

Conference proposal
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Hysterical Symptoms: Artistic Research Project on Finnish Civil War

In our research project, we are studying the experience of Finnish Civil War that took place in a relatively short, but violent span 1918. A sense of community was destroyed in the very beginning of the nation's independence, and we argue that its effects are visible in the society today.

During the war there were two sides, 'the reds' and 'the whites'. However most people from civilians to soldiers were rather impartial. People's experience of the war was for most part confusion and fear, and people often ended up taking sides depending on their background or because of social pressure: staying neutral was not an option.

We are currently writing and directing a radio play in which we use material from recorded interviews of the civil war witnesses. The interviews took place in the late 1960's or early 1970's, around 50 years after from the war. We are listening those stories 50 years later – thus bringing together 100 years of independence in Finland's history.

In our presentation, we will introduce findings from the archive materials and discuss the possibilities and challenges of artistic research to address these stories. As a way of focusing our work and positioning ourselves as listeners we are employing a concept from narratological studies called 'emphatic listener'. This relatively new concept directs us towards listening stories between the words that are spoken. The stories are told from the viewpoints of for example soldiers, prisoners, wives and children of the war. Most of the time it is not clear whether the person speaking is 'red' or 'white'. Some memories are already partly faded, some clear and full of details as though the experience took place yesterday. Fifty years later, some things are still left unsaid.