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Ethno-futurism: burden and freedom

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the time-specific term 'ethno-futurism,' coined by the Tartu literary group Hirohall in 1989 to define their activities. It focuses on the connections between ethno-futurism and the cultural processes that have shaped Estonia's transition period. The central question is how and in what framework ethno-futurism should be defined. This is linked to the question of the possible scope of the concept of ethno-futurism. In other words, is it a cultural phenomenon clearly delimited in space and time, or does it conceal broader features that help to describe the transition period in central and eastern Europe?

KEYWORDS Ethno-futurism; transition period; Estonian literature; post-soviet culture; Finno-Ugric movement

The term 'ethno-futurism' was coined in 1989 by members of the Hirohall literary group in Tartu. It was first properly introduced in print in May 1990 in the cultural magazine *Vikerkaar* (Rainbow) in a manifesto-like text, 'Ideals of Ethno-Futurism,' by Sven Kivisildnik (1990). The word had been mentioned on a few occasions prior to this, for instance in Hirohall's presentation in the newspaper *Edasi* (Forward) on 4 June 1989 (Hanson 1989). From that point on, the concept, originally associated with one group, began to spread and transform, especially through the Finno-Ugric movement (*hõimuliikumine*). Consequently, the concept of ethno-futurism underwent a significant evolution, resulting in a multitude of conflicting interpretations. In Estonia, the most significant discussions of ethno-futurism developed in the 1990s, after which its usage became more sporadic and often even more controversial.

The objective of this article is to examine the theoretical framework within which ethno-futurism should be defined and to determine whether the concept is merely a cultural phenomenon constrained by its temporal and spatial limitations or whether it could be extended to treatments of transition periods in other countries. The article analyzes the fundamental contradictions that have emerged in the development of the concept of ethno-futurism, considering whether the tension between the two components of the word – *ethnos* and *futurism* – is productive or whether it is an obstacle. In a broader sense, it is necessary to examine whether the original concept of ethno-futurism, as formulated by the Hirohall group, can be reconciled with the dominant

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form of its subsequent development: ethno-futurism as a survival strategy of endangered small nations.

For the objective of delineation, this article will concentrate on the late 1980s and 1990s, with a particular focus on the development of ethno-futurism and its relation to the transition period in Estonia. Later developments, both possible and at the same time contradictory, are briefly outlined. From a methodological perspective, this article is situated in the field of cultural studies, in part as it relates to conceptual history (see, for example, Koselleck 2002; Müller 2014).

In terms of research, the most comprehensive study of ethno-futurism in Estonia to date has been conducted by Tiit Hennoste (2012), who analyzed the connections between ethno-futurism and Estonian avant-garde movements, as well as Italian and Russian futurisms of the early twentieth century. Piret Viires (1996) was among the first scholars to examine the connections between ethno-futurism and Estonian literature during the transition period, with a particular focus on postmodernism. The potential developments of ethno-futurism in the field of art have been discussed by Heie Treier (2001). The various applications of ethno-futurism have been examined by Ott and Andres Heinapuu (O. Heinapuu and Heinapuu 2002). The conclusion of this article briefly touches on the spread of the concept outside Estonia.

Hirohall

The Tartu group Hirohall started its activities in autumn 1988, although it acquired its name somewhat later, on 11 March 1989 (Rumm 1990a; Viires 1990a, 47).[1] The group consisted of five authors: the poets Kauksi Ülle, Karl-Martin Sinijärv, Valeria Ränik, and Kivisildnik, and the prose writer Jüri Ehlvest. The last mention of any public activity by the group is from autumn 1991, when they performed at the Tallinn Writers' House on 21 October (Pabut 1991; T. H. 1991). In spring 1989, the broader Estonian Kostabi-$ociety (EK$) emerged around the group, with a more practical approach focusing on publishing and other economic activities, and it operated for a considerably longer period than Hirohall.[2]

The backgrounds of the Hirohall members were diverse. Kauksi Ülle (Ülle Kauksi, born 1962) studied journalism at the University of Tartu and began writing poetry in the South Estonian language (Võro) at that time. She was a member of the poetry club *Vile* ('Whistle,' November 1981–1986), which operated under the auspices of the Tartu branch of the Estonian Writers' Union. Her first Võro-language poetry collection, *Kesk umma mäke* (In the Middle of One's Own Hill), was published in 1987 (Kauksi 1987). In the Soviet context, it signified that she had been recognized as a promising young author. Following her graduation, Kauksi Ülle was employed as an educator at the Tartu branch of the Writers' Union. Between 1991–1993, she was employed at Võro Radio, after which she worked as the secretary of the Fenno-Ugria foundation, which promoted the Finno-Ugric movement. Valeria Ränik (born 1964), with roots in Estonia, more specifically on Hiiumaa island, grew up in Moscow. She graduated from the Moscow Institute of Radio Engineering, Electronics, and Automation, decided to learn Estonian, and in summer 1988, she relocated to Tartu to pursue studies in Estonian language and literature at the university (Viires 1990b, 82). Ränik's first collections of poetry, *Orb* (Orphan) and *Ellujäämine* (Survival), were published in 1990 (Ränik 1990a, 1990b). Her early reception was linked to the narrative of becoming an Estonian (Beier 1991; Pruul 1991; Rumm 1990b; Viires

1990b). In 1987, Kivisildnik (Sven Sildnik, born 1964) and Jüri Ehlvest (1967–2006) formed *Abi-Piirissaare Dalinistlik Kõõl* (The Dalinist Chord of Abi-Piirissaare), a group engaged in pseudoscientific-pseudopolitical performances. The group focused more on performativity than on the publication of their own work. It was partly connected with the Estonian Academy of Agriculture, where several actions took place. Kivisildnik studied agronomy at the Academy for a while and Ehlvest read biology at the University of Tartu, while both later briefly studied other subjects including theology. Kivisildnik's first collection, *Märg Viktor* (Wet Viktor, Kivisildnik 1989), in a half-formulaic way relying on Marie Under's poems, was the first EK$ publication. Ehlvest's prose was mainly published in the magazine *Vikerkaar*. His first books appeared in 1996 (Ehlvest 1996a, 1996b). The youngest member, Karl-Martin Sinijärv (born 1971), published poetry while still in secondary school. His first collection, *Kolmring* (Threecircle) appeared on the poetry cassette *Kassett'88* (1989). He joined the future Hirohall when he began his studies at Tartu, first studying Estonian and then English language and literature.

In addition to their diverse backgrounds, the young authors exhibited distinct creative approaches. The poetic forms and themes of Kauksi Ülle and Ränik's poetry were quite traditional, although both underwent changes of language. Valeria Ränik switched from Russian to Estonian. Kauksi Ülle had grown up in a Võro-language environment, but the tradition of writing in it was weak, and her education was all in standard Estonian. Her poetry is clearly addressed to Estonian-language speakers. Therefore, her work was not merely an enhancement of a dialect but presented the Võro language as a manifesto and she expected the reader to make the effort to understand the text. Kivisildnik's activities and work have, more than any other writer in Estonia, attempted to challenge the literary conventions and boundaries of literature. Sinijärv experimented lavishly with both form and content, as with spelling and sound. Ehlvest's prose is primarily distinguished by a process of de-familiarization at the level of content, juggling narratives on the borders of the grotesque and appalling, as well as using semiotic games of thought and arche-real allusions.

Members of Hirohall emphasized the essential differences between them, as evidenced by Sinijärv's assertion that 'there is no point in dreaming about any kindred thoughts,' adding that Hirohall developed into 'a union of people who held different literary principles but enjoyed one another's company' (Rumm 1990a). It is notable that Hirohall's later reception, especially compared with subsequent groups, primarily emphasized its unity (Karja 1996; Rummo 1997; Viires 1996). The impression of unity evidently was not derived from their work, but rather from Hirohall's provocative and occasionally scandalous public activities, including manifestos, declarations, and performances. The sense of unity was further reinforced by the establishment of the Estonian Kostabi $ociety with its practical activities, alongside Hirohall.

Mark Kalev Kostabi (born 1960), who provided the name for the society, came from an exile Estonian family in the United States. The cultural circles of transition-period Estonia were both fascinated and provoked, among other things, by his economic success and ability to break through in the art world (Keskküla 1989; Treier 1993). Hirohall members were drawn to Kostabi's theses (referred to as Kostabisms) aligned with the neo-liberal economic model, his opposition to the prevailing artistic conventions, and because the Kostabi family hailed from Võrumaa. Kostabi, as a commercially successful artist, also established a partly ironic following in EK$ principles. The direct creative connection between Hirohall and Kostabi was tenuous, maybe only apparent in

a certain machine-formulaic manner of production (Hanson 1989): Kostabi used assistants in his work, placed great emphasis on media appearances, and established his own 'studio factory' named 'Kostabi's World.'

The shift toward neoliberalism in the cultural sphere was a wider, but still relatively brief phenomenon in Estonia at the time. It was enhanced by general economic discussions, including the concept of 'Self-Managing Estonia,' the aversion to a planned economy, and the late Soviet era faith in the success of the local economy; concerning the latter, there was particular belief in wealthier collective farms, science-based production, and the idea that a small system, a micro-society, could manage on its own.[3] For a few years, authors who were able to successfully market their own work became media stars.

First formulations of ethno-futurism, 1989–1991

The earliest formulations of ethno-futurism are similar in form to other art manifestos of different times. The primary tenets were constructed by opposing forces, often presented as a conflict between the old and the new. Forceful manifestos may declare the inevitable demise of the old or even call for its active destruction, while milder manifestos simply announced the arrival of something new. One of the earliest manifestos of ethno-futurism appeared as part of the aforementioned article introducing Hirohall on 4 June 1989 in *Edasi*, titled 'Beside the coffin of literature.' What was dead was literature itself; the manifesto partly parodied Soviet-era obituaries. The death of literature was caused by the advent of new and superior texts espousing ethno-futurism, thus 'Literature is dead, long live ethno-futurism!' (Hanson 1989).

In one of the most significant manifestos of ethno-futurism, Sven Kivisildnik's *Etnofuturismi ideaalid* (Ideals of Ethno-futurism, 1990), the motif of dying is extended to the entire Estonian nation: 'We are a dying forest people. . .'[4] Ethno-futurism had to find a way to cooperate with a more resilient nation and leave a trace of Estonians in history via a cultural code. To this end, the existing art paradigm had to be changed so that the Estonian nation could fuse with the new art that carried such a cultural code (Kivisildnik 1990).

Several manifestos and declarative introductions, using similar rhetorical devices, were published one after the other under the names of Hirohall, the Estonian Kostabi $ociety, or individuals affiliated with them, without directly referring to ethno-futurism (for example, Aspelund 1990; Hüübinud 1990; Teineke 1990). The most notorious of these was *Hüübinud vere manifest* (Manifesto of Clotted Blood, 1990), perhaps one of the most extreme texts that exists in the Estonian language. It speaks on behalf of a non-existent Estonian Islamic revolution, interweaving motifs of armaments, hallucinogens, cannibalism, and chemical warfare (because of its cleansing effect and 'It is disgusting to kill a filthy person'). This destructive program was designed to rescue the Estonian people from their dismal mental condition, which was expressed, among other things, through language. The phonemes were nearly extinct, and speech had become merely an imitation of speech. The first remedy was to start using real words (such as 'cunt of a pig,' 'you shit,' 'dick-noses,' and 'sod's ass;' see, Hüübinud 1990).

In the 2000s, the manuscript *Etnofuturismi sobing* (Conspiracy of Ethno-futurism), was found in Kauksi Ülle's archive. It was exhibited at the Tartu Art Museum on 24 April 2006, during the one-day event *Manifest! Manifest! Manifest!*. In form,

Conspiracy is not a manifesto in the traditional sense, but rather an accumulation of free-association utterances, such as 'The balls of an ethno-futurist are wet,' or 'The cat is not an Ethno-futurist.'[5] Its general attitude is similar to that of the aforementioned texts, although it is much more playful.

Some of the initial characteristics of ethno-futurism and its earlier manifestos include extreme parody, elements of the absurd, and other similar markers that prevented any serious consideration of their more radical ideas (a soup of baby fingers as an Estonian national dish, breeding furry Estonians [*karus-eestlased*], etc.). Consequently, during their publication, this did not happen. The remedy for a dismal mental condition or extinction was purportedly associated with either some kind of bodily activity or body part (eating, swearing, owning and using guns, cannibalism, blood, naked skin, and hair), all meant to shock audiences. These methods, known from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnivals, indeed emphasize extremes, and act as a slap in the face of bourgeois tastes.[6]

Another component is linguistic: the use of language must change, archaic codes based on repetition and parallels must be found, and the right words must be used. Language usage can be linked with the physical through abuse and obscene words that go beyond the arbitrariness of linguistic marking or function as a kind of indexical arche-language. Kivisildnik underscored the significance of insulting and swearing in several of his actions during that time (Aspelund 1991; Susi 1990).

These texts also relate to certain political attitudes. In its final years, the Soviet regime was too boring an adversary to be particularly bothered with.[7] Therefore, the performances of the Dalinist Chord of Abi-Piirissaare, as well as ethno-futuristic activities, were ironically targeted at the national attitudes of the Singing Revolution and the movement to restore independence. The primary opposition was to Christianity and Estonian nationalism that originated in the influence of nineteenth-century German culture. Both got off the ground again in the late 1980s. What exactly constituted opposition was more complicated. Frequent references to Islam appear to have formed a rather exoticist approach in Estonia in this period and seem to have aligned with ethno-futurism's general criticism of everything European. Whatever differed from the usual Eurocentric worldview was positively regarded, including Võro and Finno-Ugric culture, the ancient Estonian belief in Taara, and a critical stance toward democracy.

These three dimensions – bodily, linguistic, and political – formed rhetorical clusters that led to certain kinds of rhetorical substitute operations. Thus, Islamic motifs, neoliberalism, conservative-monarchist allusions, and primordial Finno-Ugric obscene language, as well as surrealism, the subconscious, and computers, all blended together, and were occasionally impossible to distinguish.

The primary parallel with these early manifestos seems to be the futurism of the beginning of the twentieth century, especially its developments in Russia, as observed by Hennoste (2012). There are also evident similarities with the manifestos and activities of the Zurich Dadaists – Tristan Tzara and others – including deliberate attempts to shock and provoke scandals. Moreover, surrealism provides notable parallels, as one of Hirohall's predecessors, the Dalinist Chord, explicitly associated itself with it.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the term 'futurism' in Estonia became synonymous with the entire avant-garde, including artists' provocative and farcical performative actions and, consequently, opposition to bourgeois society (Kruus 1981, 404–406; Sarapik 2009, 154), whereas in the 1980s the same metonymic role was played by the keyword *surrealism*. The latter began to denote everything different from official

art and art that was regarded as professional. This kind of broadly viewed surrealism did not aim at direct dissent, but rather sought to highlight the absurd and unconscious aspects of life. The movement was naturally aligned with the activities of the Dalinist Chord, which during the most heroic period of the independence movement (1988–-1989) made a mockery of national heritage and nationalist themes under the guise of surrealism. The earlier Hirohall and Kostabi $ociety manifestos exhibited a similar surrealist-ironic dimension. The surge of surrealism in Estonia reached its zenith on 9 February 1989 with the Dali evening at the KUKU club in Tallinn, when the World Surrealist Society was founded (Juske 1989). Following this, the expansion of the movement slowed and was primarily driven by the relatively heterogeneous art group Para'89, which organized numerous exhibitions and united artists from different generations and creative practices. In Hirohall manifestos, futurism thus also pushed explicit references to surrealism into the background.

Another line that influenced the manifestos of ethno-futurism was the search for the Finno-Ugric primeval essence and its romanticization, which became particularly popular beginning in the late 1970s. This was evident in nearly all fields of culture. On Kaljo Põllu's initiative, art students undertook expeditions to study Finno-Ugric peoples scattered around Russia, which had a significant impact on the creative work of many participants. Archaic Baltic-Finnic folk songs provided inspiration for the composer Veljo Tormis. In 1987, the independent VAT Theatre was established and, in 1989, one part of it became Ruto Killakund, which, under the leadership of Peeter Jalakas, also turned to Finno-Ugric mythology for ideas. They were all – including Hirohall members – influenced by, among other things, the writings of Uku Masing (1909–1985), a poet, theologian, and philosopher, living in internal exile. The Dalinist Chord briefly attempted to publish the manuscript journal *Kosmopoliitsõber* (Cosmopolitan Friend). Its first supplement, *Kosmopoliitsõbra raamatukogu* (Cosmopolitan Friend's Library), consisted of Uku Masing's *Viiskümmend rubaiid* (Fifty Rubais, Masing 1988).[8] Masing's work valued the mythologies of various indigenous cultures and revealed his skepticism toward Indo-European cultures.

Expansion of ethno-futurism

In the initial years, the core of ethno-futurism was primarily shaped by members of Hirohall and the Estonian Kostabi $ociety.[9] Between 1991–1993, EK$ published the periodical *Kostabi*, initially subtitled 'World and Tartu culture weekly' and subsequently changed to the 'Tartu cultural paper.' This was preceded by the EK$ page in the cultural paper *Vagabund* (Vagabond), which appeared only five times in 1990 and also published the aforementioned *Manifesto of Clotted Blood*. The positioning of the EK$ page as the last one in the publication suggested to the reader that it was intended as a semi-joke. The final page of the central Soviet-era Estonian cultural paper *Sirp ja Vasar* (Sickle and Hammer) was meant to be humorous, but occasionally managed to convey texts and caricatures that were critical of the Soviet authorities. Consequently, the local readership's expectations were predictable.

The *Kostabi* paper was declared to be:

> a periodical of elite culture and postmodernism, [that] introduces both the ancient and the avant-garde, the work of both God and Satan, and is designated for our intelligentsia. It seeks the golden mean in everything intellectual, in order to sometimes deviate to paths of furious radicalism, sometimes to noble conservatism. (Kostabi 1991)

The intention was to publish the paper on a weekly basis; the editorial staff included Sven Kivisildnik, Kaido Torop, Briidu Beier, Einar Tiits, and Indrek Särg as the editor-in-chief (Kostabi 1991). The years preceding the Estonian monetary reform of 1992 were successful for small-scale economic activities, as the still valid ruble inflated quickly and people tried to purchase whatever was available with their savings. A significant number of publications emerged, with a notable increase in the production of books with poor-quality print, which were churned out at an astonishing rate to at least attempt to fill the lacunae. The period from 1989–1991 also saw a boom in the publication activities of EK$. By 1993, however, the opportunities were exhausted, and *Kostabi* ceased production due to economic constraints after the publication of its 45th issue.

The paper addressed a wide range of topics: ideas developed from those presented in previous manifestos, parody and satire, farcical insults, and reviews of non-existent books prevailed, although there were also serious texts and educational writings.[10] Ethno-futurism was briefly mentioned but not developed further in any essential way. A few manifestos appeared, the most powerful of which was Franco Ilm's (1991) *Meie võitlus* (Our Struggle). The text shares similar ideas with the aforementioned manifestos, including hostility toward Christianity, humanism, and democracy, as well as a preference for native religion and monarchy, but there are also notable differences. While *Our Struggle* can be viewed as a parody encouraged by multiple declarations of the time, the text nevertheless seemed serious. It lacked the playfulness of ethno-futurist manifestos, where readers always had to reckon with the possibility of being misled, and the recognizable markers that prevented these texts from being taken entirely seriously. As ethno-futurism was not once mentioned, I would, unlike Tiit Hennoste (2012), exclude this manifesto from the analysis of the concept's development.[11]

In May 1993, the tabloid *Post: Rahva Tõeline Hääl* (Post: The True Voice of the People) began to appear and Kivisildnik was employed by the publication.[12] The paper's profile was much broader than that of the alternative cultural paper, *Kostabi*, although *Post*, too, published plenty of fake news, as well as occasional notices about ethno-futurism and the activities of ethno-futurists. The rhetorical devices of false news were clearly linked to analogous notices in *Kostabi*, although the *Post* lacked *Kostabi*'s deeper cultural dimension.

The benevolent or at least tolerant reception of ethno-futurism and the activities of the Estonian Kostabi $ociety endured until spring 1996, when the wider public became aware of Kivisildnik's text on the internet, *Eesti Nõukogude Kirjanike Liit – 1981. aasta seisuga, olulist* (The Estonian Soviet Writers' Union as in 1981: The Essentials; henceforth *Lexicon*; see also Sarapik 2016). Kivisildnik initially offered the manuscript to the magazine *Vikerkaar* for the special issue on Hirohall in 1990, but it was rejected. Nevertheless, information about it spread into cultural journalism. The initial reviews concluded that Kivisildnik's aim could have been to write a text that was essentially unpublishable (Kruus 1990; Pruul 1991). *Lexicon* presented a list of 167 individuals who were members of the Writers' Union in the second half of the 1980s. Each name was accompanied by a variety of lexical-style parodies and political labels, as well as random professions, obscene phrases, and other insulting expressions. It seems probable that the descriptions were added randomly, using the method of free association, so the left column of *Lexicon* could have contained any list and even fictional persons. Only a few entries involved a slight connection between the writer and the description (Kalda [1996] 2000;

Pruul [1996] 1998). Since it was dealing with real, live writers, however, *Lexicon* could not be taken as merely a fictional text or simply as a joke, and various scandals erupted over it. These led to lawsuits, the impounding of Kivisildnik's computer, and other tools. *Lexicon* nevertheless lacked an explicit relationship to ethno-futurism and does not refer directly to the ideas associated with it. A contextual link might have been established had *Lexicon* been published in the special issue of *Vikerkaar* featuring Hirohall's ethno-futurism in May 1990. The relationship is primarily based on the author's name, as *Kivisildnik* denotes both the person who, among others, articulated ethno-futurist principles, and the author of the controversial *Lexicon*. The method of free association and insult as a textual strategy also links the *Lexicon* to early ethno-futurist texts.

The scandals that erupted in 1996 around *Lexicon* did not directly affect attitudes toward ethno-futurism or other authors associated with Hirohall and EK$. As a result of these developments, certain dividing lines emerged and there was mutual hostility, although gradually diminishing among some circles. In 1998 Kivisildnik was accepted as a member of the Estonian Writers' Union, and thus the direct confrontation with this institution receded. This event, nevertheless, indicated that the period of textual 'anything goes' of the late 1980s and early 1990s was irrevocably over.[13]

The Finno-Ugric dimension

Ethno-futurism began to become more serious in 1994 and this highlighted a fundamentally different line of development. The seriousness was connected with a paradigmatic shift, which meant that ethno-futurism was treated as a survival strategy of endangered autochthonous peoples, rather than as an avant-garde artistic endeavor or an attempt to irritate the public. The origins of this line can be traced back in part to the very first formulations of ethno-futurism. Hirohall began performing abroad as early as 1990, when they participated in the Poetry Marathon in Lahti, Finland. Among other pieces, they presented *Manifesto of Clotted Blood*, described by an Estonian exile paper as 'a fresh breeze of 1960s underground poetry' (HS/H 1990). Their participation in the 1991 Uralic Writers' Conference in Espoo, Finland, was different. Andres Heinapuu (1991), who represented the Estonian-Samian Society, expressed regret that of the Estonian ethno-futurists (Kauksi Ülle, Karl Martin Sinijärv, and Neeme Kahusk) who had all prepared their talks and 'really had something concrete and constructive to say,' only Kauksi Ülle had the opportunity to speak. This observation can be regarded as the initial statement that ethno-futurism had something to offer endangered small peoples.[14]

The Finno-Ugric trend was mainly related to the activities of Kauksi Ülle, and no longer as a mere poet writing in the Võro language. The Võro and Seto cultures and languages began to be seen as having been colonized by the larger Estonian-language community. This, in turn, sparked renewed interest in the practically extinct Livonian language and facilitated contact with other Finno-Ugric writers. This shift was also significant in that it disrupted one potential trajectory of political development, the proclamation of Estonian national fundamentalism under the guise of ethno-futurism.[15] This internal divergence did not result in conflicts within the group, as the Finno-Ugric peoples, a potential area for the development of ethno-futurism, were also of interest to Karl-Martin Sinijärv and Sven Kivisildnik, representatives of the more 'futuristic' part of Hirohall.

One of the pivotal moments in the evolution of ethno-futurism was the First Conference of Ethno-futurism held by the Young Authors of the Finno-Ugric Peoples in Tartu on 4–9 May 1994, along with the collection *Waterfowl Way* in English and Russian which was compiled based on the conference (Kauksi 1995). On Kauksi Ülle's initiative, the conference was organized by EK$ in collaboration with Fenno-Ugria and financed by the Open Estonia Foundation. Three follow-up conferences were subsequently held: in 1998 in Udmurtia, and in 1999 and 2001 in Estonia. All these conferences resulted in numerous publications on ethno-futurism.

Regarding the development of the concept, it is important to note the manifesto completed at the end of 1994 and published in the collection *Waterfowl Way* by four authors (Maarja Pärl-Lõhmus, Kauksi Ülle, Andres Heinapuu, and Sven Kivisildnik), entitled 'Ethnofuturism: The Mode of Thinking and a Possibility for the Future' (Pärl-Lõhmus et al. 1995, published simultaneously in Finnish as; Pärl-Lõhmus et al. 1994). It was written by two authors who were members of Hirohall and two others who believed that ethno-futurism had something to offer to young Finno-Ugric writers and artists.

While the first manifesto presented ethno-futurism in terms of a dying forest people (Kivisildnik 1990), the phrase 'A joint decision to survive was made' (Pärl-Lõhmus et al. 1995, 11) indicates a changed attitude. This time, therefore, the manifesto represented young Finno-Ugric creators who had gathered at the Tartu conference and were prepared to base their way of thinking on ethno-futurism, which they believed could guarantee the survival of these peoples. *Waterfowl Way* also presented two closely related definitions of ethno-futurism. In her article, Piret Viires (1995, 22) defined ethno-futurism as follows: 'In general, the concept of ethnofuturism unites either the archaic form (e.g. runo song) and contemporary vision of the world, or vice versa, a futuristic form and ancient, traditional world view. Ethnofuturism can also be related to surrealism, but it is more nationalistic in its manifestations.' Viires repeated this idea in a slightly modified form in her subsequent works (Viires 1996, 236; 2012, 76) and this is perhaps one of the most widely known definitions of ethno-futurism, often used without any citation. The four authors' manifesto added the metaphor of a spark:

> Ethnofuturism *is a spark* that appears in culture when the two poles of the latter nature meet. These poles are stratifications, which are the most primeval and most peculiar to the nation on the one hand and the newest and most modern phenomena in world culture on the other hand. (Pärl-Lõhmus et al. 1995, 11; emphasis by author)

What is noteworthy about this manifesto is its omission of twentieth-century world culture and even Estonia's own avant-garde. The text provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Estonian culture during the awakening period, reiterates the damaging influence of German and Russian culture from this period, and lists earlier models, primarily related to the aforementioned Finno-Ugric primevalism and the search for its own religion. Estonian futurists are not mentioned, nor are the cultural innovators of the early twentieth century, such as the *Noor-Eesti* (Young Estonia) group.[16]

Since Estonia had recently regained its independence, it was possible to give a helping hand to other Finno-Ugric peoples who might potentially benefit from the Estonian experience. The focus of the manifesto shifted from Estonians presented in the third person to Finno-Ugrians in the first person – as 'we.' The final section of the manifesto was probably written by Sven Kivisildnik, as it diverges from the preceding

text in tone, offering a program of action oriented toward the future.[17] According to his thesis, forest peoples, who are characterized by individuality and are not at home in urban culture, might truly benefit from the internet. Moreover, their cultural backgrounds and life experiences could confer a notable advantage upon them over the 'old' Western cultural nations, which are not as flexible and contain more hierarchy and bureaucracy. Forest peoples are well-suited to the information-abundant, jungle-style web environment. During the initial years of its circulation, the internet was indeed perceived as a utopian land of opportunities, supposedly the 'first free working structure, which lacks central control and the possibility for domination and control of ideas' (Pärl-Lõhmus et al. 1995, 15).

Subsequent conferences of young creatives largely adhered to the same trends as the first. They focused on ethno-futurism as a positive future scenario for the Finno-Ugric peoples, as well as a movement that enhanced their development. Substantial papers were presented, for example, by the literary scholar Kari Sallamaa from Oulu University, the political scientist Rein Taagepera, and Andres and Ott Heinapuu, all attempting, in one way or another, to turn ethno-futurism into a distinctive Finno-Ugric attitude of life or even philosophy (see, for example, O. Heinapuu 2003; O. Heinapuu and A. Heinapuu 2002; Sallamaa 1999, 2001, 2006; Taagepera 1999). Rein Taagepera differentiated small peoples' development scenarios into three extreme groups, contrasting ethno-futurism with cosmo-futurism, on the one hand, and with an ethno-past orientation (or 'ethno-preterism'), on the other. Ethno-futurism looks to the future and regards the development of ethnic culture as dynamic and open, hence offering ethnic plurality. Cosmo-futurism, on the contrary, represents post-ethnic or transnational tendencies, as evidenced by the previous shaping of the Soviet peoples or the melting pot of peoples in the United States. The core of ethno-preterism is the maintaining of ethnic culture, which also opposes ethno-futurism in its conventional conservatism (Taagepera 1999).

Branching and entwining

The December 1995 issue of *Vikerkaar* was once again dedicated to ethno-futurism, publishing, among other things, one of its most significant interpretations, the critic Kajar Pruul's (1995) 'Ethno-symbolism and ethno-futurism: Theses from revolution-era literature.' One is led to believe that Pruul, as one of the magazine's editors, perceived the potential for the concept to disintegrate and, therefore, sought to provide a 'methodological helping hand.' To prevent this disintegration, he introduced the concept of ethno-symbolism alongside ethno-futurism.

These two concepts are primarily textual strategies, but they also have worldviews and ideological roles to play. While ethno-symbolism, according to Pruuli, is characterized by paranoia, repetition, and passive heroism, ethno-futurism is schizoid, ambivalent, and ironic. Ethno-symbolism is particularly evident in poetry, while ethno-futurism is dominated by quasi-manifestos, self-portraits, (auto)biographies, ideas, and performance over written texts. Ethno-symbolism focuses on the yearning for the past and 'affirmation of ethnic identity'; whereas in ethno-futurism, ethnic identity becomes 'the most exciting variable, a source of inexhaustible transformations and play' (Pruul 1995, 60).

What matters in Pruul's analysis is that the pair of concepts, ethno-symbolism – ethno-futurism, is clearly time- and society-centered. Ethno-futurism can only

emerge during a transition period, in conjunction with a changing society, political upheaval, and the disappearance of censorship. The advent of the new era does not, however, entirely eliminate ethno-symbolism; rather, it relegates it to the background as a principle of text production, while emphasizing the performative aspect, most vividly manifested in the actions of the Singing Revolution and the Baltic Way. This pair of concepts does not encompass the entirety of textual practice and cultural expression, and alongside them there are manifestations that are not necessarily related to ethnos.

Ethno-symbolism, probably also encompassing the features of national romanticism and national symbolism, is comparable to what has been called national conservatism in the analysis of visual arts. The tripartite division of Jaak Kangilaski, who distinguished three discursive influences in Soviet art history (pro-authority, Western avant-garde oriented, and national-conservative), is well known (Kangilaski 1999, 2016, 39). It also has common features with Taagepera's notion of ethno-preterism.

Divisions into two parts have also been used before to signify a sense of in-betweenness or the dual nature of being, which dates back to the Young Estonia period and became particularly acute during the transition era. The term 'national cosmopolitism,' for instance, emerged concurrently with the ethno-futurist manifesto. Among the first to formulate this notion was the poet and critic Hasso Krull (1989). On 30–31 October 1990 a conference of the same title was held, presenting (deliberately) heterogeneous papers and defining national cosmopolitism as a 'paradoxical pair of concepts that marks various attempts in a kind of feverish way to overcome the scarcity of cultural power, the opposition between wishing and ability, which otherwise would inevitably cause feelings of inferiority and defenselessness compared to more massive foreign cultures' (Krull and Viires 1990). Papers were expected from the fields of the political and aesthetic avant-garde, surrealism, dadaism, and futurism (Krull and Viires 1990; see also Viires 1991). While the usage of this specific term was short-lived, similar phenomena were naturally discussed later.

Two fundamentally divergent trends emerged from the above. In a simplified way, these could be approached from the perspective of tension in the field between the two components of the term 'ethno-futurism:' ethnos and futurism. As a rule, ethnic restriction presupposes a past dimension, a history of ethnos formation. In contrast, futurism often encourages a denial of the past, or at least the subordination of the past to the future. The intensity of this tension is largely dependent on the different ways in which the notion of ethnos is conceived. These include whether it is understood as essentialist, as something permanently linked to a certain social group which can be determined in positive terms, or as non-essentialist, conforming and changing over time, dissoluble, pluralistic, and interchangeable. In Pruul's words: 'These thought games in fact deconstruct the established understanding about the notions of "ethnos" and "nation" and the relationship between them, playing out linguistic (or religious), territorial and racial-ethnic identities against one another' (Pruul 1995, 61–62). Similarly, the notion futurism refers to two different types of usage. It could signify the avant-garde movement that started in 1909 in Italy, the resonance of which occurred in Estonia in the period preceding and following World War I, or it can be simply understood as a dimension of the future, a future-oriented perspective.

The non-essentialist strand of ethno-futurism, which emerged earlier, kept the controversies open, harnessing their potential and energy through textual practices and cultural innovations, as well as through social and ideological critiques that were

occasionally farcical. Its more radical forms were indeed able to operate only within unstable political circumstances. In that case futurism refers to the cultural avant-garde, rather than a futurological phenomenon.

The essentialist interpretation of ethnos favors a futurological interpretation of futurism and an attempt to lower the tension. This line is thus less radical, not directly oriented toward artistic practices, but ambitiously aiming to shape considerably broader social processes, namely the survival of small nations. This line lacks temporal frames or, if they do exist, they depend on the development logic of each nation, which can involve periods of sharp transition as well as stabilization, stagnation, or quiet decline. This kind of orientation toward the future distinguishes the more essentialist ethno-futurism from ethno-symbolism, characterized by idealizing some section of the past, such as prehistory or the golden age.

The question might arise, although the current article leaves it unanswered, of whether it is appropriate to use the same term to denote two phenomena that are essentially quite different. Hennoste (2012, 279) referred to them using two different spellings, namely ethno-*futurism* and *ethno*-futurism. It is important to note that both Pruul and Hennoste actually excluded the Finno-Ugric trend in their treatment: Pruul never mentioned it, discussing only Kauksi Ülle's Võro orientation and, for Hennoste, it constituted ethno-futurism's less interesting and significant afterlife. Hennoste (2012, 265) also concluded that, of the Hirohall group, only Kivisildnik and Sinijärv gave literary form to ethno-futurist ideas, and it is their work that he primarily focused on. Pruuli's analysis of ethno-futurist text creation, however, sought to include all Hirohall poets. In Valeria Ränik's poetry, he ascribed the ethno-futurist role to autobiography, which determined the ways of reading. In Kauksi Ülle's poetry, he attributed the ethno-futurist role to the Võro language and ideology.

This was subsequently reinforced by Hasso Krull, who observed that the Võro language in Kauksi Ülle's text represents an 'ethno-futurist manifestation' that is more convincing than any Marinetti-style manifesto could be (Krull 2012, 1279). Ethno-futurism makes it possible to start a new dialogue with literary modernism and concepts of ethnicity, as it transcends traditional nationalism 'without, however, completely denying its content: the roots of ethno-futurism are not in nationalism, but in pre-nationalist traditions' (1278–1279). Krull thus proposed a solution to unite the loose ends of ethno-futurism again, leaving aside the treatment of essentialist ethnos.

A rather similar idea is present in the first manifestos of ethno-futurism: the canon of the history of the Estonian nation-state contains a crucial error, made by worshiping a foreign culture in the German- and Russian-friendly nineteenth century, and subsequently storming headlong into Europe. This error could have been rectified through the lens of ethno-futurism by uniting archaic, pre-modernist experiences with a vision of the future. Although earlier ethno-futurism eschewed treating ethnos as essentialist, it nevertheless anchored itself in some further, imaginary pre-Christian arche-history, which prevented it from dissipating into an imaginary future.

With regard to the term ethno-futurism, these two trends, based on essentialist and non-essentialist understandings of ethnicity, must still be considered. One possible means of distinguishing between them is to refer to the earlier trend as avant-garde ethno-futurism and the later one as Finno-Ugric (or 'Smugric') ethno-futurism.[18] This would leave the term open for further developments.

Afterlife

The usage of the term in the 2000s can be called a kind of afterlife. Sporadically, the word ethno-futurism pops up not only in Estonia, but also in Finland and Russia. Indeed, the movement proved to be quite viable among several Finno-Ugric peoples, particularly the Udmurts (Kreuger 2017; Rozenberg and Plehanova 2005), so long as political circumstances permitted. By 2011, ethno-futurism had reached the Estonian national core curriculum of upper secondary schools (Haridus- ja Noorteamet 2011).

Among Hirohall members, avant-garde ethno-futurism was later mainly connected with the work of Kivisildnik, although he no longer explicitly referred to it as such. The links with others were more casual and ended in the 1990s. Karl Martin Sinijärv (1997, 6) published a poem expressing resignation and titled *Etnofuturisti väsimus* ('The Fatigue of an Ethno-futurist'). During the third conference of ethno-futurism, Jüri Ehlvest published the essay 'Etnofuturistlik maailmapilt' ('Ethno-futurist World View,' Ehlvest 1999). Behind the manifesto-like title were rather obscure developments of ideas that declared his short story collection *Elumask* (Mask of Life, Ehlvest 1998) to be the bible of ethno-futurism. Kauksi Ülle has continued the tradition of Finno-Ugric ethno-futurism by promoting the Seto and Võro movements.[19]

Additionally, gradual developments have been occurring outside the Finno-Ugric realm. These developments are characterized by the association of ethno-futurism with the cultural and social practices of either marginalized social groups or indigenous peoples. While the term's origin is usually linked to Estonia, this connection may have already been severed.[20] Following the pattern of ethno-futurism, other futurism-related terms have been coined. In 1993, the term 'Afrofuturism' (Capers 2019; Dery [1993] 1994) was introduced more or less independently, which in turn led to the creation of new compounds and terms (Avanessian and Moalemi 2018).

Conclusion

Two lines of development of ethno-futurism during the transition period of the 1980s–1990s in Estonia were drawn. The heyday of the first manifestos' parodic, provocative cultural movement, groping for the borders of literature, was 1989–1993. From 1994 onwards, the idea of ethno-futurism as the survival strategy of small nations was confirmed via various cultural practices. The connection of the first line with ethnos is non-essentialist. This has also been examined within the framework of postmodernism and avant-garde movements. In the case of the second line, the essentialist understanding of ethnos dominates.

This article posed the question of whether ethno-futurism has some productive potential for analyzing the transitional period in Estonia, as well as in eastern Europe more broadly. On the one hand, the changing and ambivalent use of the term discussed above argues against this. On the other hand, early ethno-futurism was such a symptomatic phenomenon of the transition period that it cannot be ignored. Firstly, the concept of ethno-futurism seems truly to have played a significant role in the cultural development of this particular era and region, and in the context of the struggle between contradictory possibilities: between the torments of the past and utopian desires, between a sense of cultural inferiority and textual exhilaration. Secondly, this is a phenomenon that indeed only becomes visible when the old has not yet ended and the new has not yet begun in the wasteland of political instability,

collapse, and new growth. With certain specifications, such as that it is an avant-garde (or post-avant-garde, see Hennoste 2012, 282) movement, and when applied to a specific time frame, it is possible to reveal various features of the transition period through the term ethno-futurism.

I would like to mention a few more significant features. First, ethno-futurism assumes a certain deconstructive linguistic shift; it could be a change of language, a disruption of the links between speech and writing (alteration of spelling or typography), or arduous linguistic effort. Language becomes material and literature a text-creation machine.

Second, on the aesthetic and poetic level, ethno-futurism is characterized by non-aestheticism. It does not aspire to any aesthetic values, but does not oppose them either (inevitably, non-aestheticism was opposed to the prevailing taste in late Soviet period art, but this was unintentional). Unlike various early twentieth-century avant-garde movements, ethno-futurism lacked the ambition of being a total work of art.

Third, ethno-futurism presupposes a certain opposition, or, in other words, it needs something or someone to contrast with. It can be a dominant language, a cultural principle (ethno-symbolism), or a political or ideological attitude. In addition to other possible features, ethno-futurism acknowledges its own otherness and consciously exhibits it. Consequently, ethno-futurism cannot be the dominant phenomenon in a given cultural space, but only a type of resistance movement.

Fourth, on the rhetorical level, ethno-futurism presupposed a serious, imaginary, or parodical desire to act with texts, to dismantle the boundaries between art and life, and to intervene in the functioning of the state and politics. This occurs primarily on the border of provocation and anti-normativity, in the intermediate area between possibilities of language play and linguistic acts.

Fifth, connected with the previous is the political, ideological, and religious dimension of ethno-futurism. Some of its attitudes were quite consistent (anti-Christianity, skepticism regarding democracy, and a hint of neoliberalism). At the same time, the form of expression classifies ethno-futurist texts as either fictional texts, or quasi/pseudo-political manifestations. This was supported by the authors' constructions of their self-images; the authorial images of Kivisildnik, Ehlvest, and Sinijärv were intentionally shaped so that nobody took their addresses to society too seriously. Ethno-futurism's overt radical provocativeness was generally and benevolently seen as a joke.

Taken together, ethno-futurism, therefore, clearly denoted the befuddlement in cultural self-perception during the pivotal transition years of 1989–1991. All of a sudden everything seemed possible, and all borders were open. It was clear that something had to be done, but there were forces pulling from different directions, both toward the past and toward the future. By 1994 this situation in Estonia was nearly over and it was thus quite natural that attempts were made to expand ethno-futurism to promote the cultures of peoples lacking their own states, because ethno-futurism cannot act as the ideology of an independent country or a dominant cultural field.

Subsequent developments in the twenty-first century, which are only briefly outlined in this article, including many similar futuristic concepts that have emerged based on family resemblance (Afrofuturism, Chicana-futurism, etc.), are also linked to a certain anticipation

of change, a desire to free oneself from social or cultural marginality. It is the later use of ethno-futurism in the service of radical right-wing ideology that takes us furthest from its original ideas, which, conversely, confirms the instability of the concept and the need to contextualize it within a specific spatial and temporal framework.

Notes

1. The name of the group was explained as follows: 'Afterwards, Hirohall was founded, which means "gray horse" in the [South Estonian] Seto language (associations: pale horse [Agatha Christie's novel] and "herohall" in English)' (Hanson 1989).
2. The *Eesti Kostabi $elts* was founded on 31 May 1989 and officially registered on 11 September 1989. The first chairman was Karl-Martin Sinijärv, followed by Sven Kivisildnik. The acronym of the Estonian Kostabi $ociety *EK$* implicitly refers to the initials of the Estonian Literary Society (*Eesti Kirjanduse Selts*, EKS), and the dollar sign ironically emphasizes the pursuit of economic success. The Estonian Literary Society, hugely important in Estonian culture, was established in 1907, closed down by the Soviet authorities in 1940, and reestablished in 1992, therefore, later than the Kostabi $ociety. It was, in turn, founded to replace the Society of Estonian Literati (*Eesti Kirjameeste Selts*, 1872–1893), which existed during the period of national awakening. The Estonian Kostabi Association was formally dissolved in 2000. 'Eesti Kostabi-Selts.' Rahvusarhiiv (National Archives of Estonia), ERA.5130.2.2262.
3. The concept of 'Self-Managing Estonia' was outlined by Siim Kallas, Tiit Made, Edgar Savisaar, and Mikk Titma in 'A Proposal: Estonian SSR to Full Self-Accounting' (*Ettepanek: kogu Eesti NSV täielikule isemajandamisele* or *IME*), published on 26 September 1987 in the newspaper *Edasi* (Saharov 2021). In 1987, the planned economy of the Soviet Union was relaxed and joint enterprises with foreign partners were permitted. Additionally, private cooperatives producing consumer goods and food were allowed to operate from May 1988 onwards.
4. See also: 'Sven Kivisildnik: The Estonian people are dying out. Every dying nation must ask the question: how to die out. Do not delude yourself with some talk of statehood or culture. Culture is nothing more than the solemn resolution of sad situations' (Aspelund 1990).
5. The typewritten manifesto collection published in conjunction with the event is comprised of a significantly abridged version of 'Conspiracy' (Kaljula and Grigor 2006), bearing the year 1988 and signed by Sven Kivisildnik, Karl Martin Sinijärv, Jüri Ehlvest, and Kauksi Ülle. The original manuscript lacks the date and the names of the authors. Comparing it with other texts, it seems that 'Conspiracy' was written in 1989 and the date was added later.
6. *Poshchechina obshchestvennomu vkusu* ('Slap in the Face of Public Taste,' Burlyuk et al. 1912) was a manifesto by the Russian futurists David Burliuk, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Velimir Khlebnikov, published in a collection of the same name (Burlyuk et al. 1912).
7. The only exceptions were the commissioned contributions to the humor magazine *Pikker* (God of Lightning) (1989, no. 13), which was directly related to perestroika.
8. A crucial role in Estonian cultural history during the Soviet period was played by *Loomingu Raamatukogu* (Library of Creation), a periodical supplement of the literary journal *Looming* (Creation), which began as a series of books in 1957. Thanks to somewhat more liberal censorship rules, this series was able to publish a large number of translations of significant literary works. The format, a book series issued by a cultural journal, originated with the series *Biblioteka 'Ogonek*,' (Library 'Spark') which also played an important role as a publisher of translated works in Soviet Russia.
9. The first manifesto, published under the name of Sven Kivisildnik, called the members of Hirohall experts on ethno-futurism (Kivisildnik 1990, 40).
10. *Kostabi*, for example, published as a follow-up *A Concise History of Modern Painting* by Herbert Read (1959, 1991), one of the most significant books in Estonian self-publishing history. The book was translated by the art group *Visarid* in 1968. Despite its somewhat outdated nature, the book was circulated and read until the 1990s.
11. The pseudonym Franco Ilm was used by Lauris Kaplinski. 'Our Struggle' described a rather absurd, fundamentalist plan of action on behalf of the believers in a native religion, together with terrorism, mass murders, and other similar activities. A few years later, Kaplinski added this to his homepage. In 2005, 14 years after the text's first publication, criminal charges were

brought against him for inciting social hostility. The case proceeded through various court hearings until it reached the Supreme Court, where Kaplinski was acquitted (Šmutov 2006).

12. Other subtitles were used as well, such as *Expressive News, Everyone's Evening Paper*, and *Real Estonian Express*. The first editor-in-chief was Sulev Valner.
13. Lauris Kaplinski's legal saga in relation to the publication of 'Our Struggle' is rather similar. It also indicated that the strategies of writing and reception had changed (see also Väljataga 2005).
14. Ethnofuturism, although not explicitly defined, is also mentioned in the introduction to the first volume of the Kaika Summer University, dedicated to the promotion of the Võro language and culture, dated 4 April 1990 (Kauksi 1990).
15. Subsequent political developments confirm the existence of such a possibility. In 2017, the *Sinine äratus* (the Blue Awakening youth movement), an affiliate of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), which represented national fundamentalism, began organizing conferences called Etnofutur for nationalists from different countries (see also the manifesto *Rebirth of Europe: The Ethnofuturist Manifesto*, published under the names of two leaders of the Blue Awakening at the time, Ruuben Kaalep and August Meister [Kaalep and Meister 2020]). The Blue Awakening was closely connected to the youth organization of Finland's far-right Finns Party, which openly presented ethno-nationalist views, including determining who could be considered a true Finn (see, for example, Nieminen 2019).
16. The first manifesto of Young Estonia, 'Aspirations of the Young,' also directed against German and Russian influences, formulated one of the most pivotal slogans in Estonian culture, 'More European culture! Let us remain Estonians, but also become Europeans!' ('Noor Eesti' toim. "Noor Eesti" toim 1905, 17).
17. Kivisildnik used quite similar wording in his conference overview in the paper *Post* (Kivisildnik 1994); later this section of the manifesto appeared in a slightly modified form in the magazine *Vikerkaar*, accompanied by a discussion of the sale of art by Navitrolla on the Internet (Kivisildnik 1995).
18. The term 'Smugric' (*smugri*) was a colloquial abbreviation for 'Finno-Ugric' that spread in the Estonian press during the latter half of the 1990s.
19. In 2015, the 5th Ethno-futurist Conference of Finno-Ugric Authors took place (Kauksi 2016).
20. In 2022, for example, Andrew Scott Davis at the University of Missouri-Kansas City defended his PhD thesis on ethno-futurism, which does not have a single reference to Estonia (Davis 2022).

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