keep on doing your thing, just look for a thing that you love". In line with this, another songwriter talked about giving something "from inside himself" in each session (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015).

An interesting point about this rather romantic view of creativity, similar to those defined and identified in several previous studies (e.g., Stratton 1983; Caves 2000: 4; Boden 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2007: 20; McIntyre 2008b; 2011a; Rantakallio 2019; Thompson 2019), is that these songwriters create songs for mainstream pop-music markets, are not afraid to use technology, and do not perform the songs themselves. These factors, namely mainstream, pop, technology and performing someone else's songs, are traditionally connected to non-genuineness, or *inauthenticity* (Frith 2007 [1986]; Fornäs 1995; Keightley 2001: 134; Ahonen 2007; McIntyre 2011b). As musicologist Keir Keightley (2001: 131) puts it, "'Authentic' designates

those music, musicians, and musical experiences seen to be direct and honest, uncorrupted by commerce, trendiness, derivativeness, a lack of inspiration and so on." Although the songwriter quoted above does not use the term authentic, it seems to me that his elaboration is strongly related to the discourse of authenticity, which also relates to the opposition between creativity and commerce – and through that to foresightfulness.

Questions of authenticity have been discussed at length in studies of popular music (see e.g., Frith 2007 [1986]; Kendall 1999; Keightley 2001; Ahonen 2007; Barker & Taylor 2007; McIntyre 2011b; Anttonen 2017; Rantakallio 2019). Although I cannot delve more deeply into the theme of authenticity within the scope of this study, I use some of the literature, specifically in suggesting that attempts to stay "honest" or "myself" as a songwriter may also influence foresightfulness: the ways in which these artists relate to music trends or attempt to keep up-to-date in their work.

The independence of a creator in the framework of the creative industries is often defined in relation to markets and the constraints of the commercial world (Banks 2010: 252–253; Holt & Lapenta 2010: 225). For decades, writers have been dismantling the notion that art can only be authentic if it is free from economic pressure. Popular music relies on a combination of commerce and creativity (Frith 1978: 164; Negus 1996: 36; Muikku 2001: 12), and conventions shape creativity even in less commercial frameworks: "creativity does not operate, unbounded, in an autonomous fashion" (Negus & Pickering 2004: 68). Autonomy is an illusion.

Romantic conceptions of creativity and authenticity emphasise the autonomy and independence of the creator, "finding a true self", being uncompromised and expressing inner experiences (Keightley 2001: 133–136; Weisenthaunet & Lindberg 2010: 471). These values seemed important to the songwriter quoted above. Following trends would lead to making compromises and allowing external factors to dictate what kind of music to create, thereby losing autonomy and integrity. In his view, honesty in songwriting is achieved by looking at "who he is", in contrast to following trends and becoming a "pretender". He also uses the metaphor "game" to describe the ongoing competition among songwriters of being the first to catch up with trends or inventing something new. Four of the songwriters I interviewed used the game metaphor in connection with different aspects of songwriting and the music industry, some in a more positive sense and others in a more pejorative sense. However, its very use implies that the songwriters saw their working environment as rather competitive and somewhat calculative.

Researcher Teresa Amabile (1983) differentiates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, concluding that the latter may be detrimental to creative work. Examples of extrinsic motivation include money. Although I find it impossible to make a

clear distinction between what is "inside" and "outside" of a creative agent, the difference may explain the attribution of value to ideas that seemingly emerge "from inside". The media, for example, cites many examples of songwriters who complain of having lost their creativity under commercial pressures.

The production of anything that is novel requires a certain amount of freedom (Stahl 2010: 271). However, autonomy takes different forms in today's capitalist system (Banks 2010: 259), about which individual creators may have to negotiate. In another context, the songwriter quoted above found that he worked more efficiently when he was constrained by business demands. In the context of the songwriting camps, constraints and guidelines in the form of briefs were enabling and helpful, rather than restrictive. He is not alone among creative workers in acknowledging that constraints may be a helpful tool in the creative process (see e.g., Bennett 2014: 63).

> I think it's nice to have like something like, they put a frame and then you just fill it with paint. So like... and they, like... you get a frame, you get a blank canvas and you get usually like, you get also like what colours they need, and then you just... so it's quite, it's like a mission and it's nice with a deadline also like, there's not too much time to waste, you just go for it, go for your instincts, so it's good, it's effective and... I think that the deadline and the time frame and also like the tool, like the pre-sets you get, like okay it should be like this, something like this and they need it for... it needs to be dancy and they're gonna do a video for it and so on, I think it's just nice. Cause you have a clear direction, or like basically a vague direction, but something, a direction at least, and then you just, there's no time to sit around and think too much and contemplate [laughter]. You just do. It's nice. (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

Thus, the songwriter does not, in principle, resist complying with the business and industry demands. In the context of the songwriting camps, autonomy is restricted in many ways: someone else forms the co-writing teams and determines the timeframe. Participants are also given guidelines, which frequently allude to reference songs. In such cases the creative process might focus more on similarity than on coming up with something completely novel or original.

It should be borne in mind that this songwriter has his own artistic career, and it was not always clear in the interview in which role he was talking. It is probable that the words of another songwriter apply to him: when she creates music to perform herself, she does not think at all about what is "up-to-date", but when she creates music for Asian pop stars she has to (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019). This reflects the words of Pamela Burnard (2012: 233), a scholar in music education, who suggests that singer-songwriters value creation for its own sake, over commercial success. However, it is worth pointing out that even if these songwriters do not

consciously use their knowledge about music trends when creating songs they will perform themselves, they cannot discard the knowledge they have acquired in their other role as a songwriter. Their knowledge of what is trendy and up-to-date "out there" remains when they are looking "inside themselves" for ideas. As Bennett (2014: 43) notes, "It is not possible for anyone, even songwriters themselves, to know the precise relationship between prior knowledge and compositional decision-making."

Another songwriter explicitly used the word authentic when he was talking about his artistic career: he tried to look inside himself, find the best and most interesting version of himself as an artist, and by doing so, he found his own authentic sound (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). Through this, he continued, he might also be able to find something that would become "some sort of trend to some people, perhaps." One of the other songwriters said quite the opposite: as an artist he dared to take the risk and to grasp fleeting phenomena, whereas when he wrote songs for other artists he avoided fads, because his livelihood depended on these creations (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015).

The songwriter quoted at the beginning of this sub-chapter also said that he did not "try to be the same" or "try to be the next big thing". This is interesting in light of the two types of authenticity Keightley (2001) categorises in relation to rock music: Romantic authenticity and Modernist authenticity. Whereas Romantic authenticity values respect for tradition and continuity with the past, Modernist authenticity emphasises innovation and rule-breaking. Many artists, including rock musicians, shift between these two forms (Keigthley 2001: 138). As discussed earlier, creating pop music is very much about making small changes and following the rules. This could also be labelled imitation, or borrowing, which in some music genres is considered non-original and thus inauthentic (Rantakallio 2019: 307). On the other hand, artists in the field of electronic music have abandoned the idea of authenticity in rock. Combining previous ideas is more than appropriate in those genres, and the authors are not afraid of being accused of copying, or even plagiarism (Sawyer 2012: 355). Toynbee (2000: xiv–xv) connects synthesis such as this with his idea of social authorship. Creators of popular music combine ideas from the "field of the social", instead of "generating music from within", a notion that is embedded in all socio-cultural views on creativity (e.g., Becker 1974; Gruber 1989; Csikszentmihalyi 1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]).

This songwriter disassociates himself from both traits – he does not want to imitate others, nor does he deliberately try to invent something completely new: he wishes to work autonomously, not caring what other songwriters do or what audiences demand. However, this does not mean that the songwriter does not want to achieve success. He believes that looking at "who he is" and being honest

is "the only way I can be original and fresh like, and on top of the market". "When it speaks from the heart, then it will be a success as well, whatever it is." Thus, his ideas of honesty concern, first and foremost, how success is achieved: the process must be honest and autonomous.

This is in line with notions that several scholars have put forward with regard to the value audiences attach to artistic authenticity. Artists do not lose their authenticity because they become popular or commercially successful – but they do if the success is attributable to the wrong kinds of calculative acts (McIntyre 2011b; Rantakallio 2019). As such, honest creative expression and commercial success are not mutually exclusive. For many workers in cultural industries, the process of creation has intrinsic value, and any possible profit is a desirable extra outcome (Caves 2000: 22; Wikström 2009: 25). As Mike Jones, a researcher and lyricist with the British band Latin Quarter, points out in his self-reflective text (2005), creating a pop song may be a form of self-expression, simultaneously driven by the need and wish to sell records, and therefore autonomous within certain constraints.

Thus, it is worth considering the possibility that an "honest" creative process could include catching up with trends in the domain of mainstream pop music. Scanning and forecasting are inseparable aspects of the creative process in clothing design, for example (Nuutinen 2004: 201, 211; Tham 2008: 192; Kim et al. 2011: 46). Frith (2011a: 63), who sees creativity in popular music as business behaviour, describes it as "the ability to react to market conditions in certain ways rather than to produce something *ab initio*" [original italics]. Catching up with trends is a way of reacting to market conditions and thus, according to such logic, a form of creativity. As Timothy D. Taylor (2016: 17) argues: "the genius is no longer someone who has risen to the top of a pool of talent but a star who has risen to the top of a market." These songwriters are creative, not only in expressing themselves, but also in understanding the business in which they work, in reacting to changes in it, and perhaps even in anticipating future directions.

In my last research interview I became stuck when the songwriter distinguished between following trends and writing songs. I wanted to challenge her to think of trend-spotting as a part of the songwriting process, and I had difficulties phrasing the question such that she would understand what I meant.

> **EL:** Also, if you focus too much on what is trendy, you soon forget writing the song.
>
> **Me:** Mm. Is it a difficult question if I ask what you mean by writing the song? Like could it, mm, how to phrase this... Kind of, now you separated spotting trends and songwriting, but could it be part of the songwriting?
>
> **EL:** Mm. Spotting trends?

Me: Yeah.

EL: Like doing both, like?

Me: Yeah. Like kind of that it would be a solid part of the process as well, of writing the song?

EL: Yee-es. Wait, I'm trying to think what [laughs], help... Like is songwriting...? Could you still re-phrase the question?

Me: Well, I somehow got stuck with what you said about forgetting writing the song...

EL: ...if you focus too much on trends.

Me: Yes, like you kind of made a difference that it is not part of songwriting.

EL: Mm. So can you at the same time follow trends and still be... like have the song first?

(Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

She continued, but not yet in answer to the question I unsuccessfully tried to pose. She said that that American pop artist Billie Eilish may not have been thinking about trends, just liking the music she makes, and yet she had managed to make something rather ground-breaking, create a new trend and gather followers. As our slightly awkward dialogue shows, at least for this songwriter trend-spotting was not an indistinguishable part of songwriting. Later she clarified what she meant by "song first".

> I just meant that it happens easily that you forget about writing the song and just go like well, this is cool now [...] and maybe you forget about the content of the song. Which is always the most important thing. Many people can make pop that sounds great, through production and all, but if you don't have content there, I don't think it takes you far. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

In this example, "the song" in terms of "the content" is contrasted with "the cool", the sounds and the production, highlighting once again the separation between deeper and surface elements. Separation and valuation in this sense may be related to the ideas that songwriters have about the relationship between technology and authenticity or creativity. They, and especially the topliners, might think that creating a melody and lyrics is more authentic given that technology tends not to have a significant role, except in recording the ideas. Some of the songwriters' comments highlighting the difference between the work of topliners and trackers are rather value-loaded. One of the topliners talked about people who "have somehow managed to attend sessions and succeed, even though they do not have any responsibility for the song, instead they just create the track or hum melodies or something". (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017) Even though technology nowadays plays a significant role in creating and distributing popular music, using machines

in the process of creation could be considered more of a technical performance than creativity, thus reducing the authenticity of the creator. As sociologist Gavin Kendall (1999: 25) notes: "technology is regarded as a bad thing: 'real' artists don't need it, because they are naturally creative." Kendall (1999: 26) challenges this idea with an apposite remark concerning creativity, technology and humanity: a singer-songwriter with an acoustic guitar is as much a hybrid of human and non-human as a DJ with record decks. On the other hand, as Thompson (2019: 22–23) notes, record producers nowadays may be elevated to the status of genius, whereas pop songwriting is often seen as a craft-like activity.

I have shown above that, even though these songwriters are open about the commercial aims in their songwriting, the oppositions between creativity and commerce, being honest and fake, which are continuously dismantled in academia, still influence the ways in which some of them observe and react to music trends. As Negus (1996: 48) points out: "From the knowing perspective of academic theory, commerce versus creativity may be a clichéd argument, but from the perspective of the participants of music scenes these ideas are part of the way in which they make sense of what is happening to them." According to Thompson (2019: 124): "The dominance of romantic ideology within the sphere of popular music can therefore sometimes overshadow the systemic nature of creativity and influence they ways in which songwriters view their own creative process."

Of course, songwriters may also find it important to maintain their image as autonomous and honest creative workers. As Bennett (2014: 30) notes, romanticising creativity may encourage artists to give a misleading picture of their creative process in media interviews. The same could, of course, apply to a research interview.

On the other hand, the above analysis also shows that songwriters may exercise autonomy in choosing whether or not to catch trends. Their insights are rather different, yet all of them have managed to become professional songwriters.

3.6 The importance and impossibility of foresight

> Yes, you always have to think a bit ahead, 'cause as you know it takes several months, at least, before any song is released [...] so you cannot sort of do something that just passed. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

The above quote from one of my interviewees emphasises the need to "think ahead" in creating pop songs because of the slow and unpredictable release schedules and the demand for keeping up-to-date. All the songwriters I interviewed considered it important to create music that was abreast of the times, at least to some extent. They were aware that trends in pop music changed rapidly, and that audiences and the industry demanded novelty. They were also aware of the fact that their

songs were rarely released immediately. Indeed, the time gap between creation and release may be several years. These factors reflect the main assumption of this thesis: domain-specific future-oriented thinking or foresightfulness is one dimension in the creative thinking of pop songwriters, and pre-active or proactive attitudes help them to cope with changes.

The focus of my analysis in this sub-chapter is on the insights of songwriters concerning the importance and potential of foresight, specifically with regard to the prospective alternative futures of pop music. Foresight is also about influencing futures, but here I focus mainly on pre-activity, and discuss proactivity elsewhere in the analysis.

As I have shown above, the songwriters I interviewed differed in their views on the importance or relevance of trend-spotting. In the research interviews, I ended up asking those who thought it was relevant more about future-oriented thinking. I would have felt awkward talking about foreseeing trends with someone who had just said that trends were not relevant to them in any way. Given that many songwriters strongly felt that the production, the "toppings" (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018), had to be up to date when creating pop music, I also analyse their pre-active thought processes, insights and attitudes in relation to their songwriter roles.

In most of the interviews I asked the songwriters how they dealt with changes in pop music and how potential upcoming phenomena affected their working. If this question did not elicit satisfactory answers I asked more explicitly whether the interviewee thought it was important, or even possible to foresee changes in pop music. I used either the explicit term foresight (*ennakointi*), or metaphorical expressions such as "sensing what's upcoming" and "seeing into the future". Some of them picked up the theme spontaneously, whereas with others the discussion ground to a halt even when I tried to pose direct questions.

In the opinion of some songwriters it is not enough just to follow trends if the aim is to create music that is abreast of the times: "if you try to do something that has already been done, you're too late, if we're talking about trends. It's already been done." (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019) "It's no good just mimicking a trend someone came up with in the States or somewhere a month or two ago." (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015) This could be a strong motivation to seek possible future directions, although few songwriters seem to be strongly pre-active.

One of the tracker/producers said explicitly that thinking about possible and probable future phenomena played a role in his work. "Well, at least as a producer I'm always trying to ponder on what would be, what would be hot next year, and like the next big thing." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015) This statement demonstrates a strong pre-active and perhaps even proactive attitude in relation to pop music: he "always" tries to think about the possible "next big thing" in the future. His choice

of the words “trying to” and “ponder” imply conscious efforts, and in saying he does this always he stresses the importance of being prospective, as well as the permanence of his mind set. He also refers to the short time scale in relation to foreseeing changes in pop music. His words “next year” should probably not be understood literally, however, and may merely imply that he was aware of the rapid pace of change.

The same informant connected his constant pondering and probing strongly to his own role in creating songs. It was a crucial part of his work “as a producer” to think about what would be popular next year. Later, while explaining how he did this probing in practice, he explained: “Now I’m kind of talking from the producer’s perspective, that is what kinds of arrangements or productions, or, hmm, what kinds of sounds, what emerges… how pop music changes in that sense” (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015).

Here he lists what he considers are his areas of responsibility as a producer (or tracker) in writing pop songs, and in thinking about possible future changes: arrangements, productions and sounds. He did not think that the words and melodies in pop music had changed so much: people still wanted to hear “great big melodies” and stories about people falling in love. Thus, he reflected on his responsibility to look into the future in the light of existing dynamics: sounds in pop music change fast – consequently, he as a producer needs to be alert specifically to changes in sounds. This example illustrates the duality between agents and the rules or dynamics of the domain. The rules and dynamics derive from the actions and creations of agents, songwriters and other people working in the music industry, and they affect how the agents act within the domain.

A topliner I interviewed expressed a similar view as the tracker quoted above: thinking about the future was the task of trackers and producers rather than topliners. He pointed out rather strongly that looking into the future was not his responsibility. When I asked him whether he tried to “smell” what was about to emerge, he said: “Well, you know, the thing is that I’m not like a producer. And it is not my job to collect a library of 10,000 bass samples or bass-drum samples. And I made that choice like a few years ago that I will not jump on that train.” (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015)

He went on to say that his strength was in writing texts and melodies, and then he spontaneously began talking about contemporary trends in lyrics. He said that he was well aware of the lyrical trends, but that did not mean he liked them. Nevertheless, if he went to a session knowing that such lyrics were in demand, he would be ready to write them.

I had asked the question without referring to any specific musical component or trend, yet this topliner started talking about producing sounds, which was not

his primary songwriting task. As he was talking he probably realised that "smelling" might also involve lyrics and melodies, and he started to wonder what kind of role spotting and anticipating lyrical trends had in his work as a topliner. When he said that he was aware of the prevailing phenomena and was ready to adapt to them he manifested an attitude in which reactivity and pre-activity intertwine.

A songwriter who had worked both as a tracker and a topliner expressed doubts about being able to anticipate future changes in pop music. I had interviewed him earlier for a journalistic article (Hiltunen 2014), when we also talked briefly about foresight. He referred to this earlier interview, saying that his views had changed since then. Asked if he discussed upcoming music trends with his colleagues, he replied:

> Not like guessing what the thing is one should do now. We might kind of, as a joke, but not seriously like. The main thing is not to sound old-fashioned like. As long as it sounds fresh, it's good. But like...Which one of all the fresh sounds will be the most 'hit' sound in a couple of years, I won't much speculate, because... I did it a few years ago as I thought I was able to predict those, I might have thought like 'now I have to do something like this because it will be in fashion soon', but as I've noticed it never goes like that, I have given up and... And my more experienced colleagues do not clearly either, no, it is not worth it. In the last interview I might... was it a year ago? [...] Maybe it has hit me during last half a year that it cannot be predicted. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

He stressed the importance of being up-to-date – "the main thing is not to sound old-fashioned" – but said that he no longer believed in his ability to predict future music trends. He considered it more important to avoid sounding old-fashioned than to gaze into the future, since "it cannot be predicted". He referred to his failed attempts to foresee what would become fashionable in pop music, and also to what he knew about the work of his more experienced colleagues. He said that the discussions with his colleagues about possible future events in pop music were usually light-hearted and were not meant to be taken seriously.

Experiences are a crucial element on which conceptions are built (Ahonen 1994: 117), and individuals interpret specific situations based on earlier experiences, knowledge and conceptions (Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 164). Past experiences are also connected to future-oriented thinking in that interpretation of them affects current perception, which again influences future-related thoughts and anticipations (Slaughter 1996: 99). Individuals may "consult the past" in order to make realistic decisions (Lombardo 2017: 608). In this case, the songwriter's failed attempts to predict upcoming musical phenomena convinced him that it was impossible to know anything about the futures of pop music.

Another conception influencing this songwriter's belief in foresight related to his understanding of the role of the audience in determining which phenomena

become popular. He did not think that future trends could be predicted: audiences nowadays have access to a vast collection of music from which they choose their favourites, and these choices are difficult to foresee. He used the words "guessing", "speculating" and "predicting", all of which refer to highly uncertain knowledge about futures. He also referred to prediction as an ability he did not have, and wondered if it was even the case that the "future steers predictions".

The impossibility of grasping futures is well acknowledged in futures studies, and it is not considered to be the aim of foresight. Investigating and analysing futures is nevertheless important in order to make good decisions today.

> -- the history of futures studies, the numerous examples of predictions gone wrong as well as the state of the art of any futures-related theoretical concepts make it clear that the future, very simply, cannot be grasped. The key to foresight is making sense of often contradictory information, drawing conclusions on their impact, dealing with diverging opinions, subjectivity and uncertainty, depicting future options, and, most importantly: deciding on actions to take. (Daheim & Uertz 2008: 331)

One of the topliners, who has co-written many songs for Japanese and Mandarin markets, thought about the question of foresight in relation to those markets in particular. He said explicitly that he could not imagine what might happen there in the future. In his opinion, change in music is evolutionary.

> What will happen in the future, in my opinion what is relevant in music is that it is an evolutionary process, and you know, a butterfly does not change its colour because it wishes that in the future... because of climate change, the colours of the tree trunks change. Like, that is not how the evolutionary process happens, but it happens so that there are several butterflies, some of them are darker, some of them are lighter and there are also different trees. And sometimes they match. And in this analogy this butterfly is this song that has been composed, and the tree trunk is kind of an aesthetical furrow. And as a songwriter all that I can do is to make those butterflies. They have two wings, or actually four, and antennas, I hope they'll fly, some of them are really colourful, some greyer, some fly faster, some slower but all that I can do is to make those butterflies and send them to the forest. Some people think that you can make a fake butterfly with a sharp nib and throw it to the woods and hope it will hit a tree and it sure might happen. That's the production-based music, where you ponder what the trend of the day is and bring it there and 'bang bang bang'. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

He uses butterflies and tree trunks as metaphors in this comment. He does not believe a butterfly (a songwriter's creation) changes its colour (a conscious action to match a trend) because the colours of the tree trunks (the prevailing trends) change. He does believe that butterflies evolve and that sometimes the colours

match. He compares production-based music to fake butterflies, and states explicitly: "I don't think we are foretellers. Rather I think that the future hit songs are already in the world's publishers' stocks, partly, or they are created at this very moment."

This topliner showed a certain determinism in his thinking, diminishing the role of an individual in the system of pop music trends. His view reflects Bennett's (2012: 142–143; 2014: 51–52) theorisation of change in pop music, which he also describes in evolutionary terms: songs represent unique individuals with specific characteristics that are "'inherited' from the domain of existing successful/influential songs." Toynbee (2003: 43) also argues that changes in popular music are rarely initiated by individuals, and that "transformations in style are the cumulative effect of small creative acts occurring across a social network of production."

The songwriters' views on the possibility, easiness and importance of acquiring knowledge about alternative futures thus vary. The fact that they understood foresight in so many different ways implies that they may not have thought consciously about its potential. Nevertheless, during the interviews they all made some assumptions about possible future directions.

The lack of conscious foresight could also be attributable to having negative thoughts about foresight in general (cf. Hines & Gold 2015: 100; Pouru et al. 2019: 86). As I have shown, in the view of some of these songwriters, observing trends made them lose their genuineness. Anticipating trends could be considered calculative and highly contradictory to creativity, thus dishonest or inauthentic.

3.7 Contradictory conceptions, values and beliefs directing trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking

In the above I have shed light on the songwriters' conceptions, values and beliefs concerning audience expectations, how pop music relates to time, the dynamics of change, music trends and foresight. These conceptions and insights reflect and are reflected in the experienced space of possibilities in songwriting, as well as in trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking among the songwriters. As in phenomenograpic research, my aim was to discover and describe the variation in conceptions and rationale (cf. Huusko & Paloniemi 2006: 163). Nevertheless, some generalisation was possible.

As is common among creative workers, assumed audience expectations strongly influence the creative thinking and work of these songwriters. They emphasised the importance of producing pieces that differed only slightly from existing works in the domain. Thus, they seemed to anticipate continuity in the domain of pop music rather than change. Awareness of or assumptions about the audience's pref-

erence for similarity encourages a focus on similarity instead of radical variation. Such conceptions constrain proactivity and the consideration of possibilities. However, given that minor changes gradually alter the domain, the songwriters acknowledged that they should be aware of what is in fashion at a given time.

Although most of the songwriters I interviewed understood music trends in a similar way and highlighted the importance of making up-to-date pop music, they varied widely in how they related to the trends. Some referred to spotting trends as an essential part of being a professional songwriter, whereas others avoided it precisely because creating pop songs was their work, or because they opposed it on moral grounds and valued honesty in the creative process. Among the former group, some described trends as enabling and inspiring: unsuccessful imitation could result in innovation, and the fact that music changes constantly allows songwriters to create something different – the space of possibilities is expanded or shifts along with the trends. These trend-related insights and attitudes also reflect their understanding of stability and change in pop music.

What stands out from these conceptions and beliefs is that in many cases they amount to risk assessment. The songwriters mentioned several partly contradictory risks related to trend-spotting, or to ignoring trends: the risk of sounding outdated, of catching a fad, of merely copying someone, of losing integrity, of losing income, or even of their work not being appreciated during their lifetime. Avoiding all these risks simultaneously is next to impossible, thus the songwriters' different values influenced the choices they made. The most important thing for some is not to sound outdated whereas for others it is first and foremost to create timeless songs, and for some the core value is to stay honest as a songwriter.

Thomas Lombardo (2006: 16) relates differences in goal-setting to positive and negative attitudes or personality traits. Some people approach futures by pursuing desirable ends, whereas others attempt to avoid certain things. Avoiding risks has been acknowledged as a dominant feature of the music business (e.g., Laing 1990: 190; Burnett & Wikström 2006: 580; Frith 2011b: 46), and this also seems to concern songwriters.

On the other hand, trend-spotting apparently related to the songwriters' understanding of their own roles as songwriters and of the responsibilities attached to them. Their understanding of the basic elements of a song was rather traditional, namely melody, harmony and lyrics. Other elements were on the surface, where being up-to-date is considered crucial. For this reason, trend-spotting and anticipation are considered the responsibility of producers and trackers rather than topliners. Some of the songwriters pointed out that the recent fragmentism in music trends had made trend-spotting more difficult, but also less important given the abundance of listeners to many different styles of music.

Similarly, the songwriters varied widely in their views on the potential and importance of foresight. Some of them were strongly prospective, whereas for others it was practically impossible to know anything about possible futures or to influence them. The reasons for the low-level beliefs identified in this chapter include previous experiences, deterministic views on how pop music changes and the notion that the audience has the strongest agency in deciding which phenomena become popular. These beliefs are related to the songwriters' agency beliefs, which I analyse further in Chapter 6. As Rubin (1998: 164) states: "A person who feels that he or she can affect the future, also finds the future controllable and encompassible, and is able to foresight [sic]." Nevertheless, all the songwriters I interviewed had some assumptions about the futures of pop music (and some even stated them as facts), even those who claimed not to believe in foresight or considered it unimportant. As assumed, not all foresight is conscious or explicit.

Conceptions are not stable. People may air different views of the same phenomenon during an interview depending on the context and the way questions are posed, and they may change their conceptions (Häkkinen 1996: 25). This is also perceptible in my research materials, and it is more than likely that, were I to interview these songwriters again today, new conceptions would emerge. It is for this reason that conceptions should not be attached too fixedly to specific individuals.

It appears from the analysis that different levels of future consciousness clash in the work of pop songwriters. What may seem to be a reactive or even a passive choice with regard to changes in the domain of pop music may be a proactive or future-conscious choice with regard to the songwriters' professional futures. Short- and long-term consequences of different choices need to be evaluated, and it should be borne in mind that songwriters have different values that influence which goals they emphasise.

In the following chapter I delve more deeply into the practices and rationale of the songwriters by examining the ways in which they cope with changes and the alternative futures of music.

4. WAYS OF COPING WITH CHANGES AND FORESEEING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

The demand to be up to date poses a challenge for songwriters. How can one create something that sounds fashionable now, yet will stand the test of time? Furthermore, how is it possible to succeed in such efforts when there may be a long delay between writing a song and having it released? This is one example of low predictability in the music industry: songwriters working on a song to be pitched at an artist do not know when (if ever!) it will be released. A major assumption in this thesis is that to cope with this challenge, songwriters orient towards possible futures in an attempt, conscious or not, to foresee directions or to influence alternative futures of music.

Having thus far focused mainly on the songwriters' various conceptions, values and beliefs related to trend-spotting and foresight, I now move closer to practices and actions. In the following I explore how the songwriters maintained their professional skills, attempted to stay up to date, caught up with trends and acquired knowledge about alternative futures of music in light of their talk in the interviews and my observations. These practices could generally be categorised as reactivity or pre-activity in Godet's (2006: 6–8) terms. I use the somewhat indefinite term "way" with reference to rationale or practices so as to distinguish the songwriters' actions and trains of thought from the systematic and formalised approach in futures studies, although as I will show, they are surprisingly similar.[40]

4.1 Listening, analysing and being alert

When asked how they tried to keep up to date, and how they maintained their professional skills, the songwriters seemed mainly to listen to music (cf. Bennett 2014: 240). One of them said that it was the most important thing to do, and praised Spotify, "a world-wide archive" giving him access to the latest releases (Wirtanen,

40 The main findings reported in this chapter also appear in Finnish in my article "Popmusiikin tulevaisuuksia kuuntelemassa. Ennakoivuus ja tulevaisuuteen suuntautunut ajattelu musiikintekijöiden luovassa työssä" ("Listening to the futures of pop music: Foresightfulness and future-oriented thinking in the creative work of pop songwriters") (Hiltunen, forthcoming).

Oct 19, 2015). This is typical in the creative field: because of the high degree of uncertainty, actors observe each other's work in order to secure their position in the markets (Godart & Mears 2009: 673).

Listening to pop music is one way of acquiring information about the domain (McIntyre 2007; Thompson 2019: 121). One may listen through various mediums, the radio traditionally being the main forum (McIntyre 2007: 9). Most songwriters begin this acquisition process long before they write songs themselves (Laing 1990: 186), thus their understanding of the basic elements of pop songs is based on their histories as music listeners. Phillip McIntyre (2007: 9) suggests that it may be "songwriter's fandom itself which may have provided the major motivating force in their domain acquisition". The more attached songwriters are to a specific type of music, the more they listen to it and learn from it.

Even individuals who only listened to classical music in their youth probably could not have avoided hearing popular music. In that the domain is open to the public and almost ubiquitous, pop music practically worms its way into one's ears. As Simon Frith (2007 [2001]: 178–179) points out, it is something that people listen to accidentally: "we know [the songs] without knowing how we know them". They find their way into our ears through open windows and in shopping centres. Frith's point is particularly relevant nowadays with the widespread distribution of popular music in advertisements, films and television (Meier 2017).

Lucy Green (2002: 22), a scholar in the field of music education, uses the concept musical enculturation to describe the "acquisition of musical skills and knowledge by immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one's social context". Listening, including hearing, is one aspect of such enculturation, playing and composing are others. Green (ibid.: 23–24) identifies three categories of listening: purposive listening is focused and has a particular objective; attentive listening is also focused but without a particular aim; and distracted listening is unfocused, the main purpose being enjoyment or entertainment, and the level of concentration fluctuates. Popular musicians learn both by listening and by hearing (ibid.: 24).

Spotify and other streaming services have, indeed, helped songwriters to access the domain of pop music and to catch up with the latest releases as they come out. The tracker quoted above was not the only one to mention Spotify as an important working tool. Spotify and YouTube, at least, were used in the song-writing sessions I observed (FD May 5, 2015; FD May 24, 2017; FD May 22, 2018). Tuomas Auvinen (2018: 84–85) makes similar observations in his study on Finnish record producers. He claims that consumer software is nowadays included in production technology. The notion that producers of popular music are also consumers (see e.g., Théberge 1997: 200) is increasingly apt in that creators are able to listen to and to share music with their colleagues in the studio: "The line between production

and consumption becomes blurred as producers become consumers, but also vice versa, as producers make use of a consumption technology in their production process" (Auvinen 2018: 85).

Listening to Spotify could be considered more active than radio listening in that users of streaming services may choose what to listen to. There are various reasons why songwriters listen to the latest releases. Of course, they may simply "dig" the music without having an explicit motivation to learn something from it. As one tracker said, for example, he loved pop hits, and the most popular songs are popular for a reason (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). In addition to enjoying music, songwriters also look for inspiration, try to keep up with the public taste, and expand their views on what is possible in the domain of pop music.

Some songwriters talked about more analytical listening. One of the trackers emphasised the importance of understanding new music, including music he did not like so much (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). He said that he tried to understand the thoughts of the team behind the hit song, and why they did things in a certain way. This kind of listening is highly purposive, in sharp contrast with listening to music merely for enjoyment or entertainment. Another tracker told me that when he wanted to relax at home he preferred listening to classical music, or to Bossa Nova in Portuguese, a language he did not understand, so that he could not analyse it (Tamminen, Jan 21, 2015).

Purposive and distractive listening intertwine when songwriters listen to hit songs they love: they listen to the same music both to learn and to enjoy. One of the topliners said that he tried to analyse why some hit songs become hits. He described the ability to analyse popular songs as a particularly important part of a songwriter's skillset, especially when one is asked to create something that reflects the style of a specific artist (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017).

> It happens so easily that you analyse merely the surface. Like for example weak producers, or aspiring producers, they merely, if someone asks for a Chainsmokers-style song, they merely copy the chords, take the same sounds and then it sounds like The Chainsmokers. But the feeling is dead because it's like a poor copy of The Chainsmokers. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

Another topliner distinguished technical from content know-how in songwriting and listening. He said he was interested in "hit anatomy", in the sense of understanding why some songs have certain effects on people, rather than how the songs are created (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018).

Listening to the latest releases and to hit songs enables songwriters to collect information about current hits, which enhances their understanding of the domain and opens up new insights for their songwriting. One of them said it was fun when

music trends change all the time, because then he gets to write different songs (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017). Identifying a new fashionable phenomenon in pop music thus expands his space of possibilities and allows him to do something different. This example supports the notion that trend-spotting might inspire and enhance the songwriter's creativity instead of being a delimiting factor.

Because professional songwriters know the domain of pop music well, they are sensitive to signs of change, and their space of possibilities expands when significant changes are perceived. Listening to music in order to spot upcoming trends could be compared to professional clothing designers browsing fashion magazines and attending fashion shows instead of looking for ideas alone in their workrooms (Nuutinen 2004: 155–156; Kim et al. 2011: 60).

Audience criteria for accepting or rejecting innovations change all the time (Bennett 2014: 240–241). Changes in fashion are brought about via a collective choosing process (Nuutinen 2004: 72). The creators have a central role in this process, but a phenomenon or a product becomes fashionable only when consumers accept it (Nuutinen 2004: 79). After creation come acceptance, saturation, decline and finally obsolescence (Sproles & Burns 1994: 13–25). The decline begins when pioneer consumers begin searching for new ideas: the old fashion soon becomes old-fashioned. (Nuutinen 2004: 86)

It is thus, important for creators to keep up with audience preferences. Streaming services have eased the work of songwriters in that respect. As one of them said, the audience "votes" by listening or not listening to music, and it is easy for songwriters to follow which songs are listened to the most (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). On the other hand, this possibility may have increased the pressure on songwriters to keep up to date, which one topliner referred to as his responsibility (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). It may well be that having access to a wide selection of popular songs and being able to observe success immediately take time and energy away from other aspects of creative work.

Many songwriters, especially the topliners I interviewed, mentioned doing things that seemingly had nothing to do with songwriting when we were talking about maintaining professional skills. These factors are closely related to looking for good topics and ideas for lyrics, but also taking breaks and some distance from songwriting.

> I also kind of try to do many other things in my life. Often, I may get inspiration for example when I take my dog for a walk or go to the stables. I feel that it takes me forward as a musician in addition to all... Just spooning feelings and sentiments from wherever because that's what making music is about, mediating feelings and stories and experiences. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

Reading books, watching movies and going to the theatre or art exhibitions could also be considered part of the songwriter's job (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015; Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015; Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019). This example supports the notion of creative work as something that encompasses all areas of life. According to researcher Doris B. Wallace (1989: 35), many creative people do not distinguish between life and work. Mike Jones (2005: 238), songwriter and scholar in the field of popular music, shatters the mystique related to creative work and songwriting in explaining that most ideas come to him in everyday ordinary situations and conversations.

One topliner pointed out that almost any situation in life could be a learning situation in terms of songwriting, "I think you can learn from any situation like, it's just how you look at things. I try to, for me it helps a lot like looking at compositions from different art forms like paintings, videos, movies, hmm, reading books, getting the words, learning the language, social situations". (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015) These people are songwriters all the time, not only when they are in songwriting sessions.

> Probably the most important thing is to stay alert[41] and collect ideas. I collect them in my cell phone, mainly titles, punch lines, good lines to begin a song with. [...] When you live kind of a life of an artist, you're always alert, listening to people and observing [...] it's kind of like a lifestyle of a visionary, that is most useful. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

For this person, being a songwriter was about being alert and open to new ideas. Although these songwriters related the idea of being alert and visionary mainly to finding new ideas for songs, alertness could also be connected to being aware of zeitgeist and contemporary trends in a broader cultural environment. Fashion forecasters tend to start the process by scanning their broader environment in search of sociocultural trends and the spirit of the times (Kim et al. 2011: 49). Creative work is more than producing something, it is also about perceiving, searching, receiving and interpreting (Tschmuck 2006: 200; McIntyre 2007; Runco 2007; Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]: 25; Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 116). As Antoine Hennion (1983: 171) claims, pop music reflects society, it "senses the current and projects a first image of it". Songwriters need to be alert in order to recognise what is relevant in their time. "They must apply to current problems, to today's ambiance, to what people are talking about" (ibid.: 162).

Although the songwriters themselves do not associate this kind of alertness and the broad search for ideas with anticipation or foresight, their talk about their

41 He used the Finnish word "hereillä", which literally means being awake but is often used in the sense of being alert.

work brings out many features connected to creativity and future consciousness. According to Lombardo (2011: 38; 2017: 649–650), creative and future-conscious people are open-minded, imaginative, curious, proactive and able to combine intuitive and rational thinking. Being alert in the present also makes it easier to identify emerging issues and different patterns that point in a future direction. Creativity and a prospective approach are qualities that allow one to look at the world, and to see differently (Csikszentmihalyi 2013[1996]: 25; De Brabandere & Iny 2010: 1508).

4.2 Sharing and strengthening trends

According to one of the interviewees, it is the responsibility of songwriters to keep up with the latest releases even if they do not like them (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). He said that he needed to analyse the songs – and to know them to be able to discuss them with his colleagues. Colleagues seem to play a major role in domain acquisition and in maintaining professional skills (e.g., Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015; Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015; Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015).

One songwriter explained how he shared knowledge about trends at the songwriting camps, especially off-session.

> So, during the camp we shared a bit like have you heard this, have you heard this? [continues in English] Ah, check this out, and stuff like that so, that was more honest like freshness and I really enjoy that when you share maybe off-session, I mean you're not like in the process of something and you really like [...] like that's how I get my, most of my inspiration and most of my, how I find new music [...] That's how I keep up-to-date. Or so. It's good, good music education." (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

For this topliner, talking about current hit songs was a way of keeping up to date and educating himself about music. A tracker (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015) also said that he sometimes asked his colleagues for tips about interesting new sounds: it was one of the things he did consciously to keep up to date.

Such future-oriented sharing of knowledge is by no means unique to writers of pop songs. According to Laura Pouru et al. (2019), who conducted research on the creation of futures knowledge in small and medium-sized Finnish enterprises, one of the most fruitful ways in which workers in media companies in particular, acquire such knowledge is in conversations with colleagues.

Shared domain acquisition relates to Toynbee's (2000) idea of social authorship in a rather literal sense. Songwriters sharing and negotiating new releases acquire a collective understanding of contemporary trends, and they use this knowledge

in their creative work. They may also share knowledge about up-to-date music with audiences. One of the songwriters I interviewed had recently started work as a DJ, which enabled him to form a direct relationship with his audience. He had learned a lot about new music from audience members who asked him to play specific songs (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015). This is an interesting example of the relationship between the audience and the creator: the audience consists of "experts" in the domain of popular music (Anderton et al. 2013: 49). In the words of music-industry scholar Patrik Wikström (2009: 158): "In the pop cultural sphere, conventions, values and fads are shaped through a conversation between a creative audience and the professional pop cultural creators".

The general opinion that something is trendy or moving in certain direction probably influences the creative choices of songwriters, and thus also the futures of pop music. Songwriters anticipate a specific direction, create a product that follows it and thus strengthen the course. This is a basic example of foresight: it shapes futures (Bell 2003: xiii; Dufva 2015: 46). People acting on their instincts may change or strengthen the course of events. The foresight does not need to be systematic or conscious – both explicit and implicit foresight reform the future (Tham 2015: 285–287). Futurologist and fashion designer Mathilda Tham (2008: 192; see also Nuutinen 2004: 211) takes this idea further in the context of clothing fashion, suggesting that foresight and creation are intertwined in fashion design. Fashion products are incarnations of implicit and explicit foresight (Tham 2015: 285–286). Foresight may evoke new visions and change ways of thinking (Parkkonen & Vataja 2019: 67), and in the case of clothing fashion professional forecasters may make creative contributions in terms of feeding ideas to designers (Kim et al. 2013: 72). Songwriters, too, make creative decisions based on anticipation, and they create products that in themselves are future-oriented. Fashion "offers to innovators and creators the opportunity to present through their models their ideas of what the immediate future should be in the given area of fashion" (Blumer 1969: 290). By writing songs, songwriters produce alternative futures of pop music, and they are ready to alter the domain slightly or significantly if their works are performed by an artist.

As Blumer (1969: 281) notes, shared domain acquisition and "collective groping for the proximate future" may sometimes result in the emergence of similar creations at the same time, a phenomenon that may seem mystical to the creators. Several songwriters had noticed surprising coincidences in songs created by different songwriters simultaneously. Two of them, for example, had occasionally, without knowing it, used lyrical themes that were similar to themes simultaneously produced by other Finnish songwriters. Another example is when different songwriters or producers use the same instruments in arrangements of music from

the same era. These coincidences sometimes come to light only when the songs have been aired on the radio, for example. Songwriters attribute such events to the fact that they operate in the "narrow area of aesthetics" (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018), but also to coincidence or a "collective mind":

> In such things I believe in some kind of collective mind, like it is rather common in history too that similar things are invented at the same time even in different parts of the world. But that's a different topic and a wider topic. But yeah, I believe that it is not necessarily merely about following trends and copying, but for some reason some kind of collective mind works that way, like from somewhere... Like by coincidence people begin doing similar things at the same time. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

As is common among creative workers, these songwriters based many of their decisions on intuition, taste or feeling (cf. Godart & Mears 2009). However, such feelings or taste may be more collective in nature than they realised. Sociologists have discussed the collective nature of decisions that people usually believe are based on their individual taste (see e.g., Blumer 1969; Godart & Mears 2009). One of the pioneering fashion theorists, sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969: 278–280), found that fashion buyers and designers tended to make similar choices without knowing about each other. The fashion buyers in his study explained this, stating simply that some dresses were "stunning" compared to others, whereas the layman could see no obvious difference. Blumer further explained that these workers lived and worked in the same cultural and social conditions, were interested in similar things, read the same magazines, observed each other's work, and discussed prevailing phenomena, even though the selection process was highly secretive. The designers were alert to the domain of clothing fashion and the society surrounding it:

> I think that this explains why the dress designers – again a competitive and secretive group, working apart from each other in a large number of different fashion houses – create independently of each other such remarkably similar designs. They pick up ideas of the past, but always through the filter of the present; they are guided and constrained by the immediate styles in dress, particularly the direction of such styles over the recent span of a few years; but above all, they are seeking to catch the proximate future as it is revealed in modern developments. (Blumer 1969: 280)

Collective taste also explains why songwriters create similar things simultaneously without knowing about each other. They may think that they make specific creative decisions based on what they individually find aesthetically appealing, but in fact they have observed each other's work as well as wider cultural trends,

and these observations influence their choices. They have listened to the same songs on the radio, watched the same movies, read the same magazines, and have had discussions with other songwriters and publishers, who have discussed these matters among themselves. As a result, they may inadvertently create similar futures. These processes could be understood as intuitive foresightfulness, which is based on collective taste. According to Taylor (2016: 62–63), changes in music taste are currently fuelled by music used in advertising in particular. Commercials showcase music that is "cutting edge" and "hip and cool", before it has become popular. Listened to as background music, it may shape the collective taste unconsciously.

One of the songwriters reflected on her role in promoting the advancement of acoustic folk pop music to the mainstream in Finland. Her band, Eva & Manu, began releasing acoustic songs in a video blog in 2010, soon signed a record deal with Warner Music Finland and released their first album *Eva & Manu* in 2012 (Eva & Manu 2012).

> I remember when we did our first album with Manu, this kind of acoustic music was in a way really trendy. I remember that it also happened that at that time our music broke also because it was a style of music that people liked at that time and that was discussed a lot back then. Sure, acoustic music is in a way always popular, but it was more back then, I remember that it was more mainstream, and became more prominent. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

When I asked her if she thought the duo had been aware of the upcoming trend and had consciously tried to catch it, she replied that they had made such music simply because that was how they were as musicians, and that was the kind of music they had always listened to. In her opinion, "it just happened to be good timing". She insisted that everything happened independently, they had not even planned to become a band, and they did not reflect on "which words would rhyme or whether the music was trendy". She referred to their first album as "very sincere".

Here, again, sincerity is contrasted with trend-spotting. However, I suggest that one does not necessarily exclude the other. I do not question the sincerity of these musicians, yet I suspect that one of the reasons why they liked that kind of music may have been because it was fashionable at that time, and thus, among many other styles, it was available. For example, the simple acoustic folk music of Swedish pop artist José Gonzáles had become a phenomenon some years earlier (boosted by an advertisement!), and had attracted followers. Various creators may "instinctively" like the same phenomena and share the same taste (Vejlgaard 2008: 17). Furthermore, a creator who has internalised a specific system and possesses much tacit knowledge in that domain, may have a false feeling of being free

to make choices (Kerrigan 2013: 124). I also asked if she thought that Eva & Manu had initiated the trend in Finland. She replied:

> Now that I look back, I think that back then a lot of acoustic music emerged in Finland, but it is really difficult to say if it was because of us or whether the time was just such that people made that kind of music. Hmm. But yes, perhaps you could say that to some extent we had an influence to what was mainstream in Finland back then. We had a deal with big mainstr... I mean major record company, had Emma[42] nomination and all that with folk music sang in English in Finland. That was quite special [...] But as I said earlier, it is difficult to say what was because of us and what was because of the trend of the time, when people made a lot of acoustic music. I don't know [laughter]. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

It is often difficult in pop music, as in many domains, to judge which creator initiated something. As Howard Gruber (1989: 7) notes, creative work often takes time, and others may take the same direction while the work is in progress. Then, "as the distance of history obscures detail such nuances in sequence can be easily confused, and thus the creative person is seen as produced by a trend, rather than producing it." When it comes to pop songs, the creative process may not last for years, but it may be a long time before the song is released.

Songwriters network with each other and with other actors in the music industry. One of the interviewees mentioned his publisher as an important source for finding out about current music phenomena (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). Publishers give songwriters tips about interesting songs and evolving trends, and they also coach them creatively (see also Anderton et al. 2013: 56). The music industry, in turn, distributes information about upcoming phenomena by means of briefs, which may provoke these phenomena. The songwriters in this study had also taken note of changes in briefs. If similar changes occur in many briefs, it could be a sign of an emerging change in prevailing tastes.

Collective taste in the music industry is formed in interaction between various actors. Songwriters may have a vision they consider individual, but it is based on a significant amount of information shared with other songwriters and other actors in the industry. Collectively they may also anticipate, strengthen, or reform alternative futures.

42 The Finnish equivalent of the Grammys.

4.3 Observing and anticipating the actions of trendsetters and forerunners

Signs pointing towards futures are visible in the present. This is a basic methodological premise in many studies related to futures, foresight and fashion forecasting, and it also seems to be understood by many of these songwriters, consciously or not. My focus in this sub-chapter is on the insights of songwriters reflecting on their current working environment as a basis on which to make assumptions about possible futures.

I asked one of the trackers how he dealt with possible changes in pop music and how they affected his work. In reply, he first asked me if I meant changes in the music business or in music, "Because the music business is a completely different thing. Because there, change is constant and those things you really have to consider." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015) Then he continued:

> I do, like, as I mentioned earlier, people want challenges, things they have not heard before, and feelings they have not felt before. So you try to get there too, like, and you get there best by listening, by trying to keep up on what they do out there, foreseeing what could happen next out there, how will Madonna's next album be, what kinds of things there will be. (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

Although he implies in this defining question that changes in the music business are much more important than changes in music, his response illustrates his anticipatory thought processes in relation to changes in pop music. First, he goes back to something he had mentioned earlier in the interview: the audience wants to hear something they have not heard before. Then he mentions several agents he has to consider when he is anticipating or planning futures. First, he puts himself in the shoes of an audience demanding newness, trying to anticipate its future desires by listening to what he thinks is the same music. Then he refers to an indefinite group of people (possibly other songwriters): "trying to keep up on what they do out there", and finally he takes pop star Madonna as an example of a "target" of foresight, wondering what her next album will be like.

This extract manifests professional alertness to what is happening in a songwriter's working environment. He tries to anticipate the audience's expectations as well as the actions of agents he considers pioneers. This bears some resemblance to pioneer analysis or forerunner analysis in futures studies investigating the actions and ideas of pioneers. Forerunners are seen as "representatives" of futures in the present, and some countries assume this role (Heinonen et. al 2017: 308). In this case, however, Madonna is perhaps not such a representative in that she operates in the same domain as the tracker, namely mainstream pop. Observing

what Madonna does in the present is apparently not enough, and the songwriter feels a need to anticipate her future music.

Some songwriters referred to agents who might perhaps better be seen as representatives of the futures of mainstream pop music in that they operated in another domain or on another level, as one of them said:

> They're [music trends] kind of like, on different levels at different times. Usually, it goes like that trends start off from underground and then, right when for example the ticking beat has been in fashion in underground, it has not been heard yet in the mainstream. Then it has moved on to the mainstream and then perhaps in the underground something else is already prevailing. [...] perhaps the trends usually start off from the underground and indie." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

There are indeed several examples of styles and trends in popular music that have spread from the marginal to the mainstream, including rap and EDM (see e.g., Cohendet et al. 2009; Rantakallio 2019: 24). Independent companies are able to discover promising talent, to anticipate and initiate new trends (Muikku 2001: 224, 256; Burnett & Wikström 2006: 576). The songwriter quoted above indicates an awareness of the dynamics of these trends, yet he does not believe strongly in profiting from it in his work: "You may listen to underground stuff, indie-stuff and think whether there's something that might become... But it's not, like how specific things start off or do not, and with what kind of pace... It is, it changes so much that it is as difficult to foresee as anything else." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

Similar dynamics and mechanisms of change are described in research on fashion and trends. Sociologist Henrik Vejlgaard (2008: 27) writes about the predictability of trends from patterns of human behaviour. One way of spotting trends is to observe trendsetters: "[a] new trend has almost always been simmering for some time before it starts boiling" (ibid.). Franz Liebl and Jan Oliver Schwartz (2009: 313) emphasise the need to understand the nature of trends in strategic foresight. They refer to the diffusion of "the new" as a process of normalization: something that has been abnormal or even bizarre becomes normal. "The bizarre phenomena of today are a starting point for the mainstream of the future" (Liebl & Schwartz 2010: 315). These statements align well with the songwriters' views: the trackers and topliners often referred to a trend as something that had become mainstream.

The songwriters also gave examples of trends flowing from abroad to Finland. As one of them said, it is possible to anticipate what will happen in Finnish pop music even ten years ahead by observing current international trends: "You can see what will happen in Finland by looking at what is happening out there in the big world, you may kind of see ten years ahead. About." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

The songwriters seemed to perceive Finland as a follower in relation to other

countries, especially the US, the UK and Sweden, and that made it easier for them to be prospective in relation to this specific market area. Earlier in the interview the songwriter quoted above recalled the pace at which music trends arrive in Finland. He said that workers in the music industry had estimated that it took about ten years, although nowadays it might be a bit faster or even immediate via the Internet. Nevertheless, mainstream is slow to take influences from "out there". Thus, the songwriters' views on how quickly new musical trends come to Finland vary: two emphasised the long delay, one said it took about two or three years, whereas another talked of immediate spread.

The songwriter quoted above also saw potential in gauging the futures of Finnish pop music in terms of what is happening now "out there in the big world":

> You try to monitor what they do behind the big pond and what they do in Sweden, well maybe not so much in Sweden at the moment, I feel that nothing that exciting comes from there, it's more from the States and Britain and from there you try to pick up things, and sure, invent also yourself, but [...] (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

Examining or anticipating the actions of forerunners may also be a way of expanding the space of possibilities. The creative actor who anticipates the future actions of others, or what forerunners are already doing in another domain or other markets, could become more aware of the "impossibilities" (Toynbee 2000: 40) in pop music.

One of the topliners said he anticipated artists' next moves but in a slightly different sense: whereas the tracker quoted above anticipated what would be on Madonna's next album, he anticipated the kind of songs artists might be searching for in the near future. He seemed to be referring to artists who were probably more accessible than superstar Madonna, such as those with whom he had already collaborated.

> Trying to follow all the time what kinds of trends there are, what kinds of songs people [the artists and their representatives] could be looking for, and there you have to be really active, thinking what would be likely that they will ask for. Because it is good to write all kinds of songs because you never know what people will be looking for, but then again, I can quite easily estimate what is the genre what for example DJ:s, what kinds of songs they will want and, because I can read how their careers will go and what, okay, you cannot know how personally, how they feel, what kinds of sounds, but when you know what kinds of trends there are out in the big world, then you hopefully can offer those things in prospect. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

Here he stresses the importance of being active and thinking consciously and constantly about possible future demands from artists. He refers to trends in

the "big world" and says he can easily estimate the genre some artists might be looking for in the near future. He talks about foreseeing which trends will become mainstream, as well as proactively offering artists something that will guide them musically in new directions. It is his task as a songwriter to follow emerging trends and then introduce them to the artists, possibly before they have heard about them. In this example, foresightfulness connotes attitude, action and ability. The songwriter communicates proactiveness in thinking about future demands, following trends, writing all kinds of songs and being able to "read" artists' future careers. As an example, he mentions Finnish pop artist Anna Abreu: he had had a rather clear vision of her next career move, which came true.

> She has always had a certain exotic aspect in her [music], like she has tried, 'cause she's half Portuguese [...] so right away when last year or when was it that these dancehall songs began emerging, then you realise right away that okay, this is the train she will jump in, because it has always kind of been her thing, but it has not been legitimate because such songs have not been trendy, but when that groove becomes trendy, then it is the natural... you just know that most of her things this year will be such. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

This example of successful anticipation is also interesting in relation to creative constraints and the space of possibilities. The songwriter states that it was not "legitimate" (*sallittu*) for Anna Abreu to perform Latin-style songs before they became trendy. The style became legitimate for artists who wanted to be trendy and in fashion when "dancehall songs began emerging". The space of possibilities in mainstream pop music was then expanded genre-wise and stylistically, thus there was also a shift in the creative constraints of songwriters.

Other songwriters recognised the audience as a valuable "target" of foresight. One of them emphasised its role in setting trends in particular. He listened to music both as a member of the audience and as a songwriter, trying to spot future directions by guessing which of the new releases would become hits.

> It is difficult to say which are the new things that will become popular, but... I wish I knew... But that's why it is interesting to follow those, I always try to listen, listen to lots of new music. Spotify is handy in that because there's the 'new releases' section where, there's mainly pop, but I'm most interested in listening to new releases weekly. And it is fun to guess, if I hear something novel and different, whether it will become a hit or not. But you just hear. [...] And several times I have guessed right. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

He goes on to mention Canadian rap artist Drake as an example of someone he discovered rather early. He had listened to Drake's first album *Thank Me Later* (2010)

and thought the artist had a new kind of sound and would probably have great success. "And then he became the number one rapper in the States." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

By way of comparison, the role of consumers as trendsetters is highly visible in clothing fashion. Kim et al. (2011: 45) describe the fashion system as a dialogue between the professionals in the industry who come up with innovations, and the consumers who choose and accept some of them. Early adopters strengthen the diffusion of trends by wearing the clothes, while at the same time expressing their identities.

The role of music as a commodity to be used in the construction and expression of identities is recognised in the research on popular music (e.g., Taylor 2016: 42). The role of the audience in influencing trends is less direct than in clothing fashion in that people cannot see what others are listening to through their headphones. As Taylor (ibid.: 151) points out, music today is even less visible as a commodity with the shift from physical albums to digital recording. However, the emergence of social media has made consumers' choices visible and enables people to express their musical preferences more easily. Members of the audience listen to music via Spotify, link their Spotify accounts to their Facebook accounts and share the playlists they like or have compiled themselves through Twitter and Facebook (ibid.: 73–74). There are even applications showing which songs are popular in specific cities (ibid.: 74), which could help songwriters to keep up with evolving trends. One of my interviewees mentioned an application called "Hype machine", which collects tips about interesting music from music bloggers (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015).

Songwriters who keep their ears open to what forerunner artists and songwriters are doing, to the kinds of trends that are emerging and to which new songs might become popular are practising a form of informal environmental scanning. In that sense their forward-looking is very similar to fashion forecasting, in which the methodology is less formalised but it is strongly based on scanning (Tham 2008: 183). In the context of pop songwriting, environmental scanning seems to be less conscious, less systematic and less goal-oriented. Songwriters scan their environment both as songwriting professionals and as listeners. The line between these roles is blurred, but in some cases these songwriters made the distinction themselves in the interviews.

The environment that songwriters scan is basically the domain of popular music, thus in that sense it is rather narrow. My hypothesis was that songwriters also pay attention to the visual in order to catch broader cultural trends, which tend initially to emerge visually (Vejlgaard 2008: 41), but it seems that they do not make such a strong connection. Thus, this kind of foresightfulness could be characterised as forward-listening rather than forward-looking. When I asked

the songwriters a somewhat leading question, namely whether they thought it would be possible to anticipate future changes in pop music by observing films or clothing fashion, for example, they struggled to find some kind of connection, mainly talking about looking for lyrical topics in movies or other forms of art. After some deliberation, one of them suggested that perhaps a certain "culture of compression" and effectiveness had emerged hand-in-hand in films and pop music: everything must be faster, denser and more effective (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). Another did make some kind of connection between the two, but he said that he could not use such knowledge in his songwriting: "Sure, they influence each other, but that kind of stuff is more difficult to observe [than merely taking ideas and topics from movies], that kind of broader connections, which are perhaps easier to see afterwards" (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014).

4.4 Extrapolating cyclical, linear and counter trends

Creators of pop music rely strongly on information from the past. New ideas are built on old ones, and the degree of novelty is estimated in relation to an existing body of works in that specific domain. The audience finds a certain degree of familiarity pleasing, and songwriters may make explicit or implicit musical references to earlier works (Warner 2003: 9; Bennett 2014: 44).

Knowledge about the past may also be used to anticipate alternative futures. In the following I give several examples of how songwriters forecast or anticipate futures based on their perceptions of the past. Curiously, similar thinking patterns emerged in all the interviews, even though some songwriters claimed not to believe strongly in forecasting or foresight.

Such trains of thought in the songwriters' narratives tended to be based on conceptions of trends both as prevailing phenomena and as processes of change (cf. Vejlgaard 2008: 8). Known trends may facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about probable futures and could be considered "extensions of the present", although it is acknowledged that trends may also change direction or vanish (Poli 2017: 68). Songwriters observe trends in their working environment or musical products, and they make assumptions about possible futures based on these observations. For some, these assumptions affect creative decision-making, whereas others decide to ignore them.

Many songwriters have observed specific patterns in the past and assume that similar patterns will appear in the future. These assumptions influence their work in different ways: actively for some who are keen to follow or anticipate trends, and more passively for others.

> The trends will go in circles [...] I just think like if you keep doing your thing, you just look for a thing that you love, and just do it, like maybe you do it for ten years, maybe you do it for 20 years, and then when, but you just love your thing, and then, whenever, the trend hits your scene for a while and then it moves on. (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

This topliner emphasises the importance of being honest with himself as a songwriter and writing music that pleases him instead of trying to catch trends. He believes that trends, being cyclical, might coincide with his creations at some point if he just keeps on doing his own thing. Although he does not actively latch onto the trends, he is by no means ignorant of them.

People may spot trends but decide not to react to them because they are not completely sure about the anticipated directions, and they find the prevailing state of affairs satisfactory enough to keep on doing what they have been doing so far (Vejlgaard 2008: 25–26). There is an element of risk involved in any attempt to catch an assumed trend. Some songwriters talked about making conscious decisions not to spot trends, hence anticipating future phenomena did not have significant relevance in their work.

However, as the above example shows, a songwriter who does not think that catching trends is important in his work may have future-oriented assumptions. This topliner anticipated constant cyclical change, which is generally acknowledged as a central feature of pop music (e.g., Warner 2003: 4; Steininger & Gatzmeier 2018).

One of the trackers expressed a similar attitude, although he talked about shorter cycles: "I've kinda noticed that if I do my own thing, then at times it sounds fresh. At times it might sound a bit musty, but these cycles are so fast that the next year it might be like... well, to many listeners fresh again." (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

Both songwriters took account of cyclical trends and assumed that similar patterns would continue in the future. One of them mentioned ten- and twenty-year cycles, and the other referred to next year's trends. This could be attributed to their different roles and areas of expertise: trackers pay particular attention to production trends, which they believe change more quickly, whereas topliners focus on trends in melodies and lyrics.

Both songwriters justified their attitude as "doing their own thing", but they did not detach themselves completely from the trends. They strove for honesty but also aimed at freshness. There is a certain determinism in their statements, indicating rather low agency belief regarding being able to influence popular music. The expression "the trends will go in circles" (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015) implies a perception of trends as active actors (or influenced by someone else) to be followed

– or ignored – instead of the opposite, namely that the songwriter actively influences the trends.

The songwriters also had assumptions about the duration of music phenomena, the "fashion presents" (cf. Van de Peer 2014). Many emphasised the fast pace of fashion cycles in pop music. A tracker mentioned the musical subgenre dubstep as an example of a typical short-term trend.

> It was some years ago really hip and then some mainstream artists flirted with it for a couple of months and then it ended. And only small bits remained in pop. But no one tries to make any dubstep to mainstream anymore. [...] I mean it is like a fact that such trends are not predominant for a long time, before a new one emerges and then it's not cool at all anymore. (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

This comment illustrates how the tracker perceives the trend dynamics of the field. He claims, literally as a fact, that trends – in this case a trend (or perhaps rather a fad) related to using elements from a marginal music genre in mainstream pop – do not last for a long time. This belief helps him to anticipate change in the future, namely the ending of a certain trend: it is initiated by trendsetters, then it moves into the mainstream until it is no longer popular or cool (Vejlgaard 2008: 9). Similar assumptions guided the work of one of the songwriters quite concretely: he tried to avoid using tricks that had been in fashion for a long time because they were likely to vanish soon (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014).

During one interview the tracker concerned made an explicit forecast about the passing of a certain trend. He mentioned a particular trendy form of pop song at the time: many current songs had a bridge that built expectations of a chorus, but another verse followed instead, thereby surprising the listener. He suggested that this trend was already on its way out in January 2015, given that these periods are short, and the phenomenon had already been around for a while. (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

Another tracker anticipated the ending of the EDM genre, which was a major phenomenon in popular music in the 2000s. "Somehow EDM, I wouldn't say it has reached its end yet, but somehow, it is so worn down that it is difficult to find a new angle to it anymore. Those who have, still keep going." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015) The implication in the phrase 'has [not] reached its end yet' is that EDM is not here to stay, at least not in the mainstream. If it is to survive it will need new angles. The tracker then referred to French DJ David Guetta, who was one of the pioneers in bringing EDM into the mainstream: "David Guetta himself, he does something quite different today [...] It is smart of him, not keeping on doing the same thing. He wants, all the time, to be one step ahead of others."

The tracker's line of thinking reflects musicologist Franco Fabbri's (2006 [1982]) explanation of generic change: it happens when certain rules of the genre are con-

sidered outdated among the musical community, and this "deterioration" makes musical events too easily predictable. Consequently, the musical community loses interest, and change is needed. New genres do not arise from emptiness, they follow transgressions against the rules of existing genres. Successful musical innovations attract followers and new rules are formed. Negus (1999: 110) points out that the audience also plays a central role in maintaining these codes: people easily blame the music industry for producing overly predictable music, but audiences are not guiltless. The interviewed songwriters referred on many occasions to the expectations of the audience. Thus, the roles of both the creators and the audience are acknowledged in maintaining stability and demanding change in popular music.

Trend sociologists and fashion theorists explain the ending of a trend or a fashion in different ways. According to Blumer (1969: 283), a major reason why trends vanish is because people's tastes and interests change. Trends also die out if they become saturated, accepted by large numbers of consumers and "overused" (Sproles & Burns 1994: 15–16), as some of the songwriters also implied: not only do audiences demand similarity, they also require constant challenges, "new angles", and songs get "worn out" when they are consumed.

As the above examples show, songwriters do, to some extent, predict cyclical changes and the dying out of trends based on their earlier experiences and observations. Their choice of words implies certainty: instead of referring to possible futures, they seem to be quite sure about future directions, or at least about the fact that cyclical change is constant. They may say it is difficult or even impossible to acquire knowledge about the future, yet they make assumptions about possible future directions. For them, futures may well be found from the past.

> When one box has been searched through, there's a return. Now, for example, I don't know if Ed Sheeran's phenomenal rise would have been possible ten years ago. Sure somehow, but like as people have been making EDM like crazy, electronic music, rap and everything, the productions have become crazier and crazier, and then comes this guy, who's like a street musician, and just has really good songs. And like rough acoustic guitar and sound and good vibes [...] I think it's a sign of like okay, now we've had enough of something, and then it feels good and new to get back to something that is in a certain sense pretty old. (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015)

References to the past and revivals of old styles in popular music are referred to as retro trends (Reynolds 2011; Hogarty 2017), which pertain to musical genres, sounds and arrangements, for example. According to one songwriter, a typical cycle of a retro trend lasts twenty years (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014). This reflects Reynolds's (2011: 408) notion of "retro twins" in music. The songwriter refers to the Euro-dance trend that had recently emerged:

> I'm pretty sure that at the beginning of the 2000s it would not have been possible to pull Euro-dance stuff through, I don't know as I was not that active back then, but I imagine that 2 Unlimited and Snap influences were not sought after back then. But now it has been like, in the biggest rap songs in America, the 90s things, like Euro-dance things have been sampled or re-played, so I guess it's like about 20 years after which you can begin using the same stuff all over again. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

One of the trackers monitored counter-trends in a rather systematic way, suggesting that "counterpunches" almost always happened when a certain trend had lasted long enough: "When there is a big thing going on in music, then probably, well you cannot really estimate how long it will last, but it is likely that something else will emerge. And it is fun to develop a kind of a game with oneself, foreseeing what will come next." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

This comment implies a strong pre-active attitude. The songwriter considers probabilities and enjoys estimating possible future directions. The assumption of constant change is based on his perceptions about the past, but he also pays attention to the present. He believes he knows the rules of the domain well enough to make assumptions about possible futures. Agents' understandings of future possibilities are built on their knowledge of the present situation and on past experiences (Rubin 1998: 27). What seemed to be difficult for this songwriter was anticipating the culmination points, the length of the fashion present: "you cannot really estimate how long it will last". He had followed the use of saxophone riffs in pop songs, for example, and was sure that the trend was already overused and ready to fade, but "I still hear it from Spotify. I thought it was vanishing, at some point I was sure that this was the last song with a saxophone riff, but still they keep emerging."

The songwriters also mentioned some linear trends they had perceived in addition to the cyclical trends. One of them had noticed a decrease in the number of words in songs, for example: "One phenomenon that is increasingly common, although it has not reached its peak yet, at least not in Finland, is perhaps the repetition of one word. In the chorus you might not need more than one word that you repeat all the time. This is something that has been going on, the numbers of words are decreasing." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

This observation of an evolving trend was made in the very first research interview, which I conducted in 2014. Interestingly, the trend continues to evolve. This is probably attributable in part to the popularity of the Chinese application TikTok, which allows users to make and share their own music videos, synced with short sections of songs. TikTok's Chinese version appeared in 2016, and after wider distribution it became popular in Finland around 2018. It is pointed out in the media

that the most popular songs in TikTok have specific features: "minimal lyrics, a bass drop, a double meaning you can make into a joke [---] and, most important, it should 'be epic'" (Bereznak 2019; see also Vanha-Majamaa 2019).

Another topliner elaborated on the same trend and his capability to adapt to it: "I find it lazy to write a chorus that has only one word, and I want to do better [laughter], or more, or something. But that is the trend right now, and if I go to a session and I know that is what they are looking for, then I may as well write something like that" (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). He is aware of the trend, and he is prepared, but he will react only when necessary.

Another linear trend the songwriters had perceived was that songs were becoming less melodic. One of them wondered if melodies would disappear completely from pop music. "It might be moving towards the direction of melodies disappearing, but somehow I want to believe that they will not, because it [composing melodies] is one of my strengths. But if that happens, I'm ready to adapt to the situation. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

This is an example of an intertwining pre-active and reactive attitude. The songwriter had noticed a change and acknowledged the possibility that melodies would become less and less important in pop music. However, that would not happen in his preferred future. This perceived direction was unpleasant, but instead of trying proactively to change it or to ignore it, he was ready to adapt if it did happen. During the interview, he played a song by Canadian artist Drake from Spotify as an example, pointing out that Drake's "non-melodies" sounded natural to young people, but if he played the song to his mother or father they would ask: "When will this song begin?" This relates to Liebl's and Schwartz's (2010) view of trends as processes of normalisation: tomorrow's mainstream is built from elements that seem bizarre today. Young people as early adopters have accepted the trend sooner, whereas the older generation find the "un-melody" bizarre.

Futures are not only about change. The songwriters also anticipated continuity based on their perceptions of the past. Almost all of them believed that there were certain elements in pop music that were not likely to change. They gave "traditional" chord progressions, the need for punchlines or hooks and certain lyrical themes as examples – although they also had contrasting opinions and varying views about their stability. One of the trackers pointed out that as long as certain things featured strongly in people's ordinary lives, certain themes would also feature strongly in pop-music lyrics (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). He was thus connecting stability in pop music to stability in people's ordinary lives. Another tracker predicted that certain chord progressions would please audiences in the future, too, because they had not changed much since the 1960s (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). This prediction is based on extrapolating future stability from stability in the past.

Understanding the past and the present is a part of future consciousness, which may be deepened by extending consciousness in both directions to the past and to the future (Rubin 2010: 38). According to Lombardo (2009: 92), the opposite of future consciousness is not past consciousness, it is rather an excessive focus on the narrow present. Knowledge of patterns of change based on past experiences is a fundamental aspect of future consciousness (Lombardo 2017: 487). In the context of popular music and what I call domain-specific future consciousness here, linking past and current music trends may help songwriters to make creative decisions leading to results that are "in the swim". These perceptions also build a systemic understanding of the domain and the field of pop music. Understanding the big picture helps them to assess their creations in relation to contemporary trends and to anticipate the possible reception and reactions of the audience. "A knowledge of history and the interdependence of decisions, events, etc., is a prerequisite for understanding the future" (Rubin 1998: 24). In their extrapolations the songwriters focus particularly on the domain of pop music and the way it has changed in the past. They also extrapolate continuity or cycles in tastes, among members of the field of pop music.

4.5 Sensing and "just knowing": intuition, gut feeling and tacit knowledge

> Highly developed logical and intuitive skills are the two essential cognitive capacities exercised in coming up with creative ideas and thinking and testing them out. Creative individuals both see and think, placing each capacity in the service of the other. (Lombardo 2011: 38)

Thus far, I have focused on how the songwriters observed trends, reasoned or deduced possible or probable futures, and made creative decisions based on their assumptions and anticipations. Sometimes, however, they said they simply "knew" or "sensed" things. Expressions such as these refer to intuition, tacit knowledge or "gut feeling" (cf. Scheiner et al. 2013). My analytical focus in this sub-chapter is on these alternative ways of knowing. Intuition as a phenomenon is not easily grasped (see Raami 2015: 44), thus I refer more to the theory than in other chapters.

Intuition is used in creative thinking as well as in acquiring knowledge about possible futures, and it is an approved method in futures studies (see e.g., Voros 2007: 200; Tham 2008: 179; Scheiner et al. 2013), although it has been recognised only recently (Glenn 2009: 2). Futurologist Jerome Glenn (ibid.: 13) argues that using intuition is part of every futurologist's work, alongside other methods. Futures methodology reflects rational, creative and intuitive thinking (Tham 2008: 179). Several scholars have pointed out that futures studies and fashion forecasting are

simultaneously science and art (Sproles & Burns 1994: 284; Kim et al. 2011: 49; Niiniluoto 2017).

The importance of intuition is highlighted in particular in the integral approach to futures studies, which acknowledges several different ways of knowing: scientific and non-scientific, rational and non-rational, and even through spiritual insight (Voros 2007: 197–200; Hideg 2013: S12). Whereas knowledge based on analytical reasoning may be transmitted to others, these other forms cannot be wholly transmitted and remain the individual's first-person experience (Voros 2007: 197).

Intuition and sentiments also have a role in the future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness of pop songwriters. Indeed, many creative workers, including songwriters, base their creative choices on intuition. One of them told me that instead of attempting to probe into futures, he just tried to trust his feeling about what things might work. He also said he had succeeded in "guessing" which new bands and songs would become hits by "just hearing, "just knowing"; "perhaps you just feel it somehow". (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

Those involved in collaborative songwriting need to respond to each other's ideas quickly, and the responses are often instinctive rather than analytical (Anderton et al. 2013: 54). Even if decisions made in a songwriting session are neither conscious nor rational, based rather on instinct, feelings or intuition, the songwriters have had experiences and possess a great deal of knowledge on which to build their intuition or gut feeling. Scheiner et al. (2013: 119) describe gut feeling as a "combination of experience, knowledge and emotion". On the basis of their knowledge about the domain of pop music and their experiences of creating and pitching songs, songwriters are able to recognise when they have found something that has potential. They know the domain of pop music well, and being aware of prevailing trends they are able to use this awareness in their work, even if it is not conscious.

This type of intuition could be labelled professional, expertise-based intuition (Raami 2015: 62–65), which is highly domain-specific. It is often referred to as tacit knowledge (ibid.: 63), which is a form of knowledge that is gained from experience and is difficult to transfer to another person (Polanyi 1983 [1966]). It manifests itself in skills and intuitive choices. Experts know the rules of the domain so well that they may act according to what feels right, and they are also capable of changing the rules (Nuutinen 2004: 130).

Futures-related knowledge may also be tacit: an actor may have "tacit foreknowledge of yet undiscovered things" (Polanyi 1983 [1966]: 23). Futurologists Mikko Dufva and Toni Ahlqvist (2015b) categorised futures knowledge in the context of foresight workshops as codified, articulated, embodied and "out-of-radar". Codified and articulated knowledge is explicit, whereas embodied and out-of-ra-

dar knowledge is tacit. Embodied knowledge refers to expertise connected to the skills and competence of individuals (Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015b: 253). The media managers interviewed by futurologists Pouru et al. (2019), for example, believed they had visionary knowledge of futures through their personal tacit knowledge and experience.

Out-of-radar knowledge typifies most creative futures-related ideas – which might seem irrelevant at first (Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015b: 254). Pouru et al. (2019: 85) connect hunches, gut feelings and visions with this form of knowledge. These ideas challenge what is considered normal and widen the range of possible futures (Dufva & Ahlqvist 2015b: 254; Pouru et al. 2019: 85). In the context of pop music, this could be paralleled with hearing "impossibilities" (Toynbee 2000: 40), being able to imagine unimaginable alternative musical futures. Different art forms are sometimes used in futures studies to produce "wild ideas": drama methods, for example, are applied to generate creative futures-related thought processes that enable the participants to disengage from rational thinking (Myllyoja 2007: 106).

Wild ideas about the futures of pop music do not seem to have strong relevance in pop songwriting in that the songwriters emphasised small changes and anticipated continuity. One of them, when asked to imagine what might happen in pop music that was completely unexpected, mentioned the possibility that harmonies would disappear completely. He also thought that something wilder than he would ever imagine could definitely happen in pop music (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014). This statement manifests an openness to alternatives, which is one of the dimensions in Ahvenharju et al.'s (2018) Futures Consciousness model: being future conscious also means acknowledging the possibility of unexpected change (ibid.: 9–10).

This kind of out-of-radar knowledge could be paralleled to visionary intuition, as opposed to expertise-based intuition. Visionary intuitive knowledge expands beyond professional expertise, and it may even extend to alternative futures (Raami 2015: 64). However, it seems from my research material that expertise-based intuition has a far more important role than visionary intuition in the work of pop songwriters.

Intuition and reason are mutually complementary in creative work and in future-oriented thinking (Godet & Roubelat 1996: 4; Godet 2006: 2; Lombardo 2011: 38). There is a combination of rational reasoning and intuitive "sensing" in the topliner's comment quoted below: he believes he is able to estimate what kinds of songs artists will be asking for in foreseeable futures.

> Right when I begin hearing, sensing that okay, now there's that kind of... Then I'm able to say, I have studied music so much and texts that I know where it... Or what are the chances like, okay, you notice for example if a specific artist who is

> really big, begins making specific kind of, then you know, okay, there's gonna be so many copies of this. [...] Right when you see that okay, these have popped the charts, so these will be the songs that will determine approximately what kind of tempo will be required, what kind of energy, what kind of form and so on. It is usually really easy to follow [...]. (Ehnström, Jun 26, 2017)

The songwriter observes and analyses upcoming trends by combining intuitive and rational insights. He begins with "hearing" and then then adds "sensing", which could be interpreted as feeling something without acknowledging any rational reason for doing so. The verb "to sense" does not refer explicitly to any of the five known senses, thus there is some obscurity and even some mystique in this choice of word. The expression "I know" emphasises the strength of the gut feeling. Rational reasoning is also involved: he observes the artists he sees as trendsetters. He also refers to his experience as a songwriter: he had "studied music so much" that his knowledge helped him to identify emerging issues. However, he does not specify whether he means formal studies or self-study. In any case, by emphasising his experience he also justifies his authority in terms of knowing what is about to happen.

Emotions are a crucial ingredient in making sense of futures in Lombardo's (2010: 37) definition of future consciousness, in addition to the cognitive, behavioural and ethical dimensions: "The future is felt; it is not just thought or imagined. A purely cognitive or intellectual description of either wisdom or future consciousness is not only empty, but also psychologically unrealistic. A person's emotional state can greatly amplify or severely reduce his or her cognitive capacities." Thus, songwriters lean on intuition, reason and even emotions when making creative decisions and orienting towards the domain-specific futures of pop music or their personal futures.

Theories of intuition and futures awareness have been further developed in relation to clothing design. Fashion researcher Mathilda Tham (2008: 192) claims that, in the context of clothing fashion "the very practice of fashion design also constitutes a cognitive and tacit processing of possible, probable and desirable futures." Designers are able to catch the spirit of the times, something that is still in the "process of becoming", without consciously anticipating it. Fashion design is simultaneously anticipatory and visionary, and relies on experience. Tham (2008: 121) uses the term "trend awareness" to describe the tacit knowledge designers acquire from working through fashion cycles. "Fashion forecasting, just like fashion itself, is therefore reliant upon a series of selection processes, which to a large extent are tacit." (Tham 2008: 183)

This kind of tacit and intuitive awareness may explain why the songwriters did not give many examples of explicit foresight. Intuition has a major role in their creative work, and foresightfulness may be intuitive rather than conscious. One of

them suggested that part of his trend-spotting happened "probably automatically" (Ehnström, Jun 26, 2017).

Several of the songwriters referred to the ability to spot upcoming phenomena or to know about futures as a skill that some people had and others did not. As one topliner said: "There are some songwriters, producers, who just have a hunch about that thing, for example Max Martin is one of them. He just has an infinite ability to be aware of what people will next... what will be the next big thing." (Louhivuori Oct 21, 2019) In this case foresight is portrayed as innate, mystical and unexplainable. Sternberg and Lubart's (1996) investment theory connects implicitly similar foreknowledge with creativity: creative people are able to see things before other people do.

It is common in the music industry to rely on the intuition of specific people. As Frith (2011b: 35) explains, "the industry's assumption of the essential irrationality of the music market can be seen in the respect paid since the earliest days of Tin Pan Alley century to those people (song writers, talent spotters, deejays, producers) who are thought to have 'good ears', whose understanding of popular taste seems to be 'instinctive'".

Futurologists also acknowledge that some people are inherently more capable of making accurate futures-related assumptions than others. Andy Hines et al. (2017: 126) define foresight as "an innate individual cognitive ability that can be developed", whereas Jerome Glenn (2009: 2) attributes the more accurate intuition of genius forecasters to the fact that some people's brains are able to process information from different sources more efficiently. Consequently, they are also able to build more accurate assumptions about the future, based on this scattered information. Genius forecasting is, in fact, a method used in futures studies (see e.g., Glenn 2009).

In the context of pop music, intuition in this sense and the ability to scope futures better than other individuals are, again, domain-specific. One of the toplin-ers, for example, sometimes had prophetic dreams and premonitions, but he could not really see the connection or apply this quality to his songwriting (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018). On the other hand, he felt that he was more "open" to receiving "small messages" in a songwriting session than he was in everyday life.

4.6 Calculating and anticipating responses

"Do you mean calculation?", replied one of my interviewees when I asked him to give me an example of a songwriting process in which foresight had some kind of role. I replied a little uncomfortably "If you want to use that word". Afterwards I realised that in using these words synonymously I had reinforced the opposition I

deliberately wanted to dismantle in my study. The difference between calculation and foresight is related to the actor's knowledge about prevalent circumstances. These songwriters emphasised that they loved pop music both as songwriters and as listeners. I claim that it would be false to assume that if they probed the futures and based their creative decisions on their perceptions – even if successful probing would mean financial success – they were practising calculation, an activity that usually has negative connotations. I acknowledge that my claim relates to earlier arguments criticising the strong opposition between creativity and commerce (e.g., Frith 1978: 164; 1991: 106; Negus 1995; 1996; Muikku 2001). It is evident and natural that people who write songs for a living aim to create pieces that will generate income: after all, "skill is defined as the ability to meet public demand" (Frith 1978: 164). Foresight might help them to create something that is both financially successful and aesthetically uncompromising.

Futurologists Pentti Malaska and Karin Holstius (2009: 90–91) place decision types in three categories: tactical/opportunistic, strategic and visionary. Makers of tactical decisions tend to be familiar with the external situation, whereas makers of the two other types of decision are more insecure about the external situation. This typology could be applied to creative decision-making in pop songwriting.

I did not mean to ask the songwriters about tactical or opportunistic decision-making or calculation, because as I understood it, foresight may just as well have purely aesthetic as commercial motives, even in a domain that is as market-driven as pop music. However, given the obscurity of the term, some songwriters gave me examples of instances when the word calculation would perhaps be more appropriate, namely composing Christmas songs or summer hits. Such actions could be defined as tactical decision-making rather than foresight. One does not have to be an oracle to foresee that, in all probability Christmas will come this year, too. On the other hand, inherent in the assumption that people will want to hear new Christmas songs this year is an element of insecurity.

As discussed earlier in this study, anticipating audience expectations is an indirect way of anticipating the possible futures of pop music. However, it could also facilitate the making of tactical decisions in the search for success. One of the songwriters recalled a creative song-writing process in which some decisions and transformations were based on anticipated responses from audiences and gatekeepers. The song-writing team initially decided to write a calmer song because the artist's recent singles had been up-tempo numbers about partying and boozing: "We had the feeling that people don't want a fourth 'spree song' in a row, they want something else. And it seems that this anticipation was successful since it became almost as big a hit as [...]" (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014) The team had also decided before the release to replace a swearword because the record company thought

that specific radio channels might not air the song if there were profanities in the lyrics. This kind of anticipation is based on avoiding risks.

Antoine Hennion (1982; 1983; 1989), and many scholars after him (e.g., Jones 2005: 243–244; Morey & McIntyre 2014: 51), have discussed the blurring of music consumption and production in the music-making process. As they are working on the song the creators constantly shift between the roles of creator and audience, trying to hear their songs through the ears of consumers and to anticipate their reactions.

These themes bring me back to the questions of commercialism, authenticity and autonomy. Many songwriters seemed to be somewhat uncomfortable (as I was!) talking about matters that could be categorised as calculative. Even though it is evident that creative workers need to earn money, there is something "dirty" in admitting that some creative decisions are profit related. The romantic ideal of autonomously creating "from within" and not taking external demands into account still influences the thinking of people in the music business, even in the domain of hit-oriented pop. It is important to maintain the romantic image for the sake of the audience. Scholar of popular culture Lars Eckstein (2009: 242) aptly sums up the complexity of the phenomenon: "The products of the mainstream popular music industry are, one could argue on these grounds, to a large extent carefully calculated postmodern simulations of the romantic authenticity which the market demands."

There is a significant difference in how creators of mainstream music and underground music cope with audience expectations and demands, or at least in how they talk about it. Underground artists may claim they do not care at all what audiences think about their music (see e.g., Rantakallio 2019: 276–277). In such cases anticipating the wishes and responses of audiences makes no sense: if the artists are not interested in their opinions, even post-release, why would they anticipate their wishes?

The songwriters in my study talked rather openly about attempting to fulfil the audience's anticipated wishes. Some explicitly mentioned putting themselves in the audience's position. As one of them explained, when he was writing a song for a certain artist he asked himself: "If I was this artist's devoted fan, what would I like to hear from their mouth?" (Ehnström, Jun 26, 2017) When this is the starting point of the song-writing process the emphasis is on the response rather than on self-expression (cf. Cook 2018: 38). Thus, there is a social aspect involved even in a sole venture: awareness of the specific audience affects the process. The songwriter's comment also highlights the need to know the release history of the artist for whom the song is being created. There is usually no time at the songwriting camps for the songwriters to get to know the artists who will perform their songs, but the situation is different elsewhere (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015).

I have discussed calculation and anticipation in relation to audience expectations under the same heading. Yet, I suggest that aesthetic and commercial motives are also intertwined and often inseparable in such anticipation. The taste of songwriters may shift naturally along with the audience's taste and music fashions. In such cases, what the audience might like equates with what they like themselves. When they create something that they find aesthetically pleasing without making aesthetic compromises, it is not about tactical decision-making or calculation. One of the songwriters even justified creating a summer hit based on feelings about summer: "When it comes to that summer song, there were no specific... we wanted, because we also liked, digged it, and we like summer. So, there was no other motive" (Wirtanen, Oct 10, 2015)

4.7 Ears and minds open to the past, the present and alternative futures

Above I have revealed some of the means by which the songwriters I interviewed attempted to keep up-to-date or to anticipate the futures of pop music. They ranged in scope from unconscious and intuitive to systematic, rational and even tactical, as well as from individual to collective. Furthermore, the songwriters focused on the present, extrapolated and learned from the past and imagined alternative futures.

The main tool that songwriters use to keep them up to date is their ears. Therefore, the term forward-listening might be more suitable than forward-looking in this context. Listening to music is by far the most effective way of maintaining professional skills, even in relation to current and evolving trends. As they listen to music and observe trends and fashionable phenomena they establish what is currently possible in pop music. Many of the songwriters implied in the interviews that life and work could not be separated. Being a songwriter is about being open and alert to new ideas, always and everywhere.

In addition to being alert as individual professionals, the songwriters also observed trends, and anticipated as well as influenced possible futures collectively. They shared knowledge about trends explicitly with their colleagues, and were sometimes influenced non-consciously by the choices of other songwriters and the wider cultural environment. In some cases, trends and the simultaneous emergence of similar works could be attributed to collective taste. Songwriters may believe that they base their creative decisions on their individual aesthetic preferences, but in fact they have observed each other's work and are aware of broader cultural trends, all of which influence their choices. Not only do songwriters listen to music, they also hear music.

The analysis reveals that domain-specific future-oriented thinking does have a role in these songwriters' creative thinking – more significant for some than for others. Several of them "used the future" creatively: they anticipated future music trends and applied this knowledge in their creative work, inspired by an awareness that trends change constantly.

Moreover, I found that some of these songwriters' chains of reasoning bore some resemblance to formalised and scientific foresight as well as to fashion-forecasting methods such as pioneer analysis, trend extrapolation and environmental scanning. In the main, their foresight was based on assumptions about continuity, linear or cyclical change, perceptions of the actions of forerunners, and simmering phenomena in the underground scene. They talked about anticipation as an ability, but their descriptions of how they anticipated counter-trends, for example, could also be categorised as processes or practices. They used both rational reasoning and intuition in their work, even when probing possible futures or anticipating what the audience might expect from them, or which songs had potential. Some of them constantly anticipated possible future events in music, exhibiting foresightfulness that could also be categorised as an attitude. In the corporate context it has been found that such foresight is the most efficient: it must be constant rather than focused on distinct projects or processes (Rohrbeck 2015: 2).

The past had a central role in their forward-listening, but they also paid attention to the present. Perhaps the best way of preparing for alternative futures as a songwriter is encapsulated in Haridimos Tsoukas's and Jill Shepherd's (2004: 140) definition of foresightfulness: being able to "spot departures from the past and fresh developments in the present", and instead of trying make accurate predictions, being prepared for all kinds of future events, including the unexpected.

Several different "targets" of foresight were also highlighted. The songwriters anticipated future music phenomena, what pioneer songwriters and artists would produce and the expectations of audiences and gatekeepers: impressing gatekeepers still seemed to be important. Foresightfulness covers both the domain and the field of pop music.

Anticipation also influences the future. For example, when songwriters talk about emerging trends with their colleagues they strengthen these trends, and thereby also influence their future course. This causation explains continuity in pop: if songwriters keep on creating something they believe will remain popular in the mainstream, it will probably remain popular in the mainstream.

The word 'calculation' may be more appropriate than 'anticipation' or 'foresight' in some cases. The process of creating a Christmas song is highly organised and well-timed. The blurred line and ambiguity between foresight and calculation may well be one reason why some songwriters neither practice foresight nor recog-

nise it, and do not even want to talk about it. They are afraid they might lose their genuineness if they take outside expectations into account, and the same applies to anticipating expectations.

I did not find a straightforward correlation between trackers and topliners in terms of how prospective they are, even though almost all the songwriters emphasised that being up to date was more relevant in the production stage, and some suggested that it was the responsibility of the trackers and the producers, rather than of the topliners. In general, it was not possible, nor was it the intention in this study, to estimate the overall level of foresightfulness or future consciousness of an individual songwriter. The analysis shows that different levels of future consciousness cross, and that different future-oriented attitudes intertwine.

The above analysis supports my hypothesis that future-oriented thinking has a role in pop songwriting. However, foresight seems to be less important and less conscious among these songwriters than I expected. For example, I was surprised to find that none of them mentioned observing visual trends in order to spot larger emerging cultural trends and through that possible future changes in music. Nevertheless, when I asked more explicitly they were able to find many possible means of looking into possible futures, including outside the domain of pop music. The implication is that their potential for practising foresight is greater than they think it is.

The above observation also emphasises the domain-specificity of foresightfulness in pop songwriting. The domain of pop music is the main source of information about the futures of pop music. On the other hand, the ability to find signs and trends pointing towards these futures may also be domain-specific. One of the topliners, for example, had difficulties in seeing the relevance of looking forward in songwriting, even if he recognised it in other domains: "I think it is relevant to see causality and different trends, but for me it is more related to political thinking and such [...] I cannot really see it on top of the songwriting process." (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018) However, I must also consider the possibility that I was not able to pose my questions in a way that encouraged the songwriter to talk about the kind of foresight I meant.

It is evident that all these songwriters are able to make at least simple predictions about possible and probable futures in pop music. At the very least they have their assumptions about what is likely to remain unchanged, which influence their creative choices. Some of them used their assumptions more consciously. For example, they consciously avoided using tricks that had been in fashion for some time, assuming on the basis of their knowledge about previous cycles that the fashion would soon become the non-fashion.

What, then, is to be deduced about ways of coping with changes and acquiring knowledge about possible futures? First of all, these ways are not methodical,

they are rarely systematic and often not even conscious. In that sense, they use foresight in a similar way as “everybody” does (Hines & Gold 2015: 100). It has similarities with forward-looking analysis (Tapinos & Pyper 2018), but it is less conscious and open than in corporations in which forward-looking is a part of the business strategy. More importantly, they use their ears rather than their eyes.

5. THE SPACE OF POSSIBILITIES AND FORESIGHTFULNESS IN THREE CO-WRITING SESSIONS

It is impossible to know when the creative process of songwriting begins in the minds of the creators. Songwriters may invent and develop some ideas long before they find the form of a song, and they may not even be able to identify all the factors and trains of thought that influence the process. There are situations in which they are rather restricted in time and space, however, and by default, the songwriting team starts from scratch as far as possible. Creative ideas become observable to some extent in discussions and negotiations with co-writers. The co-writing sessions at international songwriting camps, which have been organised in Finland since 2007, are one example of such situations.

A songwriting team is not merely a collection of individuals, it is an operating system that produces unpredictable results. Merely investigating the individuals does not shed light on how the product comes into existence by means of collaboration. It is also necessary to analyse the interaction between individuals to make collaborative creativity more understandable.

I observed three sessions at Music Finland's songwriting camps: Song Castle 2015, A-Pop Castle 2017 and Song Castle 2018. The aim was to explore the circumstances in which the songwriters made their creative choices at these camps, and to assess the role of trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking. These observations gave me exceptional opportunities to seek answers to my research questions. The individual interactions reveal the songwriters' conceptions related to trends and foresight. Furthermore, the specific situation is investigated as a factor that may influence foresightfulness.

In the following, I describe and analyse the songwriting process and creative decision-making at the camps on a more general level; I show how the songwriters under observation negotiated the space of possibilities in the co-writing sessions; finally, I investigate the role of music trends and search for new and anticipated futures.

5.1 Pre-sets and externally located constraints

The situation is special in the songwriting camps, but it reflects contemporary songwriting practices in the world outside. Here, more than in most other songwriting situations, several factors that influence and guide the songwriting process are dictated by someone other than the songwriters.

The first externally located constraint (cf. Bennett 2014: 219) is the composition of the songwriting team. The camp organisers divide the participants into different groups each day, sometimes taking the publishers' wishes into account. The line-up of the team obviously strongly influences the creative process. Having several songwriters with their skills and knowledge brings more ideas to the table, although on the other hand there are more people who might block ideas. Bennett (2014: 131), who categorised songwriting teams using terminology from social psychology, refers to *concocted groups* with *external origins* (cf. Arrow et al. 2000: 65), giving songwriter duos put together by a publisher as an example. It is not uncommon in contexts other than camps for songwriters to end up working with someone they did not choose as a collaborator. The value of the songwriting camps may lie equally in making new contacts and writing good songs (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015).

Each group consists of at least one tracker, who is responsible for recording and producing the demonstration recording, and two or three topliners. The tracker's role is very close to that of a producer, and many trackers also work as producers. The processes of composing and producing intertwine and overlap in contemporary songwriting (Moorefield 2005; Bennett 2014: 253; Hiltunen 2016; Tough 2017: 80; Auvinen 2017; 2018; Cook 2018: 48). The compositional strategy is close to what musicologist Göran Folkestad et al. (1998) call a vertical strategy in computer-based music-making, in which "composition and arrangement/instrumentation are conceived as one integrated process, in which the track already recorded provides a reference and the background to the new track being tried out" (ibid.: 91). The computer is not merely an aid or a recorder, it has a more integral role in the composition process. Furthermore, the process rarely advances in chronological order starting from the introduction and continuing to other sections of the song. Sections may be worked on vertically, building different elements on top of each other, before moving on to the next section. This more complex tracking process originates from electronic dance music (Anderton et al. 2013: 69), and it is also related to developments in technology. The emergence of new technology and software has influenced how music is made as well as the roles in the creative process, increasing the creative input of producers (Watson 2015: 32).

Another externally located constraint is the time frame, which is determined by the organisers of the camp such that the creators are generally expected to

finish the song in one day. Working with deadlines is familiar to almost all creative workers, but beyond the camps songwriters usually have more than a day to work on their product. Naturally, they are able to work later on material created at the camps, but they are expected to present their demonstration recordings in a final session. One of the trackers describes his work as a tracker at the camps as a "miniature version" of producing a single release for radio. During one day at the camp he carries out the same tasks that would normally take two or three weeks to finish: building the track, recording the vocals, mixing the track and "doing all the tricks to make it sound as good as possible". (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

The tracker lists many tasks that are not traditionally included in songwriting. According to Moore (2012: 15), a song consists of melody, lyrics and harmony, whereas the arrangement, production, and instrumental and vocal performance/s belong to the category of "performance". However, songwriters at the camps are expected to create a demonstration recording that includes all of the performative elements. To what extent these elements are replaced if the song is chosen to be recorded and released by an artist varies: sometimes the whole track is purchased from the tracker, but more often the final recording is produced by another person.

Bennett (2014: 244) divides songwriting sessions into two types: "those that create only the song, and those that also contribute to the performance – let us use the shorthand terms 'text-based' and 'production-based'". In this sense, all the songwriting sessions at Music Finland's songwriting camps are production-based. However, the initial stimulus in one of the sessions I observed was a chord progression instead of a track, and many of the songwriters later described this session as not as heavily production based as most.

Furthermore, the songwriting processes at the camps are guided in certain directions by means of briefs presented by the camp organisers and representatives of record companies or publishers. These briefs contain information about artists who are looking for new songs, and often include specific guidelines on the kind of songs they have in mind (tempo, mood, influences and so on). Giving briefs is also common practice elsewhere (Anderton et al. 2013: 51; Bennett 2014: 217; Tolstad 2016: 202), but it probably has more significance in the camp context as many publishers and A&Rs are present, thus the songwriters have a rather direct gateway to having their songs heard.

In addition to being guided explicitly by the briefs, the songwriters are also constrained implicitly through them. When they create a song for a specific artist or in accordance with a specific brief they have to take into account several aspects that may not have been directly indicated. While composing the melody they need to think about the singer's vocal range, and while writing the lyrics they need to think about the artist's gender, age and public image. They must also find out

and consider what the artist has released before, and how their next single should relate to previous releases.

Thus, the question arises concerning how much space is left to accommodate the songwriters' creative choices and foresightfulness under these circumstances. In the next sub-chapter I examine the creative process and the creative decision-making at the co-writing sessions I observed.

5.2 The creative process and creative decision-making

The three songwriting processes advanced in rather similar ways. Each session began with a discussion to decide which brief the songwriters would use. Choosing a brief could be considered the stage in which the co-writing group designs its task and sets a common goal for the creative process.

The participants also discussed whether they would base the song on a track made by the tracker or create it "from scratch" (FD May 5, 2015). The starting point in the first two sessions was a track composed solely by the tracker, and in the third session it was a chord progression played on guitar by one of the topliners. Once the starting point was decided the songwriters began building elements on top of the track or the chords, improvising and experimenting with their voices, keyboards and guitars. The topliners experimented with melodies and random or nonsense words. Ideas that were approved were recorded immediately.

The lyrical ideas also came through improvising. At some point, the songwriters began to plan the lyrical concept more systematically. There were moments in some sessions when the topliners concentrated on writing lyrics alone. Google Docs online word-processor was used in at least one of the sessions to share the work-in-progress with other songwriters (FD May 5, 2015).

The collaborative-emergence framework of researchers Keith Sawyer & Stacy DeZutter (2009; Sawyer 2019) works well in describing how collaborative creation comes into existence in the context of co-writing sessions. The authors use improvisational theatre and jazz improvisations as examples, but the co-writing process has many similarities with these creative collaborations. The compositional and lyrical ideas are improvised, and many musical ideas are built on each other's ideas. The process is unpredictable, and each individual is able to re-direct it. When no individual has total control of the course of events, the emergence may seem mystical – the song just appears from somewhere (Cook 2018: 33). The meanings of single ideas and events become understandable only in retrospect (Sawyer & DeZutter 2009: 87). The composing process could also be described as cumulative: each creative decision produces new creative problems for the team to solve (Collins 2005: 209).

In each session the song sections were composed in non-linear order, and the lyrics, harmony, melody and production were worked on almost simultaneously. This is common in contemporary, production-based songwriting, which could be described as a vertical strategy (see e.g., Folkestad et al. 1998; Anderton et al. 2013: 69; Tolstad 2016: 215–217). There were moments in each session that I observed when the songwriters worked for a while on a section and only then began discussing whether it would be a verse or a chorus (see Hiltunen 2016: 18–19). The last phase of each session was devoted to recording vocal harmonies, claps, ad-libs and/or shouts, and everyone participated in planning the arrangement.

Two types or levels of creative thinking are present in a creative process: the level on which new ideas are produced and the level on which these ideas are evaluated (Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 84). This was observable in the interaction between individual songwriters in the sessions, and emphasised in some of the research interviews (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015; Oiva, Apr 27, 2018). Both levels seemed to be used to some extent during the whole process, and a topliner explicitly stated at one point that he was personally at an analytical a stage (FD May 22, 2018). This happened as the session was coming to an end, and he was wondering what would be the first element of the song he became bored with – thus putting himself in the audience's shoes.

There are also two types of creative decisions to be made in a co-writing process. The decisions of individual songwriters are not observable and may remain hidden and non-verbalised even among co-writers. Before presenting an idea the individual songwriter estimates its appropriateness and decides whether or not to introduce it to co-writers. Other decisions are made collectively, and sometimes become observable in the interaction between the songwriters. However, even these decisions may not be clearly articulated: for example, songwriters may collectively decide to accept a creative idea by remaining silent – in other words not rejecting it.

The three sessions I observed had a lot in common, but they differed particularly in the amount of discussion and negotiation. One of the sessions included many moments of negotiation and disagreement, whereas another reminded me of a group improvisation exercise in which you have to say "yes!" eagerly to every suggestion and build the following suggestion based on it. The third session was similar to the second, but there were fewer analytical brainstorming phases, and it included some analytical discussions. In general, there was less verbal communication than I had expected in all three sessions, which probably reflects the professionalism of these songwriters and the vast amount of tacit knowledge they share. Having been writing songs for several years, they make decisions intuitively, without verbalising or even being aware of the thought processes behind their

choices. This is an extra challenge for the observer in that the communication is musical rather than verbal – songwriters may react to each other's musical ideas by playing or singing the suggested melody, for example, developing it or ignoring the idea and suggesting something else instead.

Bennett's (2012: 154–158) *stimulus evaluation model* for collaborative songwriting portrays the process and the routes via which creative ideas end up in the final version of a song. He refers to creative ideas as the initial stimulus, which may be a chord sequence, a melodic line or a drum loop, for example. If this stimulus is not vetoed and rejected, team consensus is achieved either by adapting it, negotiating, or approving the idea as such. Surprisingly, a great number of ideas were approved as such in the sessions I observed, possibly due in part to the strict time constraints. As one of the songwriters said, in the camp context there is no time to waste (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015).

The number of co-writers may affect how much negotiation is needed in the process. One of the songwriters brought this up in the interview, and indeed, the process that was the most complex with lots of negotiation, involved four songwriters, whereas there were three in the others.

> Yes, it should always be based on offering ideas, not rejecting them. There never should be such negative like, questioning things without offering something instead, it will kill the atmosphere. And that's what often happens if there's more than three persons – if there's too many people, there's always someone who doesn't have anything to do and then they begin thinking whether it's good enough and maybe it could be even better and [...] I think it's best when you have two persons who both write text and melody. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

This songwriter also pointed out that the environment should feel safe and comfortable so that participants would have the courage to brainstorm ideas. This, according to Bennett (2014: 232–233, 241), is one of the tacit social rules in co-writing: songwriters always try to find something good in their collaborators' ideas, and to maintain a positive spirit in the sessions.

In the two last sessions, the songwriters noticed early on that the song would quickly find its form. In one of the early sessions they joked about going downstairs to ask another group if they were still working on their song, having already finished their own (FD May 22, 2018). In the end, these sessions also took several hours – although some of the essential elements were found rather early.

It seemed to me in the sessions I observed that many creative decisions were based on intuition and feeling rather than rational reasoning. The songwriters showed their approval by shouting: "got the chills!", for example. They also explained some of their creative decisions afterwards, saying that something just "felt" like

the right direction. Intuition or "gut feeling" may evoke emotions and even physical sentiments (Scheiner et al. 2013). Christian Willi Scheiner et al. (2013) found in their research on entrepreneurial behaviour, specifically intuition in the work of technological gatekeepers, that emotions had a significant role in how these gatekeepers identified and evaluated technological innovations. They felt joy and excitement when they recognised something they believed had potential. Music evokes strong emotions, and songwriters rely heavily on these immediate sentiments.

Keith Sawyer (2006: 158–159) uses the concept *group flow* to describe a state in which a group performing a creative task is at its peak, and everything seems to happen naturally, almost automatically. Group flow is similar, but not the same as flow as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1996): an individual psychological state of mind that may be achieved in creative work and in which the concentration is perfect, and the creators lose their sense of time. In the case of group flow the phenomenon affects the group as a collective unit, and it may be in flow even if individual members are not, and vice versa.

One of the songwriters referred to this kind of state in the interview, also distinguishing between intuitive and analytical states of mind:

> In my opinion, what's relevant in the sessions is that a certain state of flow exists, like the energy should shift like, you know, between several boxes, like either you have a state of flow, or then you have analytical, like you think what it is that… you know in state of flow you just input ideas and live the energy and then you are like, the game is on, so to say. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

This songwriter emphasises the importance of having stages in the process during which one just let's go and feeds ideas without too much analytical thinking. As an outside observer, I found these different stages and energy levels to be easily observable – at times the song seemed to be writing itself as ideas were thrown around and approved in constant agreement, whereas at other times things were quiet, and everyone seemed to be concentrating on their own tasks.

According to Sawyer, members in a state of group flow might sense what the other members are thinking, or even anticipate what they are about to do or say. There was an interesting situation in one of the sessions when a topliner almost pushed another topliner in front of the microphone to sing what she had in mind (FD May 24, 2017). Afterwards he said he had the feeling that she had a strong idea that would be hard to explain and easier to sing.

I reminded him about this in the feedback interview and he recollected that some people seemed to think that he had a talent for reading minds and knowing before anyone else in what direction the session was heading. Then he referred again to the state of collective flow: "Now that you said this, yes, I think I can

vaguely remember this, but I think also that is about the state of flow that you are within common energy, you achieve a collective mind [...]" He also emphasised the need to be "open" in the songwriting sessions, which he connected to the ability to sense small things and to find small "hints" for making the right decisions. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

Openness and receptivity are indeed important in collaborative creativity. According to Sawyer (2012: 350), creators end up in a flow stage because group creativity is highly challenging. They must be able to listen to their co-creators and react to their actions while simultaneously making creative contributions according to genre conventions. There is constant balancing and tension between unconscious inspiration and conscious hard work and editing (ibid.: 351).

The songwriters had some music-related conversations in the sessions that were not directly related to the song on which they were working. They talked about the artists for whom they had written songs, for example, and the artists they had listened to when they were younger (FD May 5, 2015; FD May 24, 2017; FD May 22, 2018). Even though these chats were not directly related to the songwriting process, they were probably important on the social level. Many of the participants met each other for the first time at the camps, therefore sharing their personal musical pasts helped them to understand the starting points at which each collaborator entered the co-writing session. Outside of the camps, songwriters usually have more time before the session to get to know each other, socialise and orient themselves towards writing a song together (see e.g., Bennett 2012: 157–158; Auvinen 2018: 78).

In sum, co-writing at songwriting camps is a complex process, in which the song emerges through interaction between individuals, and both individual and collective decisions influence the end result. The creative individuals and the group produce and evaluate ideas constantly. Furthermore, the level of analytical thinking shifts during the process. The group may achieve a state of group flow, and social factors and tacit social rules influence the process.

5.3 Negotiating the space of possibilities

Songwriting, be it a carried out alone or in collaboration with others, is a constant negotiation about the space of possibilities in that particular process. Songwriters have to estimate which boundaries cannot be surpassed, in other words the "box" within which they must stay. This box or space is related bidirectionally to future-oriented thinking. The experienced space of possibilities may restrict creativity and imagination, but on the other hand future-oriented thinking may expand the experienced space.

Two areas of negotiation stood out in the sessions I observed: the appropriate amount of novelty versus similarity to existing works, and genre constraints. The song's up-to-datedness and its relationship with prevailing trends was also discussed, but to a lesser extent than I initially expected. All these negotiations are interconnected: songwriters may estimate what might be too strange, or too novel, in the particular genre or style of music at the moment of creation.

Songwriters estimate the appropriateness and acceptable amount of novelty in their creation in relation to the existing body of works. The song may be too different, or too similar to songs already released (see also Bennett 2014: 77, 80, 128). The body of works was present in a rather explicit way in the sessions I observed. Almost 50 songs or artists were mentioned in the three sessions, some of which were also listened to. Using released songs as references is common in contemporary popular music, even outside the camps (Bennett 2014: 218; see also Auvinen 2018: 84, 166). Reference songs might be used to imitate specific styles, or simply for inspiration.

The majority of these references in the camp sessions were verbal, and only a few songs were played – probably due to the strict time constraints. In light of this observation, it is clear why the songwriters emphasised the importance of knowing all the latest hits. It is different outside the camps: songwriters might listen to several songs during or before the creative process. Bennett (2014: 180), for example, recalls having spent three days listening to music by the Killers when he was asked to write a song in their style.

Reference songs seemed to be used in the negotiations about the space of possibilities to place the work-in-progress in the domain, and sometimes also to show approval of one another's ideas. During the sessions the songwriters reacted verbally when they noticed that their creation echoed the style of a certain artist or song, but these remarks did not have a significant effect on the process. In A-Pop Castle (FD May 24, 2017), for example, one of the topliners enthusiastically pointed out that the song could be an Icona Pop song, a Nelly Furtado song, or a Beyoncé song. He probably did not mean that they should pitch the song to these artists, and was simply communicating that he saw they were making good progress. Moreover, if the songwriters could imagine a song being performed by one of the artists, it probably meant that the team was keeping well within the space of possibilities.

What if the song is too similar? Copyright law is a concrete constraint that delimits the creative work of songwriters (Bennett 2014: 76). While working on a song they have to compare their creation to existing works in the domain of pop music and consider whether it is too reminiscent of any others. If it is, they could be accused of plagiarism. Songwriters also need to be familiar with the domain of popular music for legal reasons.

I witnessed a situation during Song Castle 2015 (FD May 5, 2015) in which the songwriters wondered whether the song they were working on was too reminiscent of a big hit song. The chord progression and tempo were similar, but the songwriters concluded that it was not too distracting. Meanwhile, the tracker stated that chord progressions were not owned by anyone.

Such situations are common in songwriting sessions (Kaskinen Nov 11, 2015; cf. Bennett 2014: 80). Co-writing is convenient in that sense: if there are several songwriters, one of them will probably notice if their creation bears too much resemblance to existing pieces (Wirtanen Oct 19, 2015; cf. Bennett 2014: 80).

One of the songwriters said that it might be a good thing if the song evoked a feeling of familiarity. He trusted his gut feeling to recognise when the similarity amounted to plagiarism (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015). He also admitted "stealing" some elements from previous works:

> If I listen to many reference songs, I might steal, especially like rhythmics and drum beats. I might take like four or eight bar patterns, if there's a cool bass drum-snare pattern. And I don't think it's plagiarism. It might change along the way. But if I just want a certain feeling, I listen to music and deduce that it feels like this because of these elements. It's not, I can tell straight out that there's no need to re-invent the wheel. (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015)

This songwriter was not worried about plagiarism – and as I saw in the songwriting session, neither were the other members of the co-writing team, even if they had chosen the same chord sequence that featured in a well-known hit song. The process would not advance at all if the songwriters rejected everything that sounded familiar. Many scholars have criticised strict copyright laws on the grounds that the fear of plagiarism could be a hindrance to creativity (Demers 2006; Hesmondhalgh 2007: 152). "Copyright, intended to foster creativity, has become an almost insane restriction on it in many cases" (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 152). Popular music is about borrowing, in any case.

Songwriters might also have to estimate whether an idea has been over-used. One of the topliners in Song Castle 2015 questioned the use of the word "dance" in the chorus as over-used and too evident. The tracker agreed that it was the first word that came to mind when writing a funky disco song. The group decided to keep the word for the time being, and the tracker pointed out that it could be the "retro thing" in the song, but in that case the rest would need to be really modern. (FD May 5, 2015)

Considerations such as these relate to worries about predictability more than plagiarism. As Bennett (2014: 211–213) states, "Although a cliché by its nature cannot be plagiarism, it can risk making the song predictable and therefore unap-

pealing to the partnership or to the listener." Whether or not to use the word dance was not decided upon during Song Castle 2015, but it remained in the final version because no one was able to come up with a better idea.

The space of possibilities is strongly bound to time. As actors make creative choices, some of them stretching the boundaries more than others, new possibilities arise (Scott 1999: 1966; Toynbee 2000: 42). It is particularly important in pop music that the song sounds like a creation of its time.

The need to be up to date was emphasised in the songwriting sessions. The words "modern", "fresh" and "cool" recurred repeatedly, as if to remind one another that they were, or at least should be creating something up to date (FD May 5, 2015; FD May 24, 2017; FD May 22, 2018). The tracker in A Pop Castle 2015 even stated explicitly that if the chord progression ended on an E minor chord, it would sound like 2012. He was amused when I reminded him about this comment, but he could not remember exactly which situation it was. He thought it probably had something to do with the tension of the chord progression and the expectations of listeners: "So perhaps I meant that in 2012 it was still kind of new to build a chord turnaround starting on tonic, back then it could have passed. But today I think chord progressions; they're kind of like, the same chords but in a more unique order." (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

The tracker was also worried that if the song was sung in a certain manner, it might become a "funky oldies goldies song that nobody cares about": he referred to Finnish jazz singer Johanna Försti, who has performed many songs in the retro style and is also known from many entertainment programmes on Finnish television. His caution probably related to genre constraints. The tracker was aware, and wanted to remind his collaborators, that they were working on a contemporary pop song, even if the style was rather "retro".

This kind of reasoning related to the songwriters' understandings of the domain and what was currently possible within it. As in fashion scanning, they considered "rightness", relevance, appropriateness and timing (cf. Tham 2008: 183; Kim et al. 2011: 63–64). Their creations had to be aesthetically right and to correlate with the zeitgeist that was appropriate for a particular market and target group, introduced with the right timing. The current fashion always had to be taken into account, either in adjusting to it, or in departing from it (Blumer 1969: 283).

Most pop songs are similar in terms of length, form, lyrical themes, melodic ambitus and scales, for example. All professional songwriters are familiar with these features and they do not need to be negotiated in a songwriting process. This was evident to me as I was observing the sessions. There was no negotiation on whether the song should last for five or 15 minutes, for example, or whether the melody should be atonal. According to Bennett (2014: 229), knowing tacit con-

straints such as these makes the songwriting process efficient: the constraints (or space of possibilities) are used to narrow down the number of creative choices.

Negotiations were needed when members of the team suggested something that deviated from the stylistic standard. When one of the topliners began looking for jazzy chords in Song Castle 2015, for example, the other songwriters, especially the tracker, rejected them (FD May 5, 2015):

> **IW:** Uuh... No!
>
> **EK:** What?
>
> **IW:** No, no... That's too composed, you know..?
>
> **EK:** Is it too good?
>
> **IW:** Yeah, it's too sweet, you know. Yeah, that's too show-off. Hey, I learned this chord yesterday. That's not pop...
>
> **MJ:** It's jazz.
>
> **IW:** But then again, like Pharrel Williams' "Happy", those are jazz chords. And that's a whole different, I think.
>
> (FD May 5, 2015.)

The tracker excluded jazzy chords from the domain of pop music. However, he mentioned American artist Pharrell Williams' "Happy" (2013), one of the best-selling singles of all time, as an exception. In this example, the genre conventions were a constraint that prevented the songwriters from creating something too original. The tracker wanted to stay inside the box of pop, thus he rejected jazzy chords.

Overlapping systems are in operation in the co-writing process, and contradictory individual spaces of possibilities may cause conflict. On the one hand there is the symbolic system of the particular style of music, pop in this case, and the group consisting of individuals on the other (Thompson 2019: 33–34).

Individual spaces of possibilities are based mainly on information acquired outside the sessions. One songwriter included jazzy chords in his space of possibilities for a pop song, whereas another one excluded them. Through negotiation, the group defines what the common space of possibilities is. These different spaces could be termed representational spaces (Glăveanu 2011: 483): "in a collaborative situation, individuals use symbolic resources intrinsic to their particular system of knowledge and, through communication, generate new and useful artefacts (the creative outcome) within a representational space of the group".

The briefs are concrete tools that help songwriters to delineate their common space of possibilities in a particular session. They may contain very specific directions about how the song should be. One of the topliners described the role of

briefs metaphorically. “It’s kind of the same as if a cook was asked to create new recipes for 2020s hamburgers. You should do something fresh, but it still should be a hamburger.” (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018) On the one hand he saw the briefs as facilitating and precipitating factors in the songwriting process, but on the other hand they constrained and directed it in a similar way, as if a group of clothing designers were asked to create “shirts for 20-to-30-year-old women living in cities”: the proposed age, gender and understanding of what a shirt is, as well as the environment, would steer the process. In fact, a brief could be understood as a space of possibilities in itself, which the record companies or publishers determine. However, the work is also guided by tacit knowledge about the domain, which is not necessarily described in the brief.

When it came to writing the lyrics, what seemed to constrain the songwriters most was the artist for whom they had chosen to write the song, or other possible artists to whom it could be offered. In each session they deliberated over which words would suit the artist’s mouth. Ideas that were too “wild” were vetoed. The artist’s age was an issue especially in Song Castle 2018 and A-Pop Castle 2017, and they had to keep it in mind constantly to avoid inappropriate lyrical content.

The artists for whom the song was being written therefore had some kind of invisible authorship in the songwriting sessions. One of the topliners explained how he literally tried to be the target artist. During the session in which they were creating a song for a Korean girl group, he told his co-writers he was imagining being one of the singers (FD May 24, 2017).

On some occasions the songwriters expressed the need to “think outside the box” (FD May 24, 2017), which is usually understood as going beyond what is conventional. One could think of the “box” as constructed by the constraints of the domain and existing body of works. Songwriters looking for ideas outside the box are attempting to find novel ways of doing things, thus stretching the boundaries of the space of possibilities towards different futures. During another phase of the same session the songwriters called for something that was sufficiently musically accessible (FD May 24, 2017). Accessibility may be constrained by excessively brave choices, although a certain amount of originality is needed. As Bennett (2014: 230) points out, “Songs can be ‘too original’ (too genre-busting or too listener-challenging) or ‘not original enough’ (plagiaristic, derivative or simply uninteresting).”

Above, I have described the co-writing situation and the many factors that influenced creative decision-making in this specific setting. Staying inside the box is valuable for the songwriters at least in the camp context. This inevitably restricted the future-oriented thinking and prospective attitudes of the participants. Nevertheless, futures were not completely absent in the sessions, as I will show in the following sub-chapter.

5.4 The use of futures in the sessions

One of the main goals of my field observations was to monitor the role of futures in the sessions. They were present in three different ways: in discussions about evolving trends, in the search for novelty and in the anticipation of responses from audiences and gatekeepers.

There were some trend-related discussions during the sessions I observed, many about retro trends. At the beginning of the Song Castle 2015 session, for example, one of the topliners observed, based on the reference tracks they had listened to at the briefing session, how "everything sounds so 1980s nowadays" (FD May 5, 2015). Although this was probably not meant to be a suggestion, or to direct the process in any way, remarks of this kind made during the session could influence the creative process and the end result. They may make other songwriters pay more attention to similar factors and think about them more actively. The song the group ended up creating had many influences from the music of past decades, and the songwriters described it as a "disco classic" (FD May 5, 2015), or "retro disco" (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015).

Although the term trend as used in the above example referred to prevailing phenomena, there was also an implicit assumption of continuity: if everything sounds like the 80s "nowadays", it is likely that 80s sounds will be in fashion in near futures.

During one of the sessions the songwriters referred a couple of times to 1990s trends, and they had a short discussion about current music trends, changes and the dynamics of popular music. The discussion also included a prediction.

> **AJ:** Doesn't feel like you can do like proper like rock, rock anymore. People keep saying it's coming back, but I don't know man.
>
> **KL:** I don't know.
>
> **AJ:** I don't know if it will. Like, I love rock, I mean I'm about as rock as it gets really but I'm fucking well bored with it now. So bored of it. I haven't heard really any rock in the last five years that I've loved. I think the last thing that made me feel excited that was guitar music was Arctic Monkeys. Their first record. [...] Like at least pop is moving.
>
> **KL:** It's moving, but still, we had a session last week, when we listened as reference like old Backstreet Boys and that stuff and we were like, okay, this is really up-to-date, these songs are fucking amazing.
>
> **AJ:** [laughs] Yeah.
>
> **KL:** Like, but when we started listening something rock, we were like, okay we're not gonna do this today.

AJ: [Laughs] Yeah. I just think music is going along with technology, isn't it, and that's when it becomes exciting. People like Kanye West, when he started, when he did that Yeezus record, and then, Yeezus was a shit record. Do you like Kanye?

KL: Yeah.

AJ: I love his music. Yeezus was a shit record but he had like, he was kind of the first one to do that whole [makes sounds and percussion effects with his mouth]. [...] And it all comes from new ide... new technology. But rock is just like. That's why rock was cool back in the days. Cause it was new. The fact that you could amplify shit.

KL: I don't, I don't think that like rock is coming back, but I think Ed Sheeran for example proved that the real songs, they came back like five years ago or four years ago.

AJ: They'll never die.

KL: They never die.

AJ: That soulful music will never die. No way.

KL: But like ten years ago "Thinking out loud", or some song like that couldn't be the biggest song of the year, I think. Now, now people were ready.

AJ: Yeah.

KL: After all the EDM boom.

(FD May 22, 2018)

In this short discussion, the topliners wonder whether rock is coming back, predict that songs and soulful music will never die, and express their views on stability and change in pop music and the role of technology. The remark that the old songs of the Backstreet Boys, an American boy band that was popular in the 1990s, sounded "up-to-date" and "amazing" made the other topliner laugh, although he seemed to agree. Here, "real songs" and "soulful music" probably refer to music in which the melody and the lyrics are more important than the track or the production.

The discussion took place after the lunch break during which we talked about my research topic: this could have made the songwriters think more actively about trends and changes in pop music. At that point the song was almost finished, and I was not aware that the conversation had any effect on the songwriting process or on the end product.

Even if such discussions have a minimal or implicit role in the creation of the song, they are significant in showing how songwriters share their views about evolving trends and stability, thereby possibly maintaining or questioning certain limitations or rules. They may not make predictions consciously or think about the rationale behind their predictions or beliefs. However, by making these statements they validate or contradict each other's views, and in drawing these invisible lines they possibly also influence each other's spaces of possibilities in writing pop songs.

Later, in the feedback interview, I asked the tracker at the Song Castle 2015 session whether the team had taken possible future trends into account in the creative process. He replied: "I can't remember if we, somehow I think, as we decided to lean towards soulful easy-going music, then we somehow just let go and did what felt good, so I don't, there were not any conscious choices." Nevertheless, he showed a rather prospective attitude in the session. He kept on asking for something more modern, surprising and original from his co-writers, and he made several remarks that something was, in his opinion, too "basic". (FD May 5, 2015)

The topliners I interviewed had also noticed this. When I asked them about taking current music trends into account in that session they replied that at least the tracker did, because he was a "modern producer" (Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015; Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015). This relates to what the songwriters said earlier, namely that the responsibility for making up-to-date songs lies with the producers and trackers rather than the topliners.

A topliner described the session as a process of re-creation:

> As I remember it, it wasn't so much about freshness. It was more about like... getting a similar kind of groove as the reference tracks we were listening to, getting something similar to what we would dance to in the club, it was more about, yeah that, for me that day was more about like trying to create something like, that we knew how it was supposed to be and yeah, therefore we had already like, it was more about re-creating in a way. (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015)

He refers to reference tracks, and to the fact that in this particular session the primary aim was to re-create something similar to them. He contrasts this with freshness, probably meaning that the aim was not to create anything particularly novel.

The search for novelty and the stretching of boundaries were rather careful in all the sessions I observed. There may have been social reasons why these songwriters did not come up with the wildest possible ideas, and the processes advanced with very little negotiation. Many of the songwriters were unknow to each other, and they may have concentrated on making "nice moments" (Sjöholm, Dec 22, 2015) rather than taking risks either by rejecting other people's ideas or presenting wild new ones.

Group creativity relies on approval – which should not be too effusive (Nijstad & Paulus 2003: 330–331). Research on group creativity has shown that consensus, especially if it is achieved too early, may be detrimental to the process (ibid.: 329, 337; Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 89). An atmosphere that is overly positive could lead to fewer new ideas and innovations (Hideg 2007: 39). If group members do not dare to criticise one another, consensus might be achieved too soon. This could explain the low level of novelty in the songs.

Futures featured more explicitly when the songwriters were anticipating the possible reactions of audiences and gatekeepers. This relates to earlier findings and theorisations about creators as members of the audience during the process of creation (Hennion 1983; Jones 2005: 243–244; Bennett 2011; Glăveanu 2014: 36). Songwriters try to listen to their creations as ordinary audience members, and they base their decisions on what they think the audience response would be.

As an example, possible signature changes were discussed in terms of whether the song would then be musically accessible (FD May 24, 2017). On the other hand, the songwriters demonstrated their agreement with the result by saying that it would be "cool as a sing-along thing" (FD May 22, 2018), for example, and "this is where people will begin shouting" (FD May 24, 2017). Possible negative reactions were also anticipated.

The songwriters also anticipated the responses of gatekeepers such as publishers and A&R executives. The listening session to be organised at the end of the camp in the presence of many publishers and A&Rs was mentioned several times. In Song Castle 2018 in particular, one of the topliners brought up the possible expectations and responses of gatekeepers on several occasions, sometimes referring to specific people (FD May 22, 2018).

> 'Cause they're gonna be there like with a checklist like, okay, track, verse, great.
>
> Mark [name changed] or whoever the A&R guy will end up being, I can just hear him being like: yeah it's nice, really nice but like... I would sit and write melodic tunes all day long, like I just love melody, but like we're gonna need to tip the balance.
>
> (FD May 22, 2018)

The latter comment related to discussions concerning how melodic the song should be. The topliner explicitly stated at some point: "We're not allowed to be that melodic". I was not present at the camp when the briefs were given, therefore I do not know whether this was something that was emphasised then, or whether he was referring to contemporary music trends on a more general level. Nevertheless, this shows how the songwriter's thoughts about expectations restricted his autonomy in his creative choices.

5.5 Staying foresightfully inside the box

Co-writing sessions at the songwriting camps are complex processes that involve creativity on both an individual and a group level. The pre-sets and externally located constraints, namely the composition of the team, the time frame and the briefs, guide the process in many ways, yet the creative product emerges unpre-

dictably given that each individual may change course at any time. The song assumes its form through improvisation and experimentation, different sections are worked on simultaneously and the songwriter roles intertwine constantly. Both the songwriters and the group produce and evaluate new ideas, applying intuition, instinct, rationale and analytical thinking in both tasks.

As historian Hans-Joachim Braun (2016: 38) remarks, analysing a creative process is often speculative: "One of the main problems is that creative thoughts are often not accessible to awareness and cannot always be verbalised." Merely observing the sessions does not reveal the role of trend-spotting, foresightfulness and future-oriented thinking in the minds of individual creators. The feedback interviews and my analysis of the interaction between individuals give some information about the role of trends and futures in the sessions, yet much of what happened inside the heads of the songwriters remains a mystery.

Each songwriter has his or her own space of possibilities, which is based on information acquired outside the sessions and may also include assumptions about trends and futures. The common space of possibilities of the group is negotiated and defined during the sessions through direct communication, as well as through approval or rejection without explicit justification. Individuals' different spaces of possibility may sometimes cause conflicts – on the other hand these differences and conflicts may be the starting point of something completely novel (Glăveanu 2011: 484).

Among the major issues for negotiation is the amount of novelty in the creation – how prospective the team should be, and which choices are too bold, or too different. Individuals suggest ideas and novel aspects, which the group evaluates and chooses accordingly. People searched rather carefully for new ideas in the sessions I observed, for social reasons, or due to the strict time frame and the chosen brief as an explicit space of possibilities. Thus, the situation in itself restricts foresightfulness and especially domain-specific proactivity. Everything is rather "scripted" at the songwriting camps, and that kind of task design may lead to fewer innovations (Sawyer 2012: 235). On the other hand, a setting in which all the actors know their own tasks and the creative process advances in familiar ways could free energy and resources to produce novelty (Rosso 2014: 555). In this sense, many factors, including the situation in itself, function as creative constraints, which may either restrict or support the creative practice.

These processes advanced mainly in the spirit of constant approval. Even though the songwriters sometimes expressed the need to think outside the box and to find novel ways of doing things, they ended up staying inside the box. Different, partly contradictory values emerged in their dialogues: novelty, freshness, similarity, accessibility, singability and the effect of surprise.

The situation at the songwriting camps is specific in many senses. According to one of the songwriters, for example, trends are usually discussed quite thoroughly in the co-writing sessions, whereas I witnessed very few deliberations on music trends. Futures had a more explicit role when the songwriters were anticipating the possible reactions of audiences and gatekeepers. Such anticipation is based on the songwriters' previous experiences and assumptions about preferences in the field.

As suggested earlier, in the context of writing pop songs, foresightfulness may also be manifested in making reasonable instead of radical and risky creative choices. Foresightfulness is shared in the co-writing sessions: the songwriters collectively define which choices will produce desirable results. The space of possibilities is likely to be smaller in these situations than on occasions outside the sessions because of the externally located constraints. It is also possible that the group's future-oriented thinking extends further when the suggested ideas are evaluated in the sessions, whereas individuals are caught in the moment and produce ideas quickly and instinctively without having time to think about the consequences.

6. MAKING CHANGES AND INFLUENCING THE FUTURE

> Musicians make change. Although the rate has varied at different times and places, innovation is perhaps the most important defining feature of popular music. The musician's role is central here. S/he [sic!] produces the new, both through combining the already heard to generate new hybrid forms, but also by appropriating technology. (Toynbee 2000: xii)

Creation is always about change.[43] It is about inventing, or at least attempting to invent, something that has not existed before, regardless of whether the new creation is highly similar to existing creations, or whether it is ground-breaking in relation to earlier works in the domain. Creativity has been defined in dozens of different ways (see e.g., Taylor 1988; Mayer 1999; Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 24), but it is likely that none of these definitions would categorise copying a pop song note by note and bar by bar, and arranging, producing and performing it identically as in an existing song, as creative work.[44] Making a change, be it minor or major, is essential in creativity.

Creativity in any domain commonly involves making small changes, which alter a specific domain slightly but do not change its course (Sternberg 2003: 106). This applies to pop music: according to Toynbee (2000: 35), "the small creative act" is the defining feature of pop music.

Sometimes, however, an individual creator or a group may invent something that has a significant influence on the whole domain. In the domain of mainstream pop music, individual contributions are rarely so dramatic that they could be categorised as what researcher Margaret Boden (2004) calls transformational creativity: something that does not break the rules, but rather changes the rules. Transformational creativity is about creating something that has thus far seemed impossible. The creation of pop music is most commonly executed within certain rules and possibilities. However, unexpected changes sometimes occur. Current

43 In the context of historical creativity rather than psychological creativity (see Boden 2004: 2), although even psychological creativity changes something in the mind of the creator.

44 The conception of creativity is different in Eastern cultures, however, with less emphasis on novelty and originality than in Western cultures (see e.g., Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 36).

trends such as the diminishing role of melodies in pop music and one-word choruses, as mentioned by the songwriters, would probably have been almost unthinkable among creators some decades ago.

Pop-music fashions may kick off unintentionally, or the domain may be altered intentionally. A songwriter who deliberately attempts to create something that could significantly alter the domain of pop music and change the status quo displays an attitude and action that could be characterised as proactivity (cf. Godet 2006: 7; Runco 2007: 98), which I understand as domain-specific in this context. Instead of following or anticipating trends, songwriters may attempt to influence the future of pop music. Of course, small and gradual changes may result in influential changes, but in proactive activity the intent is to influence, to make a change. Being proactive is also an effective way of coping with alternative futures: instead of passively living in insecurity, one could take an active approach and "take over" the future.

If one is to make a difference in a certain domain, one must possess agency. According to sociologist Barry Barnes (2000: 25), "for an individual to possess agency is for her to possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an *active* [original italics] entity constantly intervening in the course of the events ongoing around her." Individual or collective agency is a basic premise in modern futures research and in the prospective approach: the future is not predetermined, it is open, and it can be influenced by individual or collective choices (see e.g., Godet 1982: 295–296; Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9).

Whereas agency is understood in sociology as the individual's capacity to make choices within different structures (e.g., Barnes 2000), in this study the focus is on psychological, experienced agency. I investigate how these songwriters understand and experience their agency, their "agency beliefs", which is one dimension of Ahvenharju et al.'s (2018) model of Futures Consciousness. According to these scholars, in order to be conscious about the future "-- one must also have a sense of being able to influence how the future will unfold" (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9). Although they use belief and sense synonymously, I understand belief as somewhat stronger. In this study, agency beliefs are understood as conceptions that influence actions.

Although future consciousness usually concerns personal futures, or national or world futures in psychology and futures studies, agency beliefs are also relevant in the phenomenon I call domain-specific future consciousness. An adequate level of agency belief is a prerequisite for proactive engagement: to be proactive in relation to pop music, songwriters must believe they possess the agency to influence its future. Agency beliefs are strongly connected to different futures-related attitudes (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9). Agents who believe they have control over

possible futures are also more likely to have an active future-oriented outlook. However, I assume that such a correlation is not straightforward, nor without exceptions. Actors may, for example, believe that they possess the power to affect futures but do not act upon it for various reasons.

This chapter focuses on the songwriters' attempts to make a change, as well as their agency beliefs, motives and attitudes towards making changes. These factors form part of their understanding of the mechanics of change in pop music, and of their own role in the system, which I will compare with the conceptions of some workers in the music industry. In themselves, they explain the variation in the songwriters' foresightfulness.

6.1 Generating novelty under the weight of the past

A day after having observed a session at a songwriting camp I could not stop humming the song my observants had written. "What is that song", asked my then six-year-old daughter. I told her it was a new, unpublished song written by professional songwriters at a songwriting camp. "But I know that melody from somewhere", she replied. I could not argue against her. It sounded like a children's song, and when I heard the chorus melody for the first time at the camp I also thought it was familiar, perhaps even too familiar to be the chorus of a new pop song. However, I was not able to find any specific song that had the same melody, and as the songwriting progressed I forgot about it. As the melody became accompanied by monotone verses and modern production, it suddenly seemed quite fresh.

Newness is not the only desirable attribute of popular music, and the same applies to many other musical domains (see Merker 2006; Barrett 2014: 6). Songwriting is "culturally self-referential" (Bennett 2014: 77), and the sense of the familiar makes pop music accessible to large audiences (Warner 2003: 8). Songwriters strike a balance between these contrasting demands, striving to create something that has an appropriate amount of familiarity, yet is of interest to the audience (Anderton et al. 2013: 48–49).

If altering a domain is understood as adding something new to it, the question arises of how to define what is new. Csikszentmihalyi (2013 [1996]: 29) points out that it is easier to agree what is new in "relatively trivial" domains with clear rules, and he gives rock songs as an example. In his view, the domain is altered by works that influence other creators, and this sets a rather high threshold for creativity and newness (see also Barrett 2014: 6; Bennett 2014: 48).

Bennett (2014: 79) separates two levels of newness or originality in the context of popular music. Primarily, a song must differ adequately from other songs to be considered original in terms of copyright law. Songs on the second level of

newness influence other creators, which is equivalent to altering the domain in Csikszentmihalyi's model.

It is evident that professional songwriters aim to rise above the lower threshold of newness (Bennett 2014: 79), in other words creating a song that is considered original under copyright law. Higher levels of newness and originality are not as easily defined and not as self-evidently aimed at. Bennett's division is rather harsh in that the magnitude of influence in pop music may vary widely. Some creations influence small groups of songwriters, initiating fads, whereas others may have a stronger influence on other songwriters even on the global level.

As noted earlier, the songwriters I interviewed emphasised making small changes, on the understanding that it was what audiences desired. This is one of the main assumptions guiding their work: they are not strongly motivated to invent something completely new and ground-breaking because they anticipate continuity in people's tastes. Knowledge and assumptions about such preferences delimit their space of possibilities, preventing them from creating something novel. They are constrained by their ideas about possible futures, which they perceive as similar to the past and the present. As futurologist Wendell Bell (2003: xii) states: "People often limit their own futures, seldom trying anything new, or different, or better. Closing off many of their options, they condemn themselves to the limitations of the present. What the future will be, then, is partly conditional on people thinking creatively, on their ability to seek out and to make visible present possibilities for the future."

Fellow futurologist Sohail Inayatullah (2008: 7–8) identifies three dimensions that shape possible futures: the pull of the future, the push of the present and the weight of the past. Images of futures pull actors forward, current trends push them in specific directions and the weight of the past is a barrier to change and preferred futures. The possible future space is inside the triangle. Similarly, the space of possibilities in songwriting is framed by knowledge about the past and the present, as well as ideas about alternative futures.

In the context of pop songwriting, the past is 'heavy' in many ways. Music journalist and author Simon Reynolds (2011) writes about the addiction of pop culture to its own past, to nostalgia and recycling, such that the greatest threat to its future may be its own past (ibid.: ix). Sociologist and musicologist Jean Hogarty (2017: 136) sets out her academic take on the same issue, connecting retromania with technology: "In terms of the technological shift, new technologies have apparently managed to breathe new life into older music, making it more difficult for new artists to be heard." Audiences desire similarity and nostalgia, creators create similarity, and record companies may be indifferent to music that is significantly different from earlier popular works in the domain (Laing 1990: 190).

Songwriters attempting to create something similar but different lean heavily on information about the past of the domain. New ideas are built on the previous ideas of other creators, and newness is estimated in relation to an existing body of work in a certain domain. The relationship between creativity and knowledge has attracted the interest of many scholars in the field (see e.g., Weisberg 1999; Sternberg 2003). Most of them agree that knowledge about a domain is a prerequisite for achieving creativity in that specific domain (Gruber 1989: 18; Weisberg 1999: 226; Sternberg 2003: 121; Csikszentmihalyi 2013 (1996]: 90). According to the over-simplified "ten-year-rule" (see e.g., Weisberg 1999: 230), one should study a specific domain for at least ten years to acquire sufficient expertise to make changes in the first place. Perhaps this cannot be taken literally in the case of pop songwriting – unless one counts all one's years as a listener. The songwriters began to study the domain at an early age when they started listening to music.

On the other hand, some scholars suggest that too deep knowledge may also be a hindrance to creativity (Weisberg 1999: 226; Sternberg 2003: 121–122). As one of the trackers, who studied musicology and music theory, explains:

> My challenge is that I know music perhaps too well. Like music theory too. And then I listen a lot to old music and new music, but kind of, as I am aware of chord progressions and so, melodies and how to build them and so, then it sometimes has also been a burden as a songwriter, that it is difficult to cut loose from those frames. (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

It has been suggested that creators must be able to go beyond their knowledge to create something completely novel (Weisberg 1999: 228). The songwriter quoted above struggles with the challenge of breaking away from knowledge he has acquired. He also admits that it is difficult to surprise him with creative ideas, although he is pleased when someone does so. On occasions during the songwriting session I observed that he shouted "Yeah! That's modern!", and in the feedback interview he thought that his reactions were possibly related to situations in which some of his colleagues managed to invent something he would not have invented himself, which surprised him on a musical level.

For songwriters, it is not merely about wanting to create something novel, it is also about being able to invent something novel, which may become increasingly difficult as knowledge advances. Knowledge about conventions facilitates creativity, but at the same time it complicates the search for novelty in that it is difficult to break conventions (Negus & Pickering 2004: 68–69).

The ability to realise novel ideas also depends on skills. One of the songwriters talked about it as an attribute some people have and others do not: "There always have been, and always will be people who have a very different way to create stuff,

and they invent new things. And there are more of them all the time." (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

Many scholars argue against the definition of creativity as an inherent attribute. Proponents of the confluence approach suggest that creativity and significant innovation come into existence when several components conflate, such as motivation, skills, knowledge and the environment (see e.g., Csikszentmihalyi 1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]; Amabile 1983; Sternberg & Lubart 1999). According to Sternberg (2003: 95), creativity is based on decisions: the decision to "generate new ideas, analyse these ideas, and sell the ideas to others". The songwriter mentioned above undoubtedly considered himself creative – otherwise he probably would not work as a songwriter – but he seemed to believe that some people are inherently more creative than others.

In comparison to knowledge, is it possible that skills might be too developed to produce novelty? One might assume that routinisation would be a death knell for creativity, but according to cognitive psychologist Robert Weisberg (1999: 247), developing a routine and acquiring automatised skills may clear enough space in which to develop new ideas: "[W]hen a skill becomes automatic, one can then allocate capacity to production of novelty. One does not have to think about how to express one's ideas, one can just do it as the ideas become available".

Some songwriters talked about creating songs as being rather routine, not requiring too much effort. One of the topliners told me that he practised songwriting by giving himself tasks to write certain kinds of songs. Sometimes this 'training' was successful, such as when he wrote songs that ended up being recorded and released by Belgian DJ Lost Frequencies ("All or Nothing" 2016; "In Too Deep" 2016).

> I just decided to write a song. I just took a title, and a hook, and then, it's just a song. I don't try to make a hit or the greatest art in the world; instead, I just try to create something. And that's how, often, 'cause then you don't have any pressure, then you dare to be brave and inventive. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

This songwriter sometimes routinely writes songs in "as cold and technical a manner as possible", and he emphasises the need for routine in co-writing sessions. Undoubtedly this also helps when one is writing songs to specific briefs: songwriters with technical song-writing skills are able to concentrate more on fulfilling the specific wishes expressed in the briefs.

In the context of contemporary songwriting, the past is often present in the form of reference songs included in the briefs. Songwriters are advised, explicitly or implicitly, to produce something similar to one of the reference songs, which may also influence the creative process non-consciously. The reference songs played in the briefing sessions probably inspired the songwriters without their being aware of it.

Listening to reference songs may hinder the creation of something novel. Studies on recently activated knowledge have shown that if people are given examples, they come up with less innovative creations or solutions to problems than they would otherwise – even if they were explicitly asked to create something different (see e.g., Ward et al. 1999: 198–200). Listening to reference songs helps songwriters to create something similar, but it may also make it more difficult for them to produce something different, original and novel.

Thus, the past constrains creative and future-oriented thinking among songwriters in various ways: on the domain level as the anticipation of futures that are similar to the past, and on the individual level as overly deep knowledge, past experiences, and excessively routinised or inadequate skills.

Futurologists connect past and future consciousness: remembering and understanding the past also helps in anticipating futures (Lombardo 2006: 28). However, just as creating novelty requires going beyond knowledge, future consciousness extends beyond the memory and the past (ibid.: 29). Agents should not remain stuck in the past.

6.2 Making influential changes

Although the vast majority of pop songs alter the domain only slightly, and most changes in pop music result from several simultaneous and parallel changes (Toynbee 2003: 43), individual songwriters may occasionally create something that will initiate new trends. Moreover, the music industry may, at times, demand more influential creativity.

Songwriters who deliberately attempt to create something that could initiate a trend act proactively. My focus in this sub-chapter is on the proactive attitude (including action) and thinking of these songwriters, and on identifying the related motives, values and beliefs. I approached this matter in the interviews by asking the songwriters if they had attempted to create something new and unprecedented that might evolve into a music trend, and whether they thought it was important to create something completely novel.

Most of the interviewees did not believe strongly in their power to influence trends in Western pop music. One of the trackers referred to a brief that had been around some years earlier, according to which representatives of R'n'B artist Beyoncé were looking for songs "that will change the direction of pop music" (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). He said that the brief had become a general joke among Finnish songwriters. Why was it considered a joke? It is likely that the person or the group who compiled this brief was completely serious. Beyoncé is an influential artist, whose career is followed by millions around the globe, and teams

of songwriters create the material she performs. Why could it not be a team of Finnish songwriters?

Two of the interviewees explicitly said that it was very difficult or even impossible to create worldwide trends from Finland. According to the tracker who mentioned the Beyoncé brief:

> [...] it is maybe a bit like fighting against windmills, because like Mikko Tamminen from Finland is not able to define pop music anew [laughter]. No, those trends arise from somewhere else, like... and especially in Finland I believe a method that works better is that you come up with... Or like... Yeah, you may make something fresh, but it always has to have something, something familiar. Like, if you begin making something very peculiar here and to these, for example European markets, that won't... you won't be able to survive financially. You may gain some respect in some certain circles but [...] I just somehow have seen during the years that it is so hard, and practically impossible for us to invent something that would... (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

This tracker does not believe he has the power to influence global trends in pop music. He refers to himself both as an individual and as a member of a larger group, Finnish songwriters. In using the word "us" he states that it is not only him individually, and that a larger group of people face a similar challenge, which he describes as "hard, and practically impossible". However, he does not exemplify why working in Finland makes it more difficult to influence global trends, merely referring to his own years of experience in writing songs. This is an example of a conception that is based on experience (see Häkkinen 1996: 23).

In addition to having the ability to invent something novel, one must have access to the domain in order to contribute to it (Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]: 53). Some domains are easier to access, others are more exclusive. Popular music could be considered a domain that is rather easy to access (see e.g., Toynbee 2000: 40–41). It has even been argued that recent changes in the music industry and music distribution have made it possible in practice for almost anyone to contribute to the domain of global pop music (Wikström 2009: 156; Sawyer 2012: 6–7; Taylor 2016: 121). People create pop songs on their computers in their bedrooms and distribute them through social media. Sometimes these creations become big hits. The songwriters I interviewed also acknowledged this possibility, although most of them did not express a strong belief in their potential to bring about change on the global or Western pop-music scene.

Although in the view of many scholars the power of gatekeepers in the music industry has diminished (Wikström 2009; Frith 2011b: 32), they still have a central role in the songwriting industry. Songs commonly have to be approved by several people before the artist hears them. The people I interviewed and observed have

written songs for Finnish, European, American and Asian markets. They have acquired access to these domains mainly by networking with other agents in the music industry, including publishers, A&R executives and other songwriters. However, there is a long chain of gatekeepers to be persuaded before their creations reach the ears of artists such as Beyoncé.

In his comment above, the songwriter looks at this question from the perspective of a professional songwriter: he has to earn his living by writing songs, and it would be too risky financially to write something "very peculiar", something the audience might not be ready to accept. He emphasises, once again, the importance of creating something familiar [for listeners] in pop music. Connecting professionalism and obeying certain rules is in line with Bennett's (2012: 152) notion: beginner songwriters are more eager to break the rules, whereas professionals are satisfied with completing the task according to certain conventions and merely making small changes. On the other hand, according to psychologist Robert W. Weisberg (1999: 241), creating works within existing rules is a necessary step to making significant innovations. He uses the Beatles as an example, distinguishing three different stages in their career: first they relied on the work of other creators, then they created their own songs within the existing rules, and finally they broke the rules and made significant innovations.

As the tracker's comment demonstrates, assumed audience expectations – the desire to hear something familiar – guide the work of these songwriters. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2013 [1996]: 47), knowledge of recipient expectations is essential to creative work: "-- the person must learn the rules and the content of the domain, as well as the criteria of selection, the preferences of the field." Songwriters could, of course, choose to act differently: they could disregard their assumptions of audience expectations and begin creating something "peculiar", although it would be risky financially and career-wise.

Risk-taking is inherent both in creativity and in future consciousness. According to Lombardo (2006: 25), "If the future is to a degree uncertain, to open one's mind toward the future, acknowledging the uncertainties, and yet set goals, plan, and act, involves realistic risk and consequently courage -- But, of course, where there is the possibility of failure, there is also the possibility of growth and success."

In the case of writing pop songs, taking risks could entail losing one's reputation. Breaking conventions is risky because there is always the possibility of failure and of being misunderstood and rejected (Negus 1999: 182; Tschmuck 2006: 202; Cohendet et al. 2009: 719). On the other hand, only by breaking the rules it is possible to produce something novel and become acknowledged as a creator. The tracker was clearly aware of this possibility, stating that "you may gain some respect in some specific circles" (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). However, for him the

risks he identified carried more weight than such motivations. He thus justified not attempting to make significant changes on two grounds: because it was not possible for him or other Finns, and because it was not reasonable.

These considerations reflect the experienced autonomy of songwriters and the freedom of choice in their creative work. In theory, they work autonomously and are free to create whatever they like, as their customers do not supervise the creative process (Toynbee 2003: 39–40). However, in practice there are several factors they need to take into account in their creative choices, one of which is the appropriate amount of novelty (Bennett 2014: 115). Various levels of future consciousness may also intertwine. They probably anticipate working as songwriters in their preferred personal and professional futures, and being known as reliable and professional co-workers, which they would not wish to jeopardise by pursuing something that might be desirable musically "in some specific circles". However, this 'something' may be less secure in relation to audience expectations and the industry. While basing their decisions on what is reasonable with regard to their professional futures, songwriters put less emphasis on possible or preferred musical futures: the future that seems probable is a safer choice (cf. Negus 1999: 182).

Another songwriter said that it was very difficult to embark on changing trends from Finland because trends are so global (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014). Moreover: "It is not important for me to be like a pioneer, so that my creations would be appreciated only after I died". He described his work as "industrial design rather than grand art", quoting his Finnish songwriter colleague Risto Asikainen (e.g., Rinta-Tassi 2011). In this statement he associates himself with creative labourers rather than influential authors. This low motivation to make influential changes emerged especially in the narratives of older songwriters, whereas some of the younger ones displayed a more prospective attitude. This is in line with Green's (2002: 55) notion that musicians with more experience more typically see themselves as craftspeople, whereas younger ones feel more inspired, intuitive and autonomous with regard to their own creativity.

The songwriter quoted above emphasises the difficulty or impossibility of making global changes, and he has little motivation to embark upon such a venture. He also refers to timing in the introduction of novelty: he new about many cases when international songwriters made a "really ground-breaking sound", but the world was not ready for them: such music came into fashion twenty years later.

Researcher Robert J. Sternberg (2003: 102) refers to such creativity as "advance forward incrementation", which is one of the eight types of creative contribution in his propulsion model. Contributions such as these advance the domain in the direction in which it is already going, but it does so before other creators or recipients are ready for the change. It is difficult in such cases to know whether the

creators who were ahead of their time influenced the direction in which the domain eventually moved, or whether the domain would have moved there in any case. Were these creators perhaps able to foresee future directions?

One of the topliners reflected on one of his songwriting collaborations, which had failed possibly because those in the tracker–topliner team were too forward-looking:

> [...] we fumbled for many years, because we were too experimental, especially here in Finland, we made a sound that was too bizarre, kinda, if you are a year or two ahead of trends, then kinda, when you are able to analyse what out there in the rest of the world, what kind of music you could do that would be trendy, and then try to do it in Finland, then you are too ahead, because it will change so slowly when it arrives to Finland. You can't be too cool either. (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017)

The reference here is to an experience that could be categorised as advance forward incrementation: introducing ideas to the domain too early. In remarking that he and his colleague were ahead of their time, this topliner implies that these trends emerged later. Embedded in his talk are both pre-active and proactive actions. He and his colleague had tried to anticipate what might be trendy "out there", and perhaps succeeded in being the first to bring those trends to Finland. They took a risk and failed to foresee what Finnish audiences and gatekeepers would be ready to accept. People did not understand their music because the elements they used were not yet trendy in Finland. This experience was also part of his learning process as a songwriter – it changed his views on the dynamics of music trends in Finland and "the rest of the world".

A useful skill in songwriting is to recognise the appropriate amount of novelty in a creation (Bennett 2014: 115). This could also be seen as a restriction on creativity and proactivity: songwriters are anxious not to create anything too peculiar, anything too novel. This constraint is particularly relevant in the context of creating mainstream popular music as well as for professional songwriters, as noted earlier. However, some Finnish underground rap artists have admitted to avoiding making "too weird" sounds because of their audience's assumed listening habits (Rantakallio 2019: 272–273).

According to the most common definitions (see e.g., Amabile 1983: 359; Gruber 1989: 14; Mayer 1999: 449–450; Sawyer 2012: 8), creativity is about producing something that is considered new or original, but also appropriate, useful or valuable among a specific social group. My analysis shows that these songwriters constantly considered the appropriateness, value and 'useability' of their songs, even more than originality and novelty (cf. Meier 2017: 121). On the other hand, as Sawyer (2012: 9) points out, these common definitions exclude creations that are

introduced ahead of their time, which although they might be considered novel by the recipients, they are not considered appropriate, useful or valuable at the time they are introduced. Thus, appropriateness and useability may well have more value than novelty and originality in pop songwriting, which ties in with Gordon et al.'s (2019: 20) ideas about future-fitness: creators must consider how well their solutions and ideas will work in futures.

According to Sternberg & Lubart's (1996) investment theory of creativity, on the other hand, taking risks is exactly what creative people do. They build on ideas that are not well-known or even popular, but in which they see growth potential. They may confront a lot of opposition and even contempt along the way, but in the end they "sell their ideas high", before moving on to the next creative venture. Although Sternberg & Lubart do not use terms or theories from futurology, I contend that the ability to see growth potential is related to heightened domain-specific future consciousness and the ability to spot futures-oriented trends and weak signals.

Sternberg (2003: 121) refers to the ability to sell ideas as a skill related to creativity, "a practical aspect of creative thinking". This is something that was not apparent in the experiences of the two songwriters quoted above. They searched for creative ideas in anticipated possible futures, but they were not able to sell these ideas to the gatekeepers or the audience because they were, in their words, "too experimental", "too cool".

Exploiting the opportunity to sell ideas is not merely a skill, it is also related to the creator's position in the domain. In this sense, social networks play a major role when innovations are introduced (Noyes et al. 2012). Elsewhere in the interview the topliner expressed feelings of frustration about not yet being in a position to have his ideas taken as seriously as those of more widely acknowledged songwriters, even if his ideas were better. As Godet (1982: 296) states, the future does not belong to everyone to the same extent: some actors have more power and influence than others.

Nevertheless, the songwriter who failed to bring new trends to Finland believed in his ability to influence music in the future: it was not merely a possibility, it was also his "job", a duty. He said, for example, that it was his job as a songwriter to think not only about what would be a certain artist's next move, but also about what it could be. This comment aptly encapsulates the prospective approach, which combines pre-active and proactive views: "Only the *prospective* [original italics] approach with a preactive and proactive attitude focuses on the question 'what could happen?'" (Godet 2006: 6). The interviewee included attempting to foresee, but also to influence artists' careers among his duties, using American singer Katy Perry as an example: a songwriter who wants

to pitch a song to Katy Perry should find out what she has released earlier and consider what could be her next move. As he saw it, being proactive is not so much about creating new music trends, and more about affecting the careers of individual artists.

This songwriter was one of the younger respondents. Interestingly, another one of the younger songwriters I interviewed had a stronger belief in her chances of influencing international pop music than the older ones. When I asked her if she thought she had the power to influence the international pop-music scene she replied that she definitely believed she did. She would need to be in the right team, to make a song that would be special in some way, to pitch it to the right artist – and "the stars would need to be in the right position". Thus she did not believe that it would happen easily – and many lucky coincidences would help – but unlike some of the other songwriters, she thought it was possible. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

The age difference between the oldest and the youngest songwriters in this study is about 15 years. That may not seem a lot, but the younger informants entered the songwriting business in an era when "song export" was an established aspect of music export in Finland. This may explain their higher motivation and stronger agency beliefs with regard to making influential changes.

One of the trackers gave an example of another kind of timing problem, when his attempt to be a pioneer failed because of slowness in the music industry (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). He worked with Finnish artist Vilma Alina, and they wrote a song, "Hullut asuu Kallios" (2016), which they hoped would be the first drum'n'bass influenced pop song sung in Finnish. It was ready to be released, but the record company wanted to delay the release for unspecified reasons. Meanwhile another band, Haloo Helsinki, released "Beibi" (2014), which had strong drum'n'bass influences. The almost-simultaneous creation of these two songs was probably not a total coincidence. The tracker said he had been influenced by the drum'n'bass trend in the UK, and he thought that Haloo Helsinki's songwriters probably listened to same British bands and were also influenced by them. This is another example of collective taste among songwriters, which often explains similarities that may seem coincidental.

6.3 Agency beliefs in relation to different markets

Perhaps not surprisingly, the songwriters clearly differed in how they perceived their power to influence the local and global domains. They felt they had easier access to the local than to the global domain (which they probably did). Many of them sang their own songs in Finland and thus had a rather direct gateway in terms of releasing and performing their creations in front of an audience. They were able

to introduce their songwriting ideas in their home country in pursuance of their own artistic careers. One of them told me, for example, that he had attempted to create a new musical genre, Finnish "country-rap" as his artist persona Stig, who sings in Finnish (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014). He thought he had perhaps succeeded in attracting some followers but he had not initiated a nation-wide phenomenon.

One of the topliners, who has co-written many songs for Asian markets, felt particularly powerless in terms of contributing to the Mandarin culture. He talked about current pop-music trends in Asia in the interview, and when I asked him if he thought it was relevant to try to foresee music trends or to influence them, he gave me a rather long-winded reply.

> Hmm. I don't see that as a songwriter I would be by any means in a position where I could take it [pop music] anywhere [...] to be honest; I don't see that I could, as an individual actor influence or direct any culture. If you think like Chi..., like Mandarin China, I also have songs published there, like 'mandopop', which is in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, there's like 1.1 billion people using that language, and using the writing system which is, I guess like 2,000 years old, or something, and they have like thousands of signs, so I don't simply have any contentual knowhow, like, kind of the image that I should like, like if I came up with like, you, know, nuclear reactor or gunpowder, like then I could say that I have some influence there but I claim that as an agent, in order to make any career there, I need to kind of wear that culture as much as possible. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

I assumed that, even when referring to major inventions such as nuclear power and gunpowder, he was still talking about change in the domain of pop music. He mentioned three different factors that made it practically impossible to affect Mandarin culture: his position as a songwriter, his contentual knowhow and the scope of the culture. He needed to "wear that culture as much as possible", by which he probably meant that he needed to know the rules with regard to making pop music in that culture and should not attempt to make any radical changes. This is in line with the argument put forward by many scholars that knowledge of the domain must be deep if one wishes to break or change the rules, to create something truly original that might have a strong influence in it (Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]; McIntyre 2007: 1).

He continued, advising against approaching any Asian culture with an egocentric attitude. Then he started to talk about the many current music trends in Japan and the political history of the country, as a result of which, according to him, Japanese music culture was "a bit like fusion or hybrid" (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018). He attributed the restriction in his agency and ability to foresee or influence the futures of pop music in Japan to the plurality of the culture, arising from the country's political history.

In conclusion, he insisted that everything he had said was only his view and might not have anything to do with the reality. Nevertheless, I think such beliefs, should be expressed whether or not they are accurate, because they influence the creative work of these songwriters. If songwriters believe they need to "wear the culture" of those for whom they are writing their songs, and that they do not possess the agency to make significant musical changes in a particular market area, it is logical that they focus on making small changes and creating something rather similar to what already exists. Agency beliefs directly influence actions.

This songwriter also observed that the idea of originality was not as relevant in Asian as it is in Western cultures, a notion that is also supported in the literature on creativity (Malmelin & Poutanen 2017: 36), and explains his low motivation to seek newness when writing songs for that market area.

> The idea of originality, that is an idea born in Western countries, and it is not necessarily a part of aesthetics there, in the sense that you should create anything original. Like, in my opinion, if you think about original in Asia... There it is more about replica and certain kind of imitation of previous phenomena. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

According to Lombardo (2009: 92; 2011; 2017: 649–650), holistic thinking and the ability to understand the big picture are essential for creativity and for future consciousness, which is connected to past consciousness. This topliner's lengthy responses are intriguing examples of trains of thought, initiated by the question of whether he attempted to anticipate future trends of pop music in Asia. He had clearly developed an understanding of his own agency and of musical developments in this specific market area based on his knowledge about the country's history and culture.

Another songwriter, who also focused on Asian markets, told me that she liked creating songs for the Asian market because she was allowed to make more experimental and "crazy stuff", and that the people are not afraid of oddness, "on the contrary, the odder the better". Creating something "magically novel" was of no intrinsic value to her, but of course she would like to invent something directional, and it was always "cool" if a songwriter could create something that would make people's chairs "go around" in record companies. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

This comment, again, accentuates the importance of gatekeepers in song export and the songwriting business. The first people this songwriter hoped to impress with her creative ideas were those working in the record companies: only by selling her ideas to them would they reach the audience.

One possible explanation of the rather low level of agency beliefs among Finnish songwriters in relation to making changes in global pop-music markets

lies in the following comment, although the tracker does not talk explicitly about creating music trends.

> [...] and it has also slowed down the development of music culture, that from here, like no big pop star has ever put forth from here. Cause here people don't dare to be, or think big, or maybe even dream. But it is very safe to dig American and even Swedish stars because they come from somewhere else, but good Lord if someone, well, anyone, like Lady Gaga or someone like, good Lord if she came from Finland, everyone would be like: go home and be ashamed of yourself, please don't act like that! (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015)

The implication is that Finns find it difficult to accept someone who dares to think differently, to "think big". It is easier to accept or even like "different" artists if they do not touch us directly. According to him, this typical Finnish mind-set is one factor explaining the lack of internationally known "big" Finnish pop stars.

6.4 Who possesses the power?

According to Michel Godet (1982: 296), the future does not belong to everyone to the same extent: some actors have more influential power than others. One reason behind the low agency beliefs among the Finnish songwriters I interviewed could be that they believed someone else had more power to make changes than they had. Several agents were mentioned in the interviews as possible initiators of change, including other songwriters, artists, audiences and representatives of the music industry. On the other hand, some of them had rather deterministic views on how pop music changes, without identifying specific agents who bring such changes about.

I elaborate on these views in this sub-chapter, and compare them with the views of a few workers in the music industry. Although the focus of my research is on songwriters as opposed to other actors in the songwriting business, I believe it would be beneficial to find out how songwriters perceive these other agents and their role in creating music trends. These perceptions – whether they are accurate or not – explain why songwriters choose to act or not to act in a certain way. For example, if they believe that only record companies have the power to initiate trends, it is quite likely that they make no efforts to create trends themselves. These beliefs also have a role in possible pre-active actions in terms of narrowing the focus when spotting upcoming phenomena.

The songwriters mentioned Finnishness, or working in Finland, as an obstacle in terms of influencing the domain of pop music on the global level, thereby implying that the songwriters who have the power are not Finnish. They specifically

mentioned North America, the United Kingdom and Sweden as forerunner countries with influential songwriters. Some of them also referred to Los Angeles as a place where new styles are created and move forward.

Some places may indeed become creative hubs, and the emergence of many musical genres and trends can be traced back to specific cities. Patrick Cohendet et al. (2009: 709), a scholar in the field of innovation, even suggests that creativity "should be considered above all as a geographically localized process". Soul music is believed to have originated in Detroit, and rap music in New York, for example (Cohendet et al. 2009). Stockholm may not be the birthplace of pop, but Swedish songwriters have had a strong presence in global pop music and electronic dance music (Björnberg & Bossius 2017; Bossius 2017).

It is interesting to compare the position of Finnish and Swedish songwriters because of the geographical proximity of the two countries. Half of the songwriters I interviewed mentioned Swedish songwriters or producers such as Max Martin (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014; Kaskinen, Nov 11, 2015; Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017; Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019), as having had a great influence on Western pop music (see e.g., Bossius 2017; Michelsen 2017: 217–219). No one has been able to explain why Swedish songwriters in particular managed to break into the big markets, although some suggestions have been made. As Musicologist Thomas Bossius (2017: 146–149) points out in his history of Swedish electronic dance music, the emphasis in the media is on the contribution of the creative workers rather than the publishers and others in the music industry. These narratives are based mainly on stories told by people who have been involved in the phenomenon. If there is truth in them, the power would indeed be in the hands of songwriters and producers as opposed to gatekeepers.

> What we find in these stories, these discourses, of Swedish EDM and its success are not stories about heavy support by big and economically strong record companies, not about smart and ruthless managers and/or record company executives, and also not about eccentric superstars. Instead we find stories about humble, unobtrusive, hard-working, talented, skilled, and creative young enthusiasts who in friendly but competitive milieus are making innovative high-quality electronic dance music. Because it's fun, because they love it, and because they see a need for it among themselves and their fellow DJs. (Bossius 2017: 146)

These views emphasise the role of the musical content, enthusiasm, motivation and good spirits among music-makers rather than the structures of the music industry. According to Robert Burnett and Patrik Wikström (2006: 577), "the strength of the Swedish music industry rests on the creative talent of Swedish composers, performers and lyricists allied to the business skills of music companies and

entrepreneurs". Dominic Power and Daniel Hallencreuz (2002: 1837–1838) emphasise the ability of Swedish artists and music makers to create "Anglo-American music that is often better than the `real thing'". All of these scholars thus highlight the creative talent and musical content. Moreover, most of the songwriters I interviewed who mentioned Max Martin, referred to his abilities as a songwriter and even as someone with the ability to know what people will want next. The implication is that such agency is about individual abilities and has nothing to do with nationality or location.

Katariina Sorsa, Export Manager of Music Finland also referred to the low agency beliefs of Finnish songwriters (Feb 19, 2018). While Music Finland was working on a future vision for Finnish songwriters and publishers with its collaborators (Music Finland 2017a) she noticed during a workshop held in Stockholm that Finnish attitudes towards potential international success differed very much from the attitudes of their Swedish colleagues. It seemed to her that Finnish songwriters did not consider "the doors as open as they actually already are".

In the view of one of my respondents, better-established songwriters have stronger agency in the domain. In terms of experience, he is "not yet in a position in which his ideas would be accepted in the same manner as some more famous creator's, even if my ideas were a lot better" (Ehnström, Jun 27, 2017). Another songwriter was of the view that catching international trends and bringing them to Finland was a job for younger songwriters operating "below the mainstream", rather than for these professional songwriters who created mainstream pop songs (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015).

In light of these opposing views, it may be exactly the kind of professional songwriters I interviewed and observed for this study who are less likely to take big risks in songwriting by attempting to create something completely novel. They are not yet in a position to suggest wild and strange ideas and to be considered geniuses, but they are professionals who regularly have their songs performed and released, and their income depends on these cuts.

One songwriter reflected on his ability and willingness to provoke changes in relation to his role as a songwriter. As shown in previous chapters, the opinion among songwriters is that changes in musical parameters related more closely to the work of trackers than to the work of topliners. However, according to the tracker quoted below, in the Finnish context it is rather the lyricist's task to look for something new and "cool".

> -- especially in Finnish markets [songs sung in Finnish], looking for the new, I mean like new and cool, is maybe more on the lyrics side. It is more like on lyricists' shoulders. It is more important that you find something ne... like something to say

> that touches people somehow. Like. Now it sounds like I'm thinking, like, always removing the responsibility to someone else, but it is so very important, especially in music sung in Finnish in Finland that... [...] like how you could invent something new content-wise, like what could touch people when the world is changing so fast and. I think that would be a more reasonable way to think and more interesting, and probably also more useful way to embark... (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015)

This tracker based his argument on what he thought was reasonable in the context of his work. He was somewhat embarrassed to "remove the responsibility" to someone else but he based his arguments on what was reasonable, important and useful in this cultural context. Domestic popular music has always enjoyed great success in Finland. Audiences hear a lot of music sung in Finnish, which has led to the writing of ambitious and versatile lyrics. In fact, this may be one reason why some songwriters emphasise the importance of keeping lyrics up to date.

Some of my respondents reflected on the role of artists in initiating music trends. Artists who choose which songs to perform may become forerunners in music trends and fashions, and also initiate phenomena in songwriting. Artists are mediators of the work and ideas of songwriters. One of them told me that they needed an internationally successful Finnish artist to create trends that could cross the borders of Finland. This is something that those engaged in the export of Finnish songs have also acknowledged. The song-export strategy published by Music Finland (2017a), and compiled with songwriters and publishers purports to invest in Finnish artists in order to increase the export of Finnish songs. One of the aims listed is to make the "Suomi Sound" into "the next big thing in pop music" on an international level.

Perhaps this explains why these songwriters have a more proactive attitude when they write songs for Finnish markets. When they are able to perform their creations themselves they do not need to introduce their ideas to artists via publishers and A&R executives. The chain of gatekeepers is shorter in these cases.

Some of the songwriters mentioned the role of the audience, or consumer, in the emergence and diffusion of music trends.

> It is a bit difficult to embark on changing trends from Finland, they are so worldwide after all. Youngsters in Finland listen pretty much to the same music than American youngsters do, like. So it's like... And they follow those trends like, like we music makers do, so it's a bit difficult to embark from here like... (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

This songwriter based his argument on the audience's active role in setting music trends. He found it difficult to have a head start in relation to [Finnish] consumers, because they have the same channels as songwriters for spotting the latest international trends. He also said that radio gatekeepers no longer had the power

to decide what would become popular. According to him, young people choose "cool things" from the Internet – it has become a "buyers' market" (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014). For that reason, it has become more difficult to foresee and influence the futures of pop music. This, according to him, has also influenced how record companies operate.

> The phenomena that are really novel, in my experience, they do not emerge from the songwriter–record company–publisher triangle. The really novel stuff comes from somewhere else. But for those to have access to be heard by the audience, that is because of the changes in record companies and the music business. On the Internet you can succeed without a record company and now the record companies are beginning to realise it and they do not attempt to push by force, rather they begin following. I find it very good that it is not the old men there saying what kind of music should be made. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

The songwriter is pleased that the record companies have become followers rather than initiators of new trends. The changing role of the audience has been discussed in depth in studies focused on the music industry and in the literature on creativity (e.g., Wikström 2009; Rojek 2011: 5; Burnard 2012: 14–17; Sawyer 2012: 6–7; Anderton et al. 2013: 12; Bennett 2014: 21; Vogel 2014; Taylor 2016: 121; Steininger & Gatzemeier 2018). Audiences may influence and enforce growing trends with their listening choices: as one of the respondents told me, "they vote by listening a lot or not listening at all" (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). They may also influence the success of different songs (Steininger & Gatzemeier 2018: 171), and songwriters can easily follow the most frequently played songs via streaming services. This knowledge, again, influences their creative decisions, and through this the domain of pop music.

One of the songwriters suggested that this had also brought about a change in what the industry demanded of songwriters. He had noticed that less ground-breaking novelty was demanded in the briefs: The A&Rs ask for "basic stuff, because they probably have thought that they cannot really... youngsters choose novelties from YouTube, Spotify and like... regardless of what the big record companies offer." (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

This observation accords with Wikström's (2009: 5–6) account of the shift from control to connectivity in the music industry. Whereas music corporations used to exercise control over audiences, consumers nowadays are networked, resulting in a loss of control over information flow. Consumers share information about the music they listen to, and thereby influence what others listen to and what becomes popular. This is also why attempts to predict success based purely on musical features easily fail: they do not take into account the relationship between the consumer and the music (Steininger & Gatzemeier 2018: 168).

What the songwriters failed to mention was that audiences are strongly influenced by streaming services. Various curated playlists have a major influence on what people listen to. It is certainly possible to "vote" by skipping specific tracks, although in the free version of Spotify, for example, the number of skips is limited. Playlists curated mainly by streaming services always foist the next song on the listener, hence the curators have become gatekeepers of the music industry in a new form.[45] In the context of the entertainment industry, scholar Harold L. Vogel (2014: 269) comments on how these services are controlled: instead of people collecting music as it used to be, these platforms collect people.

Some of the songwriters I interviewed drew attention to certain changes in consumer expectations. One of the topliners said it was becoming more and more difficult to hold the attention of listeners even for three and a half minutes. He had heard rumours that some radio stations were planning to air only 30-second sections of songs. It is acknowledged as characteristic of pop music that the listener's attention must be captured within the first few seconds (Warner 2003: 7).

As audience behaviour and preferences change, creators need to adapt and react. This topliner's worry has recently been realised in a sense in the popular Chinese application TikTok: users share 15-second sections of songs, to which they have made their own videos.

Another way in which audiences may influence the domain is by creating songs themselves. Such "amateur creativity" (Wikström 2009: 7–8, 170; Burnard 2012: 17) may sometimes produce surprising hits, as well as indirectly influencing trends and consumer taste. Digital technology has enabled passive consumers to become active participants in creation (Rojek 2011: 5; Anderton et al. 2013: 12). Architect and researcher Wojciech Bonenberg (2015) discusses this in the context of architecture, suggesting that the ideas of non-professional architects distributed via the Internet shape the taste of young generations, who will be the consumers of real architecture in the future. He also describes virtual reality as being ahead in trends and fashions. It may well be that the non-professional songwriters, who are also audience members, are freer to invent new things because they are not constrained by industry pressure or livelihood issues. Moreover, they do not possess as much pop-music-related knowledge as professional songwriters: too much knowledge may be a barrier to creativity (Sternberg 2003: 121–122).

45 In January 2021, Spotify even announced that they had been developing technology to monitor the speech of users in order to recognise their emotional state, for example, and to suggest music based on it (Stassen 2021). Musicians and human-rights organisations have strongly protested against the use of such technology (Thubron 2021).

The influence of audiences on the creative process is rather indirect in most cases. Performing artists may have a more direct relationship with their fans, and the fans may even contribute directly to the creative process (see e.g., Wikström 2009: 176). Songwriters, in turn, construct their ideas of what the audience wants based mainly on assumptions. Of course, as one of them said, today's music industry has the means to survey audience taste in detail: clicks on Spotify or YouTube give an enormous amount of information about audience preferences (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). These changes in music consumption channels have probably reinforced the audience's influence on creativity and change in popular music. The agency of listeners is considerable in this specific domain (Bennett 2014: 247): "The average listener who only listens and therefore can critique music has as equal and valid presence within the field as any other agent" (Taylor 2017: 7).

On the other hand, as already stated, songwriters are also audience members. Most of them listen to pop music for enjoyment as well, thus they are encultured to the domain in a similar way as the rest of the audience. They have a solid basis on which to estimate their creations from the audience's perspective, a task that, according to Toynbee (2003: 42), is an essential part of their work: "we might say that the main role of the musician is as primary listener, someone who listens ahead".

Two of the songwriters pointed out that, in their opinion, record companies and music publishers still had the prime power to create, choose, maintain and foster phenomena and fashions in pop music (Oiva, Apr 27, 2014; Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). This was not a negative thing for them, and it was natural for the business. People working in record companies are able to recognise potential and the right contacts to diffuse music. The songwriters create the content, and the industry makes the choices.

> A&R and record companies create phenomena [...] as songwriters we create meta content, like the fuel, we are the bustling fellows who spread seeds in the forest, like some weird, good elves and then they cultivate it, I mean these record companies and A&R, they decide. (Oiva, Apr 27, 2018)

He further points out that phenomena are "machinated" to the mainstream, and the songwriter's task is therefore to be humble and create songs. Another songwriter said, with a twinkle in his eye, that he is was slave to the Finnish music business (Wirtanen, Oct 19, 2015). In making these kinds of statements, the songwriters diminish their own agency in the industry and position themselves as creative labourers rather than influencers. In any case, as one of them claimed, if the product (the song) is good enough songwriters do not need record companies, because anyone is able to distribute their music via the Internet (Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015).

Interestingly, an A&R executive in Sony Music Finland supports this contradictory view in claiming that innovations emerge from the creative side, and it is not at the core of his job in A&R to design and initiate trends. However, during the interview he recalled that he had a role in a trend that grew rather strongly in Finland about a decade earlier. With his colleagues he had initiated a boom in ambitious children's pop music, which resulted in a series of records known as "Ipanapa" (2007–), released under the "Ipanapa Records" label. Famous Finnish pop musicians and artists composed and performed songs for children for these albums. "We began consciously and blatantly using our media relations and talking about the issue with great passion [...] for a while then children's music was trendy." (Kuoppamäki, Feb 28, 2018)

However, even if he used the words "blatantly" and "consciously", he implied that, at the time, it was not conscious, and that he only realised this proactive action during the interview: "your topic is so fun, or I mean interesting, that things like this begin to be revealed." (Kuoppamäki, Feb 28, 2018) In this case, the creative idea came from the personnel of the record company, the songwriters created the content, the record company intentionally boosted the trend, and the media were brokers between the industry and the audience. This story is an example of an innovation that was a result of collaboration between industry workers and creators.

In the context of songwriting camps, industry representatives have a rather direct influence on what the songwriters create. They also act as gatekeepers in deciding who attends the camps. In distributing briefs as guidelines for them they direct the creative process quite explicitly. One might ask whether these briefs, given by A&R and publishers (both at and outside the camps), will have a stronger effect than the songwriters' choices on how pop music will sound in the future.

The briefs might also include preferences concerning the amount of novelty. The field may be reactive or proactive in stimulating novelty (Csikszentmihalyi 2013 [1996]: 43). Two of the songwriters mentioned a brief in which the objective was to find a song that would change the direction of pop music (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014; Tamminen, Jan 14, 2015). However, one of them noticed that there had been a change in the contents of the briefs in general during the previous year concerning the level of novelty required. Instead of looking for something ground-breaking, the record companies had begun to ask for "basic" songs. (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014)

According to some of these songwriters, the radio gatekeepers still seemed to have a significant role in setting trends. As one of the trackers remarked, the radio managers transmitted the wishes of the audience to songwriters and publishers, and through that they influenced the work of songwriters (Wirtanen Oct 19, 2015). As an example, he refers to the "empowering" songs that were trendy in Finnish

pop music at the time of the interview: "If you want a big song on the radio, you must write a song in which you say that life has been tough for you but it's getting better." Anticipating the responses of the radio gatekeepers also had a role in the story of a specific song narrated by one of the songwriters (Siitonen, Oct 1, 2014, see Chapter 4.6). On the other hand, none of these songwriters emphasised the role of film, TV or advertisements, which according to Leslie Meier (2017) and Timothy D. Taylor (2016: 62–62) strongly influence current consumer tastes, and through that the creators. Nowadays, one of the main gateways enabling songwriters to have hits and to make a profit is to have the songs synchronised to films, TV or advertisements. TV and radio create rather than follow trends, and present music that is about to become a hit (Taylor 2016: 63, 130).

One of the songwriters indicated an awareness that unexpected political events, for example, could influence what became popular. She took American singer-songwriter Norah Jones's success at the beginning of the 2000s as an example, connecting it with the terrorist attack at the World Trade Centre in 2001:

> I believe, and it has been researched a lot too that this record became such a huge success because it was so calm and wistful and somehow also a record that brought hope. It was released when this horrible event happened in the States, so then people longed somehow for a feeling of safety. (Louhivuori, Oct 21, 2019)

Of course, unexpected events such as this that have a significant impact are not easily predicted. Such events are called wild cards or black swans in futures studies, and the 9/11 terrorist attack is often used as an example (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen 2017: 283). In hindsight, there may have been many signs pointing towards such events. A more recent example is the Covid-99 pandemic, which, although it came as a shock to most people, was long anticipated by some researchers. Predicting such events is definitely not a core aspect of the work of these, or probably any songwriters. However, being able to imagine the unexpected and acknowledge the possibility of nonlinearity is a central element of future consciousness (Ahvenharju et al. 2018: 9–10).

Finally, some of the songwriters did not identify specific agents as influencers when they were talking about cycles or trends, which they seemed to perceive as active agents in themselves. These views are rather deterministic or evolutionary: "trends will go in circles", "whenever the trend hits your scene, the trend hits your scene for a while and then it moves on". In this, coincidence and luck also have a role.

6.5 The past and experienced agency influencing proactive attitudes and actions

I have shown in the previous sub-chapters that acting proactively with regard to music trends was not especially common among these songwriters, and I have identified some reasons for that.

Most of the songwriters I interviewed were not strongly motivated to attempt to make influential changes: many recognised the risks of being a pioneer or did not consider it important. These motivations and values related to their own experiences as well as to their assumptions about audience preferences. They anticipated continuity in people's tastes, and in that sense their creativity was constrained by their static ideas about possible futures. The past, in addition to the past of pop music and their personal experiences, constrained their proactivity in that they may have acquired knowledge that was too deep, and skills that were too routinised, or inadequate.

Most of these songwriters also had rather low beliefs in their agency in terms of influencing the domain of pop music, especially on the international level. However, some of the younger ones believed more strongly in their chances of influencing global pop music. Several reasons for these low beliefs were identified: the songwriters' previous experiences, their understanding of their abilities to produce novelties and their knowhow in relation to a specific market area or its features, difficulties in accessing the domain and, finally, their own position in the business.

The songwriters suggested explicitly or implicitly that someone else had the power to make changes in pop music. They had different, somewhat contradictory beliefs about who possessed this power. Some were convinced that non-Finnish songwriters or specific individuals were more capable of making changes; some said that the music industry or the media had the power; others claimed that the power had shifted from gatekeepers to audiences. This notion underlines the complexity of the popular-music industry, and probably also relates to the fact that the music industry is in the midst of structural change. It is difficult even for someone who is part of the system to understand how it works. As if surrendering to this complexity, some of the songwriters expressed deterministic views about change.

Given these conceptions and agency beliefs, none of them had intentionally tried to create songs that would have a major influence in the global domain. Agency beliefs, values, motivations, attitudes and actions are all intertwined.

The truth is probably somewhere in the middle: futures are built together by several different agents, and all parts of the system influence the other parts.

Although the songwriters' attitudes may not be the most proactive, they indicate an understanding of the complexity of the system, each in their own way, which in turn connotes heightened future consciousness.

7. CONCLUSIONS

My aim in this thesis was to enhance understanding of domain-specific foresightfulness in the context of creating pop songs. First, I have illustrated the role of observing and anticipating current and alternative future music trends in the creative work of pop songwriters. Second, I have explored how they deal with changes in terms of foreseeing and influencing the futures of music. Third, I have revealed the conceptions and other factors that relate to or influence the amount and level of future-oriented thinking among individual songwriters and co-writing groups.

Adopting an ethnographic approach, I gathered my material during interviews with eight songwriters and observations of three songwriting processes at international songwriting camps. I scrutinised the data through directed content analysis. In line with the phenomenographic approach, I focused on the informants' conceptions about the phenomena in question rather than taking a positivist stand on reality.

The analysis was guided by several concepts from futures studies to shed light on the agents' orientation towards possible futures in terms of foresightfulness and future consciousness, among other concepts. I claim that, in the context of pop songwriting, these concepts may also be used domain-specifically. I searched for manifestations of these abilities, attitudes and actions in the songwriters' narratives as well as in their interaction during the songwriting sessions.

I also drew inspiration from studies on creativity, highlighting the creative aspect of songwriting through socio-cultural theories and the concept of creative constraint. Furthermore, I analysed the songwriters' rationale and practices in relation to future-oriented thinking in line with the 'space of possibilities' concept, and in theorising pop music as fashion I explored its relationship with time.

Previous research on making popular music portrays pop songwriting as work in which autonomy and creative choices are strongly limited: the creators merely make small changes and re-create the work of their predecessors. Consequently, a glance backwards to the past seems to have more relevance than an orientation towards possible futures. The results of this study support the notion that making small changes and having a thorough knowledge of earlier works are essential in pop songwriting, but I also found evidence that awareness of alternative futures does have relevance, and that past consciousness is connected to future consciousness in this context.

My study brings to light rationale that has previously been ignored in academia. Foresightfulness does indeed have a role in the creation of pop music. The ways in which the songwriters took a stand, observed trends and anticipated futures were more diverse and even less conscious than I initially assumed, however. The correlation between their insights and actions is not straightforward, either. Future-oriented thinking, or foresightfulness, in pop songwriting is a complex phenomenon, which is related to different conceptions, values, motives and beliefs.

7.1 Foresightfulness: a significant, yet unrecognised aspect of songwriting

The principal aim of this study was to explore the role of thinking and acquiring information about current and future music phenomena in the work of pop songwriters. I discovered that trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking have significant roles in the writing, but songwriters rarely recognise or explicate these actions and rationale. As assumed, foresightfulness became apparent as an ability, as an attitude and as action.

I identified reactive, pre-active and proactive attitudes among the songwriters. However, these attitudes could not be connected to specific individuals or songwriter roles: the same songwriter may be reactive in one sense and proactive in another. However, these attitudes could not be connected to specific individuals or songwriter roles: the same songwriter may be reactive in one sense and proactive in another. Moreover, they may be intertwined: reactivity and pre-activity cannot always be separated, and the same applies to pre-activity and proactivity.

The analysis reveals individual, social and cultural dimensions of foresightfulness in pop songwriting. Trends and futures are sensed and observed on an individual level, but these observations and insights were shared and strengthened collectively in the songwriting sessions, as well as elsewhere. Songwriters as creative agents use their intuition and their rationale to observe and anticipate changes in the domain, as well as in assuming and anticipating the preferences of members of the field. These agents also base extrapolations towards possible futures on their perceptions of past changes in the domain. The field expresses contradictory demands, asking for both novelty and similarity, and selects works into the domain. Some members of the field produce novel elements and thereby influence the domain directly. Agents receive feedback from the field, which reshapes their conceptions about expectations and future possibilities.

In practice, this means that songwriters have several different ‘targets’ of foresight. They listen to music made by songwriters and artists they consider forerunners: well-established as well as underground actors. Furthermore, they try to

keep up with and anticipate audience taste and the expectations of gatekeepers.

In making these conscious and non-conscious anticipations and observations, songwriters define the space of possibilities in their songwriting, individually and collectively. They may instinctively like the same things and work towards similar futures unconsciously, based on information sharing and collective taste. Sometimes perceiving an evolving trend or anticipating an unexpected change may expand their space of possibilities to include novel futures, thereby allowing them to create something new and different. However, anticipation among the songwriters in this study focused most of all on continuity – in tastes, in specific elements of music and in cyclical change.

Anticipations influence futures. If a group of songwriters agree that "soulful music will never die" (FD May 22, 2018), it is a safe choice for them to create a soulful song. Consequently, soulful songs will be also heard in future. However, conscious attempts to influence futures were rare in my research material.

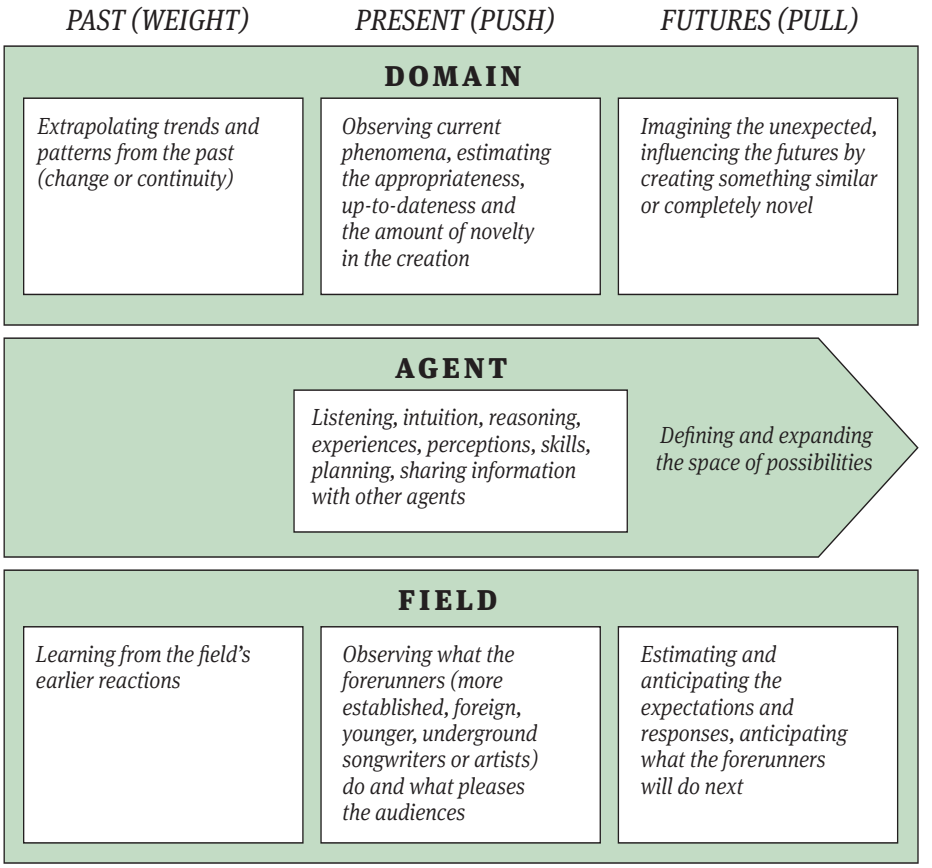
Figure 2 (p. 180) depicts the agents' different ways of acquiring knowledge about alternative futures and defining and expanding the space of possibilities, positioned in Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity. I have further classified them according to whether they are based on information about the past, the present or the futures, all of which influence agents in terms of weight, push or pull (Inayatullah 2008: 7–9).

Given the main focus of this study, this figure positions the agent (songwriter or a group of songwriters) at the centre, although all the components are interconnected and influence others. The field has a direct way of influencing the domain, and the domain influences the agents and the field.

The past and the present carry the most weight in the future-oriented thinking of pop music songwriters, whereas alternative futures are less relevant. When provoked, they might imagine unexpected alternative futures, but their anticipations are based mainly on extrapolations from the past and observations about current phenomena.

Interestingly, these intuitive insights and conscious reasoning resemble formalised foresight and systematic fashion forecasting, which in addition to the songwriters' rationale could perhaps reveal something about these formalised methods and the mechanics of popular music as a fashion system. According to several scholars focusing on modern futures studies, prediction, probability and trend extrapolation are inadequate as methods for acquiring future-related knowledge. However, they are still relevant in fashion forecasting (see e.g., Kim et al. 2011). A domain that changes with the fashion is predictable to some extent, which the songwriters also acknowledged. Tsoukas & Shepherd (2004: 139) characterise forecasting as a simple form of foresightfulness.

Figure 2. Songwriters' ways of acquiring information or knowledge about current and future music phenomena, combined with a revised systems model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988; 1999; 2013 [1996]; Kerrigan 2013). The agent (the songwriter or a group of songwriters) uses information (rational and intuitive capacities) about a field's (audience, gatekeepers, other creators) and a domain's (works of pop music) past, present and alternative futures, and through that defines and expands the space of possibilities in a future direction. The creators are influenced by the pull of the future, the push of the present and the weight of the past (Inayatullah 2008: 7–9).



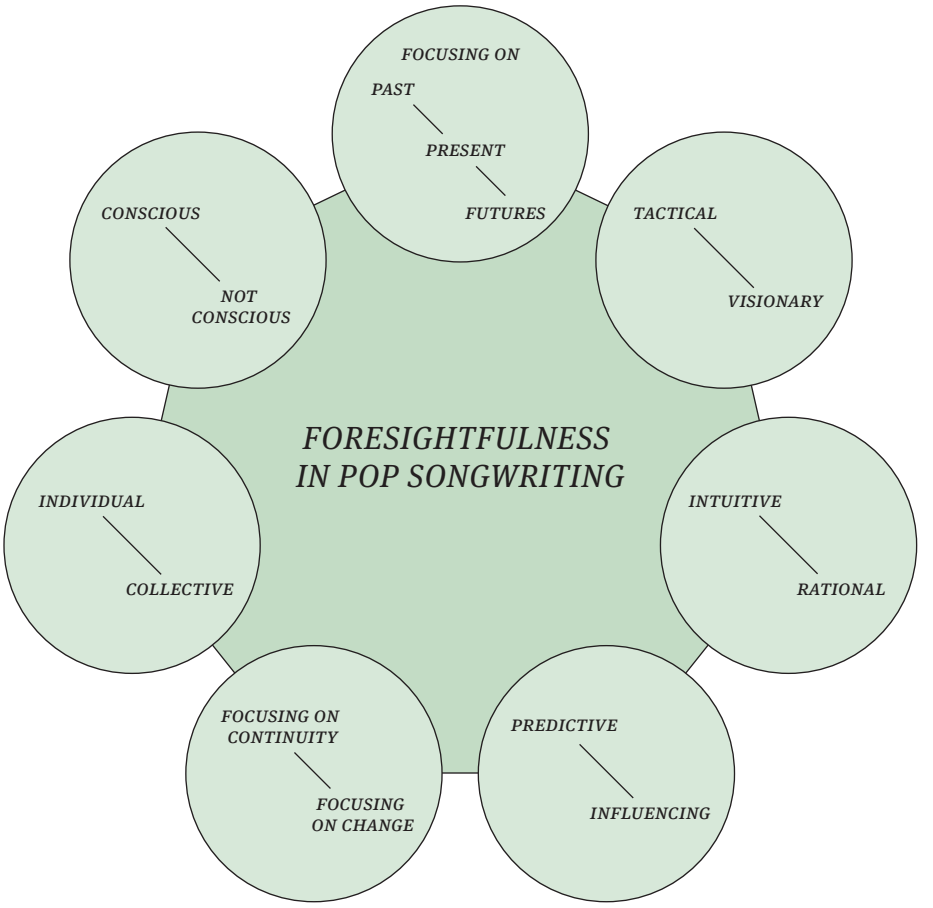
My research findings imply that trend-spotting and explicit future-oriented thinking have more relevance outside songwriting camps than in them. During the sessions the songwriters make creative decisions based on what feels good and right, without much analysis or discussion. Many of them also pointed out that making good connections at the songwriting camps was at least as important as making good songs. Of course, information acquired in everyday work and life may be used consciously or consciously or non-consciously in the sessions.

I also found examples of tactical planning, which could not be categorised as foresight, given that the external situation is known: songwriters create Christmas

songs because they know that Christmas will come this year. Nevertheless, I have included these examples in my analysis since they exemplify the ways in which songwriters prepare for alternative futures and influence their careers.

Figure 3 below summarises the various ways of being foresightful in pop songwriting, expressed as continuums rather than opposites, with various combinations and intermediates.

Figure 3. Ways of being foresightful in pop songwriting expressed as continuums rather than opposites



Some songwriters use futures creatively and consciously: they anticipate future trends, enjoy estimating probabilities and use this information in their creative work. As I assumed, future-related ideas serve a similar purpose as several other creative constraints in pop songwriting. Anticipation may both restrict and en-

hance creativity: anticipating continuity may inhibit the search for novelty. On the other hand, domain-specific future-oriented thinking may facilitate the turning of impossibilities into possibilities, although there are few examples of such anticipation in my research material. All the songwriters I interviewed were able to make future-related assumptions of some kind, but not all of them consciously did so in their work. They may not have considered it relevant, or even possible. Yet, a songwriter who does not believe in the potential of foresight may well speak about stability or constant change in pop music. What contradictions such as these imply is that songwriters are in possession of more foresight than they use. Beliefs, abilities, attitudes and action do not always match, and it is also possible that the songwriters did not realise that forecasting continuity was also a form of foresight, for example.

These songwriters possess many qualities or abilities connected with future consciousness: a systemic perception of their working environment, an understanding of patterns, and the ability to combine intuitive and rational insights. In terms of rationale they show systematic foresight. However, they have a rather low level of belief in their own agency in the global industry, which is considered important in building future consciousness.

In the following, I will pull together some of the main factors identified above that explain the differences in the songwriters' levels and amounts of future-oriented thinking.

7.2 Previous experiences, conceptions, values, beliefs and externally located constraints influencing foresightfulness

Several factors influence trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking in various ways, encouraging some songwriters to use trends and futures creatively and others to ignore fashionable phenomena, and not to provoke change.

The songwriters identified several risks related to trend-spotting and attempting to create something ground-breaking: catching a fad, copying someone, losing integrity, creating something the audience was not ready to accept and losing income. Avoiding all these risks simultaneously is impossible, thus the songwriters' different values and motives influenced the choices they made. For some, the most important thing was not to sound outdated, some wanted to be pioneers, some aimed first and foremost at creating timeless songs, whereas for others the core value was to stay honest as a songwriter.

The phenomenon becomes more intricate when different levels of future-oriented thinking or future consciousness are taken into account. Making safe and reactive rather than proactive choices did not necessarily indicate a low level of

future consciousness or a non-prospective attitude among the songwriters. Choosing safely and acting reactively with regard to music trends could actually help to secure their careers in the long run. Songwriters may focus on long-term or short-term goals, and catching a prevailing trend may be a less risky option in long-term than catching an anticipated trend. Being pre-active or proactive in the domain of pop music entails a higher level of uncertainty and risk.

With regard to these songwriters' personal professional futures, being reactive towards changes in pop music may thus be the most future-conscious choice. Thinking about the consequences of choices and understanding complex systemic relations point to a developed level of future consciousness. These songwriters had their own understandings of how the music industry worked, on which they based their creative decisions – attempting to avoid risks. Some of them said they had made the conscious decision not to follow music trends, but even they were not completely passive in terms of a future orientation: they believed that because of the cyclical change in pop music, doing their own thing would make them sound fresh.

These songwriters thus tended to make small changes and to act reactively primarily because that was what they assumed audiences and the industry expected of them. They anticipated continuity in tastes and had to carefully consider the appropriate amount of novelty in an attempt to stay inside the space of possibilities of pop music. These findings accord with many earlier theorisations of making popular music. Some of the informants also found it difficult to produce novel ideas because they knew the domain and the conventions too well. None of them expressed any frustration because their work was constrained to rather limited creativity by the demands of audiences and the industry. They had chosen to work in this specific domain, and they were content with the rules. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2013 [1996]: 37), people who have a calling find it rewarding to act according to the rules of the domain in question.

Many of these songwriters' insights reflect their experiences. Some of them had failed in their attempts to forecast future trends or to introduce novel sounds. Experiences such as these resulted in low beliefs in being able to foresee or influence the domain of pop music. On the other hand, none of them had attempted to influence global music trends, some of them being strongly of the opinion that it was not possible for Finnish songwriters. They found it difficult to access the global domain from Finland. They felt that they did not have adequate "knowhow" in relation to target markets, or they believed that someone else had the power to make changes, such as other songwriters and gatekeepers. The songwriters had diverse views on who has the power to bring about changes in music which, according to my interpretation probably reflects the ongoing structural changes

in the music business: nowadays even key figures such as songwriters struggle to understand the role of gatekeepers and other agents. It is nevertheless evident that publishers, A&R and artists still have considerable power to choose which songs will be released.

According to the songwriters, there was a big difference between domestic and international markets in the extent to which it was possible to predict or influence alternative futures. Some of them believed they could predict what would happen in Finland by looking abroad, and that they had stronger agency in influencing pop music in Finland than abroad. Such beliefs reflected how well they understood the properties of a specific market area and culture as well their knowhow and position in relation to target markets.

Their future-oriented thinking was further influenced by their conceptions of continuity and change, as well as by fashion mechanics in pop music. They may have had deterministic views about how trends infinitely appear in circles, for example, or about which musical elements audiences will always find appealing. Alternatively, they may have believed that something completely unpredictable would simply emerge. These conceptions influenced their domain-specific future-oriented thinking and foresightfulness in different ways: some made assumptions about possible futures based on their understanding of cycles, whereas others found it impossible to make any predictions.

Some of the songwriters also acknowledged that interpreting current trends and extrapolating them forwards had become more difficult because of the accelerated pace of change in fashion cycles, changes in consumption and the presence of multiple simultaneous trends. On the other hand, multiple simultaneous trends allowed them to trust in their own work in the belief that all kinds of music had listeners. This kind of awareness points to systems perception and an openness to alternatives, which Ahvenharju et al. categorise as dimensions of Futures Consciousness. The songwriters had a holistic view of the music industry and of the complexity of its systems – thus they understood how unreliable predictions were.

Foresightfulness and a prospective attitude seem to have a smaller role in co-writing sessions than in outside sessions. Earlier research points to two different directions, implying that a routine-like situation may lead to fewer innovations, but on the other hand processes and routines may offer a fruitful and supportive environment that encourages novelty. The situation in the songwriting camps was specific, with several externally located constraints and tacit social rules, resulting in a rather limited space of possibilities. This could explain why anticipation played a smaller role in the camps than in other songwriting situations. The situation in itself is one factor that influences foresightfulness.

Foresightfulness in some of the informants related to their views on integrity

and autonomy. They maintained romantic conceptions of creativity by emphasising the need to create from within, to remain honest to themselves as songwriters and to pay less attention to what others do. This is interesting given that songwriters create songs for mainstream pop-music markets to be performed by someone other than themselves. Thinking about music trends was oppressive to some of them and made them fearful of losing themselves as songwriters.

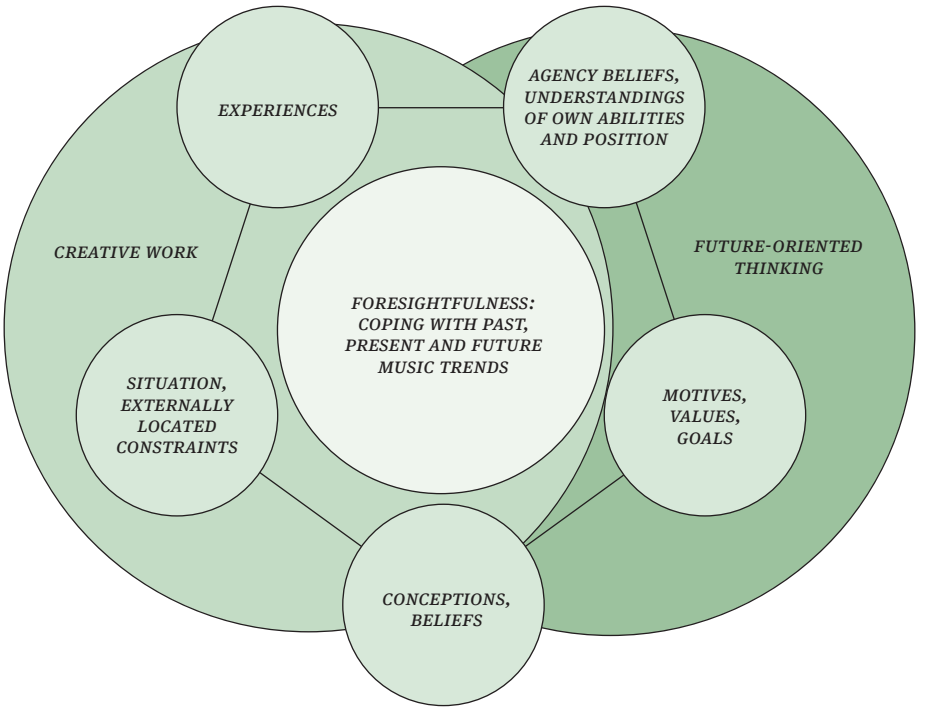
Thus, decision-making in pop songwriting seems to be based first and foremost on what is possible and what is reasonable regarding alternative futures in the domain and the songwriters' professional futures. A strong motive behind many creative choices is to avoid risks. Producing similarity is less risky than producing novelty, and the songwriting situation may also influence the amount and level of future-oriented thinking.

Finally, the songwriters connected the importance of foresightfulness with different songwriter roles, but this did not mean that representatives of specific roles were categorically more prospective than others. They had a rather traditional view of the essence of the pop song: its production was still considered "surface work" by several of them, especially the topliners. Although the majority of them emphasised that production in particular had to be up-to-date, and that trend-spotting was the responsibility of trackers or producers, it is not implied in this study that all trackers are more prospective than all topliners.

In sum, the different factors identified in this study as influencing future-oriented thinking, attitudes and actions in pop songwriting include: the situation and other externally located constraints; the songwriters' previous experiences, their conceptions of trends, change and continuity as well as of constraints in pop music; the potential of foresight and their understanding of audience and industry expectations; their agency beliefs regarding the futures of pop music; and their understanding of their own abilities and positions or roles as songwriters. Finally, foresightfulness was strongly influenced by their diverse motives, values and goals: some wished to be pioneers, some to avoid risks, some to create timeless songs and some to create up-to-date songs, whereas for others the most important thing was to stay true to themselves as songwriters.

Figure 4 (p. 186) depicts foresightfulness as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of future-oriented thinking and creative work, which is influenced by the factors identified above. All of these factors are interconnected.

Figure 4. Foresightfulness in the creative work of pop songwriters



7.3 Novel perspectives on pop songwriting, creative thinking and future-oriented thinking

The most significant contributions of this study relate to its interdisciplinary setting, as well as to its potential applications in the practice of songwriting. New knowledge has been generated in several different fields.

First, my research enhances knowledge about songwriting in contemporary popular music by illuminating the practices and working conditions of contemporary pop songwriters in Finland. In the context of popular music, the results contribute to research on songwriting in particular, but also to current discussions on authenticity, as well as the relationship between creativity and commerce.

Second, my investigation of the relationships between future-oriented thinking and creative thinking contributes to multi-disciplinary research on creativity. In focusing on future-oriented thinking, trend-spotting and foresightfulness as creativity-enabling and creativity-enhancing abilities it adds to current knowledge about creative work and creativity. In this sense, it could be positioned as a continuation of a track of research initiated by psychologist J.P. Guilford (1950, see Lubart

2000–2001: 299) that concerns the key processes involved in creative thinking. Guilford saw the value of investigating sub-processes in creative work in terms of understanding the creative process as a whole. Within this approach, my research contributes to two paradigms in the research on creativity proposed by educational psychologist Richard E. Mayer (1999: 452). In my analysis of future-oriented thinking in creative work I have described creativity and I have related certain factors to it. Whereas previous research has approached creativity mainly as a dimension of future consciousness, I have shown a reverse relationship: domain-specific future-oriented thinking and future consciousness as dimensions of creativity in the creation of pop music. I hope that, by doing this, I have dismantled the stigma and mysticism associated with foresight in showing that foresightfulness and creativity could be considered complementary rather than opposites.

Third, my research contributes to the discipline of futures studies in expanding understanding of future-oriented thinking. I have also pointed out the lack of appropriate concepts in futures studies, research on corporate foresight and fashion forecasting that would describe future-oriented thinking in this specific context. Whereas previous research has conceptualised systematic and conscious foresight – which tend to be domain-specific – and personal future orientation, which is often implicit and non-conscious, what this study brings to light is foresightfulness, which is domain-specific yet partly non-conscious and implicit. In applying concepts and perspectives from futures studies to research on popular music I have produced a work that serves as an emerging academic connection between these fields.

Foresight refers literally to visual perception. My study has shed light on future orientation, which is more about hearing, sensing and reasoning, and which seems to be highly domain-specific. Whereas scanning the broader socio-cultural context is an essential part of trend analysis and forecasting in the domain of clothing fashion, songwriters focus strongly on the domain of pop music. They maintain their professional skills mainly by listening to the music of other songwriters, and for this reason I refer to forward-listening rather than to forward-looking. Even though many of the songwriters said that consuming other forms of art was also part of their creative work, such actions did not seem to be strongly connected to their future-oriented thinking in the domain of pop music. When encouraged, they were able to make connections between broader cultural trends and pop music, but those they observed did not have significant relevance in their work. However, work and other areas of life are inseparable, at least for some songwriters.

The most suitable categorisation of futures studies applied in this study is Godet's differentiation of attitudes towards the future, perhaps because of its practical approach. I found examples of each attitude, but I could not categorise

the songwriters accordingly. However, acknowledging these attitudes may be beneficial for the actors in their attempts to achieve specific goals. In general, bringing this aspect of songwriting to light may enhance future-oriented thinking generally in the industry. The results of this study could be applied to enhance future-oriented thinking among songwriters and other agents. Furthermore, my dissertation confirms that concepts from futures studies could be further developed for the benefit of musicology and applied musicology.

7.4 Evaluating the methods and generalisability of the results

Having interviewed and observed a number of songwriters, I attempted to draw as many-sided a picture of the phenomenon under study as is possible within the scope of a doctoral thesis. However, as Marton and Booth (1997: 128) remark, the ways in which people experience a phenomenon represent only one side of the picture. This study presents a picture of trend-spotting and foresightfulness in pop songwriting through the narratives, experiences, conceptions, interactions and actions of 14 songwriters, including 11 Finns. Given the small number of informants and their homogeneity, the results cannot be generalised to any larger group of songwriters. However, the fact that it is the first study to shed light on foresightfulness in pop songwriting proves that such a phenomenon exists, and it is likely that it also exists among other songwriters.

These Finnish songwriters work with international co-writers and pitch their songs to international artists. Their working methods are similar to those used abroad. As noted above, I also observed some non-Finnish songwriters, and it is evident that my results also have international relevance.

The interview materials turned out to be a more fruitful source of information about trend-spotting and future-oriented thinking in pop songwriting than the observations. It is tempting to claim that foresightfulness and being prospective have more relevance in contexts other than songwriting camps, but I cannot make such a claim as I did not have access to the songwriters' thinking processes in the sessions. Feedback interviews give some insights into to what happened during the sessions in the minds of these songwriters, but they may not have been aware of, or may not remember all the factors that influenced the process and their creative decisions.

Given that my research topic relates to current and possible future changes in music, it is worth pointing out that the time between the first and the last interview was a little over five years. The music industry is in a state of constant change, thus many things may happen in five years – and the songwriters' conceptions may have been different in 2014 and 2019. This is one of the reasons why conceptions

should not be attached too fixedly to specific individuals. I focused on the phenomenon, relying on individual insights.

I chose my informants from among songwriters who had participated in Music Finland's international songwriting camps. There were moments in my research process when I doubted the decision to delimit songwriters to this group of professionals. Someone who works in the music industry put it into words when I told him about my research. In his view, this group of songwriters were talented professionals who wrote songs mainly as commissioned, which restricted their freedom to make creative choices. He therefore assumed that they did not use information about alternative futures very creatively. In fact, some of my findings imply that this group of songwriters may be unlikely to be prospective precisely because of their position: they are professionals whose livelihood depends on their creations, yet they are not sufficiently well established to take big risks or to attempt to create something ground-breaking.

However, my research materials indicate wide variation in rationale among this rather homogeneous group. Had I interviewed young underground songwriters or producers in Helsinki basements I would probably have had different results. However, the more deeply I delved into the world of mainstream pop, the more intriguing I found it. The songwriters I interviewed are caught in the crossfire of conflicting demands: they are asked to create something new but familiar, something innovative but not too bizarre. They need to be aware of music trends, to recognise fads and to estimate risks in their creative work.

A limitation in my research material is the low presence of non-male songwriters: I interviewed only one female along with seven males, a gender distribution that does not reflect the number of female songwriters in the camps. However, taking into account the songwriters I observed brings the percentage of female songwriters in my study to a slightly higher level than in the camps. In any case, it would be necessary to include more non-male songwriters in further research in order to achieve a more gender-balanced view.

7.5 Further research

In line with most research, mine has not only produced answers, it has also raised new questions. In the course of my work I had to make many decisions and exclude valuable material to meet the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, and to focus on specific questions using specific methods.

During the process, I was often asked about the role of publishers in foreseeing and creating the futures of pop music. Although I am well aware that most publishers contribute to the creative work of songwriters by suggesting songs

they should listen to as references, for example, I deliberately decided to focus solely on the writers. Clearly, publishers and other agents in the music industry would be fruitful informants for further research. The songwriters I interviewed also mentioned underground producers and younger songwriters as innovative and quick at catching on to fashionable phenomena – this would be another group of informants that could further enhance understanding of foresightfulness in songwriting.

As stated earlier, doing research on future consciousness could increase its incidence among informants. It would be intriguing to go back to my informants and to see if their thinking about music trends and foresight had changed since the first interview. Even during the interviews some of them seemed to be thinking more consciously, and they told me they had not thought about some of these issues before.

An interdisciplinary setting would have given me the opportunity to take other approaches than the one I chose. It would have been possible to use methodology from futures studies to produce knowledge about alternative futures, as well as to identify future-oriented thinking in pop songwriting. Had I used the Delphi method or organised foresight workshops, for example, I could also have analysed the reasoning that leads to the anticipation of specific futures. That would also be a fruitful topic for further research.

A similar interdisciplinary setting could be used to serve broader normative and ethical aims, such as to enhance future consciousness throughout the music industry in terms of ecological, economic and socio-cultural sustainable development. This is something I would like to pursue in my further research.

The conceptual work upon which I have embarked is merely a beginning. I have shown the applicability but also the inadequacies of current thinking on futures studies and foresight in describing future-oriented thinking in the context of pop songwriting. Yet, within the scope of my study I had to exclude some of the main concepts, such as weak signals. Further research could explore the possibilities of applying such concepts in studies on popular music.

Finally, as a practical application and a follow-up for this study, it would be useful to develop foresight methodology to suit the needs of the music industry, and to use the results in a practical guide on trend-spotting and foresight. Despite the future-oriented nature of the industry it seems that, at least in Finland, there is still a lot to be discovered about the practical potential of foresight and the expertise of professional futurists.

Research materials

Interviews

All the interviews were conducted by the author, and all the transcripts and field work materials are in her possession.

SONGWRITERS

Ehnström, Axel 2017. Music Finland's conference room, Helsinki. June 27, 2017. WMA + transcription. 76 min.
Kaskinen, Elias 2015. Music Finland's conference room, Helsinki. November 11, 2015. WMA + transcription. 54 min.
Louhivuori, Eva 2019. Bar, Helsinki. October 21, 2019. WMA + transcription. 29 min.
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Sjöholm, Erik 2015. Cafeteria, Vaasa. December 22, 2015. WMA + transcription. 60 min.
Tamminen, Mikko 2015. Via Skype, Helsinki. January 14, 2015. WMA + transcription. 101 min.
Wirtanen, Ilkka 2015. Studio restroom, Helsinki. October 19, 2015. WMA + transcription. 89 min.

INFORMANTS WORKING IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY AND IN MUSIC EXPORT

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Sorsa, Katariina 2018. Export Manager, Music Finland. Music Finland's conference room, Helsinki. February 19, 2018. WMA + notes. 22 min.
Valtanen, Kimmo 2018. Managing director, Universal Music Finland. Universal Music Finland's conference room, Helsinki. February 6, 2018. Notes.

PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS
Bennett, Joe 2019. E-mail, September 5, 2019.
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Observations

Observation at Song Castle camp 2015. Kallio-Kuninkala, Järvenpää. May 5, 2015. Observed songwriters: Madeline Juno (Germany), Elias Kaskinen (Finland), Erik Sjöholm (Finland), Ilkka Wirtanen (Finland). Field notes and WMA files. 180 min.

Observation at A-Pop Castle camp 2017. Radisson Blu Seaside hotel, Helsinki. May 24, 2017. Observed songwriters: Janne Hyöty (Finland), Timo Oiva (Finland), Ucca-Laugh (Japan). Field notes and recordings. 254 min.

Observation at Song Castle camp 2018. Kallio-Kuninkala, Järvenpää. May 22, 2018. Observed songwriters: Andrew Jackson (Great Britain), Minna Koivisto (Finland), Kalle Lindroth (Finland). Field notes and WMA files. 370 min.

Other research materials

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: The songwriters I interviewed and observed

Ehnström, Axel: A Finnish singer and songwriter who has co-written songs for both Finnish and international artists, having his biggest hits in Central Europe. In 2016 he had more international cuts (songs that have been chosen and recorded by artists) than any other Finnish songwriter, according to Music Finland's data (Music Finland 2017b). He participated as a topliner in Song Castle camps 2016, 2018 and 2019.

Hyöty, Janne: A Finnish songwriter and producer who has co-written songs for Europe and Asia. He has co-written many successful songs especially for Japanese boybands. He participated as a tracker in A-Pop Castle camps 2014 and 2017.

Juno, Madeline: A German singer-songwriter who has released four studio albums. She participated as a topliner in Song Castle camp 2015.

Koivisto, Minna: A Finnish songwriter and producer who has written songs for Finnish and international artists. She is also part of the band KOI. She participated as a tracker in Song Castle 2018.

Lindroth, Kalle: A Finnish singer and songwriter who has written and co-written songs for Finnish and European artists. In Finland he is also known as one of the pop duo Ida Paul & Kalle Lindroth. He participated as a topliner in Song Castle camps 2016, 2018 and 2019.

Kaskinen, Elias: A Finnish singer and songwriter who has not had much experience in writing songs for international artists. He has co-written some songs for Finnish pop artists and lately he has been concentrating on his solo career in domestic markets. He participated as topliner in Song Castle camp 2015.

Jackson, Andrew: A British singer, songwriter and producer who works both in London and in Los Angeles. He has written/co-written songs for several world-famous artists such as Dua Lipa, Avicii and Alicia Keys. He participated as a topliner in Song Castle camp 2018.

Louhivuori, Eva: A Finnish singer and songwriter who has written and co-written several songs, especially for domestic and Asian markets. In Finland she is also known from the band Eva & Manu. She participated as a topliner in A-pop Castle camps 2017 and 2019.

Oiva, Timo: A Finnish singer and songwriter who has written and co-written several songs for domestic and Asian markets. He also has his own publishing company focusing on Asian markets. He participated as a topliner at A-Pop Castle camps 2016, 2017 and 2019.

Siitonen, Pasi: A Finnish singer, songwriter and producer. His biggest international cuts have been in Asia, and in recent years he has been focusing more on his own domestic career as "Stig" or "Stig Dogg". He participated as a tracker in Song Castle camps 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012 .

Sjöholm, Erik: A Finnish topliner who does not yet have much experience of writing songs for international artists. He has co-written a few songs for Finnish pop artists, and in recent years has focused on his own career under the name Erik Sjøholm. He participated as a topliner in Song Castle camp 2015.

Tamminen, Mikko: A Finnish songwriter and producer who has been co-writing songs for Finnish and international artists for several years. His biggest cuts have been in Asia and Germany. He is also a rap artist, appearing as "Setä Tamu" in domestic markets. He participated as a tracker in A-pop Castle camps 2014, 2016 and 2019 and Song Castle camp 2015.

Ucca-Laugh: A Japanese songwriter who has written and co-written songs especially for Japanese artists. She also performs as an artist. She participated as a topliner in A-Pop Castle camp 2017.

Wirtanen, Ilkka: A Finnish songwriter and producer who has been co-writing and producing songs for international and Finnish artists for several years. He studied musicology at the University of Jyväskylä. He participated as a tracker in Song Castle camps 2015 and 2016.