



Border Crossing Trauma Seen Through Hyper-Naturalist Prose and Surreal Forms of Narration

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- Abstract** This article studies two novels by Karelian writer Arvi Perttu, of 2001 and 2004. These report traumatic experiences that relate to territorial and symbolic border crossings in the Finnish-Russian borderlands, a national border between Finland and Russian Karelia that has been the source and context of significantly traumatic events throughout history. The analysis focuses on narratives and metaphors in Perttu's novels that are representative of border and mobility related traumatic experiences. It is guided by the questions what the often grotesque and surreal representations of trauma in Perttu's works induce readers to see, how the hyper-naturalist prose in Perttu's gloomy and dark works can lead to give it a label, and how his surreal forms of narration function as a form of trauma language.
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“I swayed between the two worlds, Finland and Russia, west and east, and I now stood on this side of the border, still unsteady.”

(Konkka 1939, 358).

“Was that the border river? How insignificant it looked, and how different worlds it demarcated from each other. Two whole worlds. [...] I wish, I could still turn around, and return home [...].”

(Hurre 1942, 11.)

“We had entered a strange country. [...] I must say, everything seemed very confusing.”

(Tuominen 1957, 248).

Introduction

These examples illustrate the experiences of people who have crossed the Finnish–Russian national border. They emphasize a sense of disorientation associated with border crossing, that is often followed by feelings of instability, homelessness and alienation. After crossing a border, a feeling of disorientation is triggered by the encounter with a “world” that appears strange and curious, almost like a fantasy. These examples show poignantly the multifaceted nature of border crossing experiences that are always subject to physical, emotional and cognitive adjustment, and it is difficult to differentiate these elements from each other (Johnson et al. 2011, 62–63).

In its extremity, border crossing can be a traumatic experience. In a hostile environment, a border crosser can experience or be threatened by witness persecution or even violence. Violence can be targeted at both social and physical bodies, and the violence itself can be both physical as well as discursive, and this has the effects of otherizing, humiliating, and desecrating (Aldama 2003, 8). Furthermore, a border crosser may be forced to permanently leave their home and family, and might not find his or her place in a new country or culture, but rather stay in-between the different cultures, languages and societies. These sudden or insidious border crossing experiences can shatter the border crosser’s worldview and identity, and these are regarded as being central signs of cultural trauma (Sztompka 2004, 158–162, 171–175). In addition to personal experiences, historical events such as wars and border conflicts can traumatize people living in the borderlands. In these cases, so-called trans-historical traumas move from one generation to another and are “reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present” (LaCapra 1999, 700).



Border crossing experiences can vary from the ordinary to the traumatic, and are a highly topical theme in today's world as they represent the everyday lives of millions of people. The recent *International Migration Report* provided by UN, shows that 258 million people have left their homes more or less permanently (United Nations 2017, 4). The reasons for migrating are various, and migrants include people who are forced to migrate because of war, nature catastrophes, persecution, or severe threat of violence. However, migrants also include people who are mobile in their everyday life because of work, leisure, or family circumstances.

This article studies two novels written by Arvi Perttu: *Pain (Kipu 2014)* and *Symposium of Petrozavodsk (Petroskoin symposiumi: 2001)*. These novels address traumatic experiences that relate to territorial and symbolic borders and border crossings of Finnish migrants in the Finnish-Russian borderlands. In Perttu's novels, the traumatic experiences are seen as the results of violence, death and profound changes in the lives of individuals due to border crossings, and are of such magnitude that they cause an "incomparable amount of suffering" so that it is impossible for the individual to "comprehend the experience or to integrate it in the individual's understanding of the world" (Schweiger 2015, 346). In Perttu's novels, the territorial border refers to the national border between Finland and Russia that has been the source and context of several significantly traumatic events throughout history. Symbolic borders refer to various borders emerging in encounters between people, in social and cultural practices, and in different discourses (Johnson et al. 2011, 63).

The analysis focuses on narratives and metaphors in Perttu's novels that are representative of border and mobility related traumatic experiences. The research questions are: What do the representations of trauma, that are often grotesque¹ and surreal² in Perttu's works, force readers to see (see Caruth 2008)? How can the hyper-naturalist³ and grotesque prose that can be used to label Perttu's gloomy and dark works, as well as his surreal forms of narration function as a form of trauma language (Caruth 2011)?

Literature, poetry and art can function as instruments for communicating border and mobility related experiences in more multifaceted ways than the use of everyday language. They can also deepen or enrich our understanding about such experiences. The significance of poetic and artistic representations is that they "can provide moral, political, and aesthetic ways of understanding" and these understandings are never seen as "simple, flat, and formulaic" (Winn 2008, 7). Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that we can "rediscover the perceived world with the help of modern art and philosophy" (Baldwin 2004, 10). Through artistic representations, we can distance ourselves from our everyday observations and experiences, and study them from different and even surprising viewpoints. As a result, when represented through art, the world

1 Grotesque refers here to ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant, freakish and unnatural; aberrations from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion (Cuddon 1999, p. 367–368). Sometimes grotesque is used in connection with 'carnevalistic' and 'magic realism'. In literature and art, grotesque is often used as an instrument of societal and cultural criticism

2 Surrealists in art and literature have been interested in expressing the workings of the unconscious mind, in studying dreams and hallucinations, and the threshold of the conscious mind. (Cuddon 1999, p. 882–883.)

3 According to literature researcher Mark Lipovetsky, hyper-naturalist prose was a new version of realism in Russian literature that was introduced in the culture of Perestroika. Typical motifs of hyper-naturalist prose were "everyday cruelty, crimes, tortures, and humiliations of recruits in army, the horror of prisons and other penitentiaries, the ordinary life of homeless derelicts and prostitutes." These motifs "typically evoked anger and moral indignation among the critics and readers." (Lipovetsky 2011, p. 179.)



appears as being “strange” and even “paradoxical” (Baldwin 2004, 10–11). Literature can function as an instrument through which we can study border and mobility related experiences, and take advantage of the unusual and bizarre viewpoints it provides. In some cases, unusual and estranged viewpoints can be the only possible means through which traumatic experiences can be discussed (Whitehead 2004, 83–84).

The theme and viewpoint of the article connect with cultural studies and the multidisciplinary field of border studies, where cultural and humanist approaches have gained more visibility over the past decade (Brunet-Jailly 2005; Konrad and Nicol 2011, 74–75). The aspect of trauma has been noted also in the recent border studies (Wilson & Donnan 2012), and also from the point of view of literature and artistic practices (Kurki 2016b; Ristolainen 2014; Eaton 2003). The theoretical background of the article is based also on multidisciplinary trauma studies. In the 1990s, the early scholarship of multidisciplinary trauma studies was based on the idea that trauma is something unspeakable and un-representable for the person who experiences it. According to literature and trauma researcher Michelle Balaev (2014, 1–2), the idea of un-representability was based on Freud’s theories, and was introduced, for example by theorists such as Cathy Caruth. According to the idea of un-representability, trauma is an unsolved mystery to the unconscious, and it illustrates the inherent conflict between the experience and the language. According to Caruth (1991, 187), the traumatic event cannot be experienced or approached at the moment of its occurrence, and can be sensed and observed only in another place and in another time. Michelle Balaev (as well as other recent multidisciplinary trauma researchers) has challenged the idea of the un-representability of trauma (Balaev 2014, 2–6). In these studies, trauma has been defined and studied from various theoretical viewpoints, and the literature research, has focused for example on the semiotic, rhetorical and social dimensions of trauma. The research has also questioned the universality of trauma features, and focuses on the uniqueness of trauma, its connectedness with societal and cultural contexts, and the relationship between trauma, politics, memory and remembering.

Traumatic Borderland as a Context for Writing

The Finnish-Russian national border has a long history as being both a porous border that allows mobility across the border, and also as an iron curtain that blocks mobility almost entirely. It has also been a source of various traumas for the people moving across the border and living in the borderland areas. Border shifts have split the borderland area in several different ways during past centuries. The shifting border has thus separated ethnolinguistic and language groups on both sides of the national border [see Fig. 1]. Especially, the



Fig. 1: Russian and Finnish Karelia (grey area).



borderland area of Karelia has become a crystallized example of the Finnish-Russian borderlands as a traumatizing environment that serves also as a stage for Arvi Perttu's novels.

From the 12th century until the early 19th century, Finland belonged to Sweden and the border divided the region of Karelia between Russia and Sweden. During the centuries of Swedish reign, the national border that divided Karelia shifted on several occasions. In 1809, Finland was separated from Sweden and annexed to Russia, where it became an autonomous grand duchy. Then, the whole region of Karelia became part of Russia. In 1917, Finland became independent from Russia, and in 1918, the national border was defined between the two countries, dividing Karelia between Russia and Finland. According to Nick Baron (2007, 24–27), the porousness of the Russia-Finland border is exemplified by the fact that despite its existence, army troops and also civilians continued to move across the border in both directions. This level of mobility decreased significantly after 1922 when Soviet-Russia and Finland signed a treaty that confirmed the border, and border guards were placed to monitor the treaty's enforcement. The border was shifted twice more: first after the so-called Winter War (1939–1940), and a second time after the so-called Continuation War (1941–1944), both of which were fought between Finland and the Soviet Union. After the Continuation War, the border was set in its current location. Today, the border divides Karelia into two halves: Russian and Finnish Karelia, and Karelia thus exists on both sides of the national border.

For the past hundred years, people have migrated across the Finnish-Russian national border in both directions. According to Finnish historians (Rislakki and Lahti-Argutina 1997, 17–19; Paastela 2003, 68, 76–77; Vettenniemi 2004, 47; Engman 2005, 387), approximately 15,000–20,000 people (25,000–30,000 according to some estimations) moved from Finland to the Soviet Union in the early decades of the 20th century. While the reasons for migration were mostly political, many migrants looked to find work and start a new life on the Soviet side of the border. In addition, the wars between Finland and the Soviet Union resulted in a large-scale mobility across the border, where over 400,000 people were evacuated from the borderland and re-settled in other areas of Finland (Raninen-Siiskonen 1999, 15). After the Second World War and up until the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the border between Finland and the Soviet Union functioned as a manifestation of the Cold War. The border, the 'Iron Curtain', effectively hindered mobility across the border. For ordinary citizens, opportunities for interactions across the border were minimal, and what little interaction there was mostly took place through various cultural and political organizations. However, this was a standard practice in other Soviet borderlands, and not restricted to Finland (Chandler 1998, 83). When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the border opened up, and mobility across the border became both livelier and a part of everyday life.⁴ During the post-Soviet era, migration from Finland to Russia has been of a low level, involving approximately 6,600 people (Statistics Finland 2016). However, 54,000 people have moved from Russia to Finland (Statistics Finland 2016), and include 30,000 people who moved to Finland as part of the returning migration program launched by the Finnish government in the 1990s. The program allowed Finnish expatriates and people with Finnish ancestry

4 For example, in 2013, passenger traffic peaked as the Finnish-Russian border was crossed over 13 million times. In 2017, the border was crossed just over nine million times. (Individual border crossings 2012–2017).



living abroad to return to Finland (Ministry of Interior 2009; Ministry of Interior 2010).⁵ Among these migrants was the writer Arvi Perttu who moved from Russia to Finland in 2001.

Finnish literature has a long history of describing the historical events, mobility, and life-stories connected with the Finnish-Russian border. These themes have been popular in biographical writing, memoirs, war literature, history writing, as well as in fiction applying a microhistory viewpoint.⁶ In addition, the borderland theme has been a popular feature of the so-called regional literature that focuses on former and current ways of life and on cultural traditions in the borderland villages. The Finnish-Russian borderlands have served as a stage for many Arvi Perttu's novels that approach these themes from historical and contemporary perspectives.

Arvi Perttu was born in the town of Petrozavodsk, in Soviet Karelia in the North-West Soviet Union. He started to write in Finnish in the 1980s and established his writing career as a representative of minority language literature in Russia until the 2000s. While in Russia, Perttu published his first novel *Symposium of Petrozavodsk* (2001). In Finland, he has published four novels: *Expedition of Papanin* (Papaninin retkikunta 2006), *Skumbria* (Skumbria 2011), *Pain* (2014), and *Year of the Queen* (Kuningattaren vuosi 2015). Today, Perttu is one of the few actively publishing writers who write in Finnish and originate from Russian Karelia (Kurki 2018, 319–20). His position as a writer provides him with authentic perspectives on the borderlands, its people, and its past and present. Although born in the Soviet Union, Perttu has a Karelian ethnolinguistic background, his mother tongue is Finnish, and he received his education in Russian. In his work as a writer, he sees himself walking a tightrope between at least two, maybe even three cultures, and several languages (Perttu 1998). In his novels, his perceptive viewpoint on the borderlands, its people, history and present situation, simultaneously employs several different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints and cultural codes. Thus, his works provide unique 'multidimensional' (Hicks 1991) insights into life in the borderlands, and deviate from the mainstream literature.

Hyper-natural and Surreal Representations of Trauma

Pain and the *Symposium of Petrozavodsk* look at two significant events in the history of Russia: the civil war that led into the establishment of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1990s. These events are part of the collective and cultural memory in Russia, and also in its neighbouring countries. In his novels, Perttu studies these events from the viewpoints of Finnish and Karelian individuals and migrants who are mobile in the Finnish-Russian borderlands. His works provide us with subversive and supplementary narrative voices that can contribute to the collective and cultural memory of these traumatic events.

5 Despite changes in the returning migration program, the right of returning migration has remained among the Ingrian Finns and those who served Finnish army abroad in 1939–1945.

6 For example, recent fiction on this theme are: Rosa Liksom's *Hytti n. 6* [Cabin No. 6] (2011), Antti Tuuri's *Ikitie* (Forever road) (2011), Zinaida Lindén's *Nuorallatansija* [Tightrope dancer] (2009), Sirpa Kähkönen's *Vihan ja rakkauden liekit* (Flames of anger and love) (2010) and *Graniittimies* [Granite man] (2014).



Historical Trauma of a Victim and a Perpetrator in the Borderlands

The historical novel *Pain* discusses the civil war that took place in the early 1920s in Russian Karelia, close to the Finnish–Russian border. The war was merciless as it divided the population and even single families with the question of whether Karelia should join the Soviet regime, remain a separate entity, or join Finland. Part of the population tried to remain neutral, albeit that it was difficult to do so in a world that was at that time divided by strong ideologies and demanded allegiance.

In Russian Karelia, Finnish troops also participated in the war, and fought on both White and Red sides. The driving force of the White Finns was the Greater Finland ideology (in Finnish: *Suur-Suomi-aate*) that had developed already in the 19th century and aimed at unifying all Finno-Ugric peoples living in Finland and elsewhere (Niinistö 2001, 80–83). In the novel *Pain* (Perttu 2014, 21–22), this Greater Finland ideology works as an intoxicating drug that creates enthusiasm and affinity among the White troops and persuades the Finnish soldiers to cross the border. Officially, the task of the White troops was to defend Karelia against Russia, and liberate the Karelian people from Russian rule. This task justified their border crossing, their violence and killing, and the executions of Reds on the Russian side of the border. By leaning on the Greater Finland ideology, White Finns also attempted to annex those areas of Russian Karelia inhabited by Karelians and Finns to Finland (Baron 2007, 25–26).

The novel *Pain* addresses two different traumas in the civil war: the trauma of the victim and also the trauma of the perpetrator. Both traumas are embodied in the narrative of the main protagonist, a Finnish woman Riikka. Riikka participates in the civil war with the White troops. Her personal motive is to revenge on the Reds for a violent attack where her uncle was shot to death, and she was mutilated with a horsewhip. The force behind her actions is her physical and mental pain resulting from these traumatic events. She tries to numb the pain not only by exacting violent actions against the enemy and killing the Reds in a blind fury, but also through a process of self-inflicted pain. As such, pain becomes an instrument for controlling her agony, and she had understood its controlling mechanism at the moment of her uncle's murder and when she became a victim of a violent attack herself.

“The pain was burning, it was almost stunning, but strangely enough it felt somehow good. The pain was the only thing that existed, my uncle's dead body that was sliding down against the wall did not cause agony, there was no fear. There was only pain.” (Perttu 2014, 46.)

“Riikka wished that she could shoot all the prisoners herself, but she was just one of the eight volunteers. Each of the volunteers should aim at one prisoner. [...] Riikka did not feel anything. She looked at the men who were bustling at the cliff edge. She did not understand what they were doing. The pain inside her did not let go. It was not replaced by another pain that she wished for. The new pain would have erased all that which cluttered her memory and did not leave room for anything new. She had just killed a man, and now the body was pushed over the cliff's edge into a roaring torrent.” (Perttu 2014, 57–58.)

Like other Finnish soldiers, Riikka at first supports the ideology of Greater Finland. However, the ideological intoxication evaporates during her fights with the enemy, and the emptiness and meaninglessness



of the war is revealed. When the “war blindness” (Caruth 2008, 153) caused by the ideology disappears, Riikka and the soldiers understand their overwhelming situation. At first they thought that they were doing the right thing and their actions were justified, but when surrounded by death and mutilated bodies, they come to understand that they were wrong. The soldiers see themselves only as killers, and not as the defenders of some noble ideology: their task is only to kill others and try to survive.

“This was the war, you could not follow any rules, and the war could not have any logic. Riikka felt that the feeling of emptiness that now filled her, killed her hopes of curing her internal pain. From now on, there was just new pain that would not erase the old one; the pain just piled up. [...] The war expedition did not have any goal anymore; the purpose was just to kill others and survive.” (Perttu 2014, 60.)

When the insanity and meaninglessness of the war is revealed to the soldiers, they feel betrayed. The trauma and betrayal (Caruth 2008; Freyd 1998) manifests itself in feelings of emptiness, cumulating physical pain, and mental agony. Along with the other soldiers, Riikka tries to numb the agony with self-inflicted sadomasochistic pain, including whipping, tying with ropes, drugs, and sex.

“Riikka remembered the nights with Raivola [another soldier] flavoured with cocaine, bizarre love scenes that did not result in anything, but still she missed them. [...]. Or was it cocaine that she was missing? Raivola always had cocaine, and Riikka was ready to do anything for a fix.” (Perttu 2014, 103.)

“Why was she here? There was no rational explanation. She had made up all of this just to fill the empty feeling in her soul. Only because of her pain was she here, she was not taking revenge, but numbing her own pain.” (Perttu 2014, 105.)

“Was this just a game or some kind of an experiment? Riikka thought when the whip moved from Raivola’s hand into hers. Changing the roles was not difficult, after she had already had her satisfaction. [...] Did she wish to have a punishment for her sins, or was this just an experiment to explore her own dark side in a safe environment? [...] It had been real pain, liberating pain, and now she was able to imagine herself as the absolute ruler of pain [...]. (Perttu 2014, 239.)

In the midst of war and violence, Riikka experiences a move from the real world into a surreal world. This takes place when she experiences a move into Kazimir Malevich’s painting *Black Square* (*Chernyi kvadrat*, 1915). *Black Square* represents an abstract art movement Suprematism initiated by Malevich in Russia. It focussed on pure geometric forms such as square and circle that were thought to be universally comprehensible forms (Drutt 2003). The painting *Black Square* has been interpreted as signifying eternity, emptiness and depth (Esanu 2013, 84–85), and in the novel, starts to symbolize Riikka’s experiences in the war and her existence in the world (Perttu 2014, 12). In her experiences, the war had changed the world entirely and profoundly, and therefore, the world could no longer be depicted through traditional art forms. Only abstract art could provide instruments for depicting this new, changed world. The



new world appeared to Riikka as a place where the previous forms of harmony and balance had disappeared, and this was akin to how *Black Square* had deviated from previous art forms (Perttu 2014, 50).

“She felt that she was on the shore, on the edge of an abyss, ready to fall into the emptiness, death and eternity that would not give her oblivion, but eternal pain. In St. Petersburg, almost three years ago, she stood in the front of Malevich’s *Black Square* for a long time, and did not understand it. Now she knew that the war had changed the world entirely, and it could not be described with the traditional means of art, because the world had contracted or expanded into a black square. In her case, it was bloody red.” (Perttu 2014, 12.)

As the chaos of the war continues, the painting *Black Square* starts to represent the world in which Riikka acts and orients herself. In her mind, the geometrical shapes and colours of the painting parallel the world around her that has become incomprehensible in her experience. The young men who she is about to execute parallel cardboard pictures, inanimate targets, and shooting them does not disturb her conscience.

“Somehow, it was connected with this time, this space, and the war. She felt that she was inside Malevich’s painting, the world around her was like even, bright surfaces: red, black, squares, circles, and sharp lines piercing them. The former harmony had disappeared, and could not exist anymore.” (Perttu 2014, 50.)

“These young men were only cardboard figures, just like targets. She tried to look inside them, but she saw through them like a bullet.” (Perttu 2014, 50.)

During the fighting, the enemy captures Riikka. During her captivity, she falls in love with one of the enemy, a Karelian named Santeri. For both of them, the situation stirs up contradictory and frustrating feelings of simultaneous love and hatred towards each other, as well as simultaneous feelings of fear and pleasure. However, the relationship inevitably leads to their ultimate destruction. Experiences of frustration and the impossibility of their relationship are summarized in the metaphor of a red square that also refers to Malevich’s painting. Riikka and Santeri had voluntarily locked themselves inside the building to fulfil their sexual, sadomasochistic fantasies, but they wake up as a fire rages outside, and the flames become visible in the window revealing the red square in front of their eyes. The enemy is outside, there is no chance of escape, so they face their inevitable death. Thus, the red square becomes the ultimate symbol of destruction, death, eternity, and of simultaneous pain and pleasure.

“The window looks red, was it the morning sun? Santeri woke up, but it felt like the dream was continuing, and now turning into a nightmare. Angry shouting and random gunshots were audible outside. [...] The smoke became thicker, and it entered the room through the same cracks in the wall where the freezing breeze had entered earlier. Smoke came through the broken window where the flames were now visible. [...] The world was not black anymore, but it was in the colour of blood and fire, and it was hot. The red square was a burning window, an entrance to death, coloured with blood.” (Perttu 2014, 389.)



Personal trauma, both the trauma of a victim and of a perpetrator, changed Riikka's experience of the world and her idea of herself. For her, the world became distorted, twisted in proportions, and lost its harmony. Riikka knows that her old self has changed permanently, and there is no chance of return. She recognizes herself not only as a victim, but also as a perpetrator. She tries simultaneously to understand these experiences and also to forget them. Through the painting *Black Square*, her internal pain and the chaotic world she inhabits translates into the language of modern art, in the forms of abstractions, controlled shapes and colours. The similar symbol of a burning window which appears as a red square, is also a symbol of her death, a tragic combination of pain and pleasure together with her enemy that finally relieves her from her agony.

Crossing Symbolic Borders: A Distorted Mirror and a Claustrophobic Corridor

Symposium of Petrozavodsk (2001) examines the symbolic border crossing from the Soviet to the post-Soviet eras. It depicts the end of the 1980s in the town of Petrozavodsk, in the North-West Soviet Union when the Soviet Union is disintegrating. The events are narrated through the viewpoint of a writer Pauli who is also encountered as a Fool. Together with his friends, Pauli tries to control personal and professional aspects of his life, but life gradually turns into a nightmare. Their attempts to control their lives are connected with the problematic position of the Finnish ethnolinguistic minority in the Soviet Union; a group of border crossers that Pauli also represents. The place of the ethnolinguistic group is disappearing and becoming non-existent in the Soviet Union and Russia, as well as in Finland, and in effect, they are not welcome "here" nor "there" (Perttu 2001, 110). The realization of not having a place or home is a traumatic experience for Pauli.

In addition, the transition from the Soviet era to the post-Soviet era is depicted as an overwhelming experience that becomes a principal factor in defining the identities and life courses of Pauli and his friends. In Russian society, this transition has generally been described as a traumatic experience that profoundly changed the lives of all Soviet citizens, and shattered the former Soviet identities (Sztompka 2004, 158–162, 171–175). The situation has demanded the creation of new history narratives, and also the formation of new identities for former Soviet citizens. What is controversial in this traumatic event is that whilst nearly everyone saw the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a positive event, very few Soviet citizens were prepared to live in a society that had changed so profoundly after the collapse had taken place (Sztompka 2004, 171). Arvi Perttu uses the metaphors of a broken mirror and a dark, claustrophobic corridor when examining individuals' experiences of their disintegrating society and also when crossing the symbolic border to the post-Soviet era.

In the novel, the surrounding society is in a state of chaos, and both the past and the future have turned out to be illusionary concepts as the Soviet Union disintegrates. The idea of a shared Soviet space is also deconstructed (Beumers 2012), and in the midst of the chaos, Pauli comprehends that his life is also disintegrating and he becomes unsure of his identity: "I cannot perceive the multiplicity of the world, and therefore, my normal state of mind is confusion and irresolution" (Perttu 2001, 11). He studies himself in a broken bathroom mirror where his unrecognizable image is mirrored countless times, and he sees an image of an old lady replacing his face. The situation makes him doubt his own sanity, and ponder which of the images is real



and which an illusion. The situation also makes him doubt that he exists any longer: “I know well this state of mind when I am not sure of my existence, it feels like the old lady in the mirror is livelier than me, or do I see myself in her figure – my loneliness, my redundancy, and my immeasurable age [...]” (Perttu 2001, 30).

As the disintegration proceeds, Pauli enters into surreal spaces. Especially, he finds himself in a claustrophobic, dark and dirty staircase, with no exit doors, and the staircase continues deeper and deeper underground. He is scared, but continues to descend. On one of the landings, he meets himself as a Fool who is trying to get upwards towards the surface.

“I am not listening to the end, I don’t answer, I rush down, leaping over several steps with one stride. [...]. But when the first floor is over, the stairs do not end and there is no exit. One staircase after the other follows, and I descend deeper and deeper. On one of the landings, I meet Fool. [...] I knew that Fool had already been there for long time trying to ascend these dark and dirty steps. [...] Ominous shades were haunting the darkness, but a faint beam of light came down somewhere from above. He was not scared of the future but of the past.” (Perttu 2001, 201.)

Finally, Pauli enters a corridor that symbols the transition from the Soviet past to the unknown future. The underground corridor is about to collapse, and it is dark. People run within it, but one must not fall, because they will be trampled to death by the others. The past appears as a black chasm at the back of the corridor, and the future glimmers faintly at the front, appearing as a “ghostly memory” of the light. Pauli is scared and horrified, but the dream of a better life pushes him forward. (Perttu 2001, 217.)

“An endless, narrowing corridor, black holes in its walls are entrances to other worlds, but Fool is afraid to approach them even though he knows that there is the light. Sunlight comes through the tiny holes, but can you be sure that the light is not only neon light?” (Perttu 2001, 217–218.)

The metaphors of the broken mirror and the claustrophobic corridor reflect the border crosser’s experience within time and space, where the relationship between past, present and future becomes problematic and ambivalent. The surrounding world has also become difficult to perceive and comprehend. Crossing the symbolic border detaches Pauli from the familiarities of coherent time and place. On the one hand, the past represents something frightening and strange that Pauli wishes to leave behind, yet on the other, the chaotic present makes Pauli feel nostalgic towards the past, because it, nevertheless, represented a time when the worldviews and identities were able to be formed as coherent entities.

The relationship with the future is also problematic. Pauli’s future plans were based on the promises that Soviet socialism promised for all Soviet citizens. However, the promises were never fulfilled. Therefore, Pauli moves in a paradoxical reality of time and place: it is after the future that never came true (Epstein 1995, 72–73). The experienced time, “after the future” (Epstein 1995) is a shared experience with other Soviet citizens who experienced the collapse of the Soviet Union. The events leave Pauli without a clear idea about where he comes from and where he is heading to. At the same time, a coherent narrative chain from the past to the future is broken. In effect, there is no structured world or narrative that could function as a basis for



Pauli's identity, and the present that is created by the disintegration appears as being broken, empty, and artificial (Epstein 2000, 4–7).

The relationship between these new identities and the past is necessarily ambivalent. The new identity attempts to separate itself from the past and stresses the separation between the post-Soviet and Soviet era. Yet, at the same time, the new identity also creates connections with the past (Beumers 2013, 3). After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some of the former Soviet citizens felt estranged by the Soviet past, and some former Soviet states tried to forget their Soviet past as soon as possible (Abashin 2012, 153–154). However, returning to the past and an open and honest discussion of it turned out to be crucial for the formation of new post-Soviet identities (Shneidman 1995, 6; Abashin 2012, 153–154). Thus, an increasing ambivalence emerged where the Soviet past could simultaneously appear as a traumatic experience and also as a source of nostalgia for the former Soviet citizens (Beumers 2013, 3; Aarelaid-Tart 2006, 35).

The world that opens after crossing the border appears incomprehensible, and the corridor ends in a surreal room: “Fool knows that he was to be arrested, but again he was not noticed, and he jumps out of the window and falls, falls like in an endless childhood nightmare...” (Perttu 2001, 218).

The surreal room reflects an experience of the world that reveals itself after the disintegration process. The disintegration did not necessarily lead to the better future that Perestroika promised, and instead the future appears very uncertain. The world that Pauli recognizes after reappearing from the corridor seems chaotic, fragmentary and gloomy, where the distinction between the dream reality and the reality we experience in our everyday lives becomes blurred.

Discussion

In both *Pain* and *Symposium of Petrozavodsk*, crossing the territorial and symbolic border creates experiences that disturb the border crosser's sense of time and place, and force the border crosser to redefine his or her identity. After the border crossing, the experienced time and place become ambivalent and surreal, as the border crosser moves in a state of uncertainty, confusion and extreme discomfort. Not being able to comprehend the radically changed situation, the border crosser moves in a trauma space that is located outside the present state of the world that is real to others in their everyday lives. These traumatic spaces are located in intoxicating fantasy, artwork, in surreal tunnels and rooms, or in distorted reflections in a mirror. The identity of the traumatized border crosser is also based outside the coherent experiences of place and time. This is typical when processing traumatic experiences, where the distinctions between the past and the present may become blurred (LaCapra 1999, 699). According to Schweiger (2015, 347), “Traumatic events defy comprehension and cannot be overcome or integrated meaningfully within ordinary cognitive structure through simple recollection”. Literature researcher Kerstin Bergman (2008, 148) suggests that every fiction work represents its “own theory” of remembering and representing trauma. As an example, she mentions a flashback that has represented the remembering of trauma in films, prior to the formulation of modern trauma theories. It can be suggested that grotesque, hyper-natural and surreal narrative elements can also provide “theories” or a “language” of remembering and representing individual, collective



and cultural traumas. Thus, novels can also be understood in the context of 'trauma fiction', which often emulates the traumatic experience and its further processing and narrativization (Whitehead 2004).

Traditionally, trauma narratives stress the idea of witnessing. A witness can be seen as someone who has observed an event with his or her own eyes, and speaks out and gives testimony (Nünning 2008, 137). In Perttu's novels, witnessing is not an elementary question, although his historical novels apply documentary material, and he himself has lived through the disintegration of the Soviet Union and moved to live in another country. However, as cultural researcher, and literature researcher Vera Nünning suggests (2008, 137), the traditional definition of a witness may be too narrow when applied to trauma fiction or artistic works representing traumatic events. Nünning (2008, 123–125) also suggests that works of popular culture that are not based on eyewitness narratives can still have a significant impact on remembering and processing collective traumas. According to Nünning (*ibid.*), the representations provided and repeated by popular culture can strengthen the role and significance of some trauma representations, as part of the collective and cultural memory.

Fiction can also be understood as the narratives of secondary witnesses (LaCapra 1999, 699) and as post-memory (Hirsch 2008). In this context, works of fiction can be understood as emphatic expressions and reactions to the past occurrences they feature (LaCapra 1999, 699). Fiction can also provide more multifaceted understandings of traumas and their consequences. In Perttu's novels, hyper-natural elements, grotesque and surreal elements form narrative strategies that Perttu uses to create confusion, in order to illustrate the perplexities of the traumatizing events that are seldom cognizable in a coherent manner. The repulsive and confusing elements in Perttu's novels also diversify the dominant and standardized narratives and understandings of various well-known historical traumas and their consequences in Finnish-Russian territorial and symbolic borderlands. Often, these standardized documentary narratives (for example about the civil war) are based on the detailed accounts of places, people and listings of events, based on external observations. The worlds depicted in Perttu's novels follow the scheme of using hyper-natural prose and its violent, gloomy, and pessimistic worlds, that show the individual's struggle for survival. Hyper-natural prose was introduced in Russian postmodernism in the 1990s, and depicts for example the everyday cruelty, the horrors of prisons, the life of derelicts and prostitutes, and the corporeality of people, in ways that are often despised (Lipovetsky 2011, 179). According to literature researcher Mark Lipovetsky (2011, 179–180), the purpose of hyper-natural prose is to open past traumas to discussion, by introducing shocking and sometimes repulsive depictions. Readers' critical reactions indicate that the use of hyper-natural prose has touched the traumas that have been previously buried in the collective consciousness. This possibility to shock and create confusion is also inherent in the reception of Perttu's works. Ultimately, the shocking and repulsive, as well as, grotesque and surreal elements of his novels offer the possibility to influence the construction and processing of the collective and cultural memory of traumatic events that occurred in the Finnish-Russian borderlands.

Perttu's novels provide unique perspectives on events and life in the Finnish-Russian borderlands. His unique perspective is possible because his works can be understood as being multi-dimensional texts that are typical of border writing (Hicks 1991). This multi-dimensionality means that Perttu's works connect with various writing traditions on different sides



of the national border, and apply several cultural codes when writing about the history and contemporary border crossers in the Finnish–Russian borderlands (Kurki 2018, 352–53). Due to the multi-dimensionality of his novels, the representations of the traumatic events can be understood from several simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory, viewpoints. This can promote discussions on trans-historical traumas and the formation of the post-memory (Hirsch 2008, 105) of the traumatizing events.

One of the contributions of Perttu's novels in constructing collective and cultural memory lies dormant in the idea of hyperspace. In this article, hyperspace is seen as a de-territorial space that is based on the traumatic experiences associated with the shared border and related mobility (Kurki 2016a; Kurki 2018, 351–52; Kurki and Kaskinen 2019, forthcoming). This hyperspace can emerge virtually, for example, in an artwork and the reception of the artwork in an installation space. The hyperspace can serve as a basis for constructing borderland, traumatic, and mobile identities. This definition comes close to the idea of a cyber space as a means to share and understand trauma, as introduced by Michelle Balaev: "Trauma is understood by locating its meaning in the new space of the internet – cyber space – that redefines the meaning of traumatic memory and its impact on identity" (Balaev 2014, 19). Hyperspace includes the elements of both the 'hyperspace' and 'hyperscape', as defined by literature scholars Fredrik Jameson (1991, 15–16) and Hazel Smith (2000, 54–56), as well as by folklorist Tok Thompson (2013). The hyperspace can be seen as "a new type of textual, political, and subjective space," where individuals do not necessarily hold a stable position for themselves, or cannot orient in that space (Jameson 2009, 15–16; Smith 2000, 1, 54–56). The hyperspace can function as a basis for decentred, de-territorial, and emergent identities, and a basis for re-defining traumatized identities. Therefore, the concept of hyperspace may challenge the territorially or nationally oriented definitions of identity that often tend to homogenize the identities of people living in various borderland areas. When the experiences of the border crossers and their traumatic experiences come to the fore, emphatic understandings of mobility and border crossing can be created. This can also increase the understanding of mobility experiences in today's world. The dominating discourses on borders, borderlands, mobility and migrating people do not always recognize the micro-level experiences and understandings about borders and mobility. Nevertheless, a recognition of these micro-level experiences and understandings are vital for the border crosser's survival and their future life after their overwhelming experiences, as well as providing a means for understanding the trans-historical traumas which occur at various borderlands.

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