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RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMS MADE BY THE ESTONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM (1961–1989)

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ABSTRACT
This article* analyses the films made by the Estonian National Museum in the 1970s and the 1980s both from the point of view of the filming activity and of the content of these films. Although the Museum's director, Aleksei Peterson, who developed this activity, was mainly interested in strictly ethnographic film, the legacy from this period consists mainly, but not only, of film monographs made both in Estonia and in the Finno-Ugric regions. These films encompass the ethnographers' knowledge of the reconstructed period, the beginning of the 20th century. Nonetheless, the films made in Udmurtia contain several shots that reflect skills and practices still active at the end of that century. Other films are totally shot spontaneously, and there is also an example of comparative material. These forgotten films deserve to be remembered.

KEYWORDS: visual anthropology • ethnographic filmmaking • Estonian National Museum • Udmurts • Vepsians

The roots of Estonian ethnographic film go back both to the very beginning of Estonian filmmaking and of the Estonian National Museum.[2] The first Estonian filmmaker, Johannes Pääsuke (1892–1917/18),[3] worked for the Museum taking photos for the Department of Homeland Pictures. He made himself a motion picture camera from an old film apparatus and in 1912 started to make short films about Estonia and the events

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of that time. He is also the author of the first Estonian fiction film. Pääsuke died during World War II at the age of 26 and so his work was interrupted, but he remains a symbol both in documentary photography and filmmaking (Reidla 2008).

After the war, filming activity at the Museum was not entirely interrupted[4] and was already characterised by Finno-Ugric cooperation: in 1939–40 a documentary called *From the Livonian Coast* was shot in cooperation between the Estonian National Museum and Kultuurfilm (Peterson 1983; Teinemaa 1998). It was not sufficient to create a tradition: the war came and interrupted the work on ethnographic film, which started again in Soviet Estonia in the 1950s–1960s. Like fiction film, ethnographic filmmaking was concentrated in Tallinnfilm,[5] which was the official filmmaking enterprise producing exclusively Soviet propaganda films (Ruus 2010). A comprehensive account of Estonian ethnographic filmmaking should encompass also the films made by Tallinnfilm and by Estonian television. However, in this article we shall focus on parallel filmmaking production, which started in the Estonian National Museum in the 1960s; the Museum has never ceased to use film cameras since, but we shall limit our study to the films produced in Soviet Estonia, in comparable conditions both politically and technically, since the independence of Estonia (1991) was contemporary to a major technical shift with the spreading of video tape replacing film stock.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

Although the Soviet period is still historically close to us, and we have innumerable personal witnesses remembering this period through their own experience, it is not superfluous to remind ourselves of some main features of that period.

As a consequence of World War II, Estonia was most unwillingly part of the Soviet Union without interruption from 1944 until 1991. Not all that happened during this long period, and not all that is significant for our purpose, is directly connected to Soviet rule; however, because the Soviet project touched every field of life, much depended on so-called political factors that shaped public life. We shall comment hereafter on the main factors that pre-conditioned filmmaking in the Soviet period and allow an explanation of some peculiar features in these films.

The Political Context in Filmmaking

Promoting Estonianness

As we mentioned, politics invaded most of the public space. The political framework consists of different aspects, at different levels of abstraction. We will not insist on the general features of Soviet Estonia, but it is important to remember that the ethnic Estonians, who represented before the War 90% of the population, having had the experience of an occupation in 1940, were as a whole reluctant towards Soviet rule and were compelled to accept it as a *de facto* occupation. They had to submit to an organisation of social life that contradicted their own historical experience, and to adapt to that organisation. While the Estonian community was weakened by extensive exile, mass deportations and imprisonments, the importation from Russia of communists with Estonian

roots, and of a population of Soviet worker, changed the ethnic composition of the population, and reduced considerably the part of the native Estonians in it (Parming 1972; Taagepera 1981). This is crucial for understanding a double tension that expresses itself in filmmaking as well as in other sectors of cultural life: on the one hand, Estonians were submitted to Soviet rules and principles, on the other hand they attempted to find possible ways to promote, within the limits, their own culture and their own values. There was a tension inside the country between the rules to be respected (and those who were in charge of them) and those who wanted to promote Estonianness, and there was also a tension between the Estonian SSR and the authorities in Moscow on the same subject. This explains how in years of intense Russification, as in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, cultural institutions resisted and were keen on fostering Estonian themes and values. Another way of expressing one's identity, and a different identity from the one imposed from above, was to enhance the Finno-Ugric connection. Estonians, whose identity is basically founded on language, speak a Finno-Ugric language of the wider Uralic family. With incorporation into the Soviet Union, Estonians found themselves in a space in which there were other minority peoples speaking Uralic languages as well: in the regions around Estonia, speaking Finnic languages (Livonians, Vepsians, Votes, Karelians), in the Volga region and the Urals (Mordvinians, Maris, Udmurts, Komis, Nenets) and in Western Siberia (Khantys, Mansis, Nenets, etc.). After a period in the 1920s, in which Soviet rule warranted these peoples an institutional framework for developing their cultures, they had been further submitted to traumatising and intense Russification so that, in the 1930s, the mere notion of Finno-Ugric or Uralic kinship had become synonymous with treason and many intellectuals from these peoples became victims of Stalinist repressions under the accusation of being spies for Finland or for Estonia (see Toulouze 2006). So Finno-Ugric kinship was a delicate issue. On the other hand, by living within the same borders, which were mostly closed to the foreign world,[6] Estonians had access that foreign researchers had not, to the Finno-Ugric regions. This subject was present in filmmaking, in the official Tallinnfilm, which after 1970 produced five splendid films on kinship and the Finno-Ugric peoples, made by Lennart Meri (who became the first president of independent Estonia). In addition, this subject is also widely present in the activity of the Estonian National Museum.

The Ideological Framework

The Soviet regime had a very clear conception of scholarly work on cultures, which had consequences for the academic institutions. There was no place for ehnology or anthropology,[7] as they existed in the West. Soviet ethnography was seen as an auxiliary discipline to history. Its central aim was to study the evolution of primitive societies and its main conceptions came from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who borrowed heavily from Morgan and other 19th century arm-chair anthropologists[8] (Engels 1884; Morgan 1934; Leete 2000: 74–78). Therefore the departments of ethnography were incorporated in the faculties of history and were supposed to follow methods close to those of historians. One of the main issues for ethnographers was to explore the ethnogenesis of different peoples, thus work was on archive materials. Empirical ethnographic research was mainly focused on material culture, which was explored in great detail and precision from an evolutionist point of view. The emphasis put on the notion of productive process by the whole of Soviet discourse explains that working tools and their evolution

were the main focus of academic research as well as of museum collections. In addition to the research into tools and techniques, ethnography focused on traditional dwellings and architecture, clothing, even food. Contemporary life was present in ethnographic research mainly through the issue of the collective farm culture. Spiritual culture was not ignored, but it was tackled within another academic discipline, connected to philology, called Folklore and based on the study of texts, excluding spiritual practices, which were not favoured by the regime (for more details on the history of Soviet ethnography, cf. Sokolovskiy 2009).

Following a direction not unknown in the rest of the world, Soviet research was utterly positivist and valued objectivity as a functioning category. This approach has several consequences, which are felt both in research and filmmaking. One of them is the importance of reconstruction and 'purity'. Phenomena are never to be met in life in a pure form: hybrids are the rule. However, hybrids do not interest Soviet ethnography, which tried to analyse the existent phenomena to isolate virtual prototypes of cultural features. This understanding stipulates that at some time in the past, there were pure phenomena, whose reconstruction is the aim of the scientists. This presumes that a past, the last stage before modernity, or, in the Soviet Union, that time before the 1917 Revolution, should be taken as a framework. Often this period is not explicitly defined in ethnographic writing – it is the 'ethnographic past' – that describes how things were. Sometimes still this past is more clearly defined, as we shall see in the films produced by the National Museum.

Reconstruction, as such, was very much present not only in the understandings of ethnography, but also in the Finno-Ugric background of Estonian research on identity. Actually Finno-Ugric studies have been based for decades on reconstruction: the so-called Finno-Ugrists were for about a century linguists, who were interested in language kinship and attempted to find the original Finno-Ugric, and even, if taking the Samoyed languages into account, a more remote Uralic proto-language from which all these languages originated. The analysis of materials from different languages was set into a framework of historic and comparative linguistic research that led to the inference, from the existing linguistic data, a common lexical or grammatical proto-form, proving the common origin of the analysed languages (for example, Donner 1920; Mark 1925). Actually, ethnography and overall the study of Finno-Ugric cultures, are very much connected to this aim, which also explains the extreme development of comparative historic phonetics (see the debates about Finno-Ugric vocalism: for example, Steinitz 1944; Itkonen 1960; 1962). In the search for roots, explorers – both Hungarian and Finnish – organised, from the middle of the 19th century, extensive expeditions to Siberia in order to gather materials, imagining that the remotest languages and cultures were also the most conservative. They looked mainly for language, and as what interested them were the closest possible forms to the original language, they delved into the most archaic folklore material, leaving us precious data whose main original value was not so much *per se* but as support for reconstruction.

The Institutional Framework

The institutional framework for film production determined the way the Museum got access to filming. At the highest official level, the only institution whose task was to make films was Tallinnfilm (Orav 2003). That meant that only Tallinnfilm was allowed

to acquire film stock. Still this did not prevent other institutions from filming: one of them was the Cinema Studio of the University of Tartu, which in 1956[9] produced *Kihnu Wedding* (37 min), filmed by V. Levitski under the supervision of Eduard Laugaste. This film, which was meant to accompany the course in Estonian folklore, was a reconstruction because it did not film a real wedding, the wedding was staged for shooting, on the basis of both the experience of the local people and the testimony of ethnographic material. Laugaste also organised the making of other shorter ethnographic films, like *On Salu Farm* (9 min).

The other institution that produced film was the Estonian National Museum, which has a long and rich history and plays an important role in the development of Estonian identity (Õunapuu 2009). During World War II, Raadi Manor, the building hosting the museum, was destroyed and the Museum did not get a permanent exhibition space until 1994, when the Railway Workers' Club was given the Museum and reorganised it into a permanent exhibition hall. One of the Museum's main tasks was to collect and study ethnographic items (Peterson 1993). In addition to the collection of exhibits, the Museum had a large collection of photographs and drawings that was started at its foundation in 1909. In 1961, it added filmmaking to its activities.

Museum director Aleksei Peterson's idea of developing filmmaking at the Museum was inspired by the Finnish ethnographers, especially Niilo Valonen (Peterson 1982: 1), who had been chief of the department of Ethnology at the National Museum of Finland (1955–1961) before becoming Finno-Ugric ethnology professor in the University of Helsinki[10] (1961–1977). Niilo Valonen had directed some ethnographic short films in Central Finland and in Lapland.[11] Seeing that film production was an organic part of the museum's activities in the neighbouring country, he had the idea of extending the field of activity of his institution in Estonia and communicating its messages in filmic form.

The Museum was not officially allowed to produce films. Although, as Peterson considered its duty to be to develop the recording of folk culture through film, he asked the ministry of culture for permission, and thus was able to start filmmaking semi-officially. The activity was tolerated, but this did not mean it was institutionalised. The Museum was not allowed, for example, to buy film stock directly. It had to use superfluous film from Tallinnfilm, often of bad quality, and find ways to acquire the materials needed for filming. In 1961, the museum bought a camera. It was still dependent on Tallinnfilm for the final positive prints; apart from this the editing template was achieved at the Museum.

The Human Resources

This is a point on which Aleksei Peterson insists very much in all the texts he has written about ethnographic filmmaking. Filmmaking requires professionals, who must be skilled both in filmmaking and in ethnography. For Peterson, it was essential that the filmmakers – scientific advisor, cameraman – were members of the ethnographic institution's permanent personnel. Therefore he recommended first of all that, if possible, the ethnographer and the cameraman should be the same person, and if not, to chose trained ethnographers over professional cameramen (Peterson 1983: 32–33). He emphasises the importance of the ethnographer: he proposed that ethnographers should be

taught the basis of filmmaking, not the reverse, for, according to Peterson's understanding, theirs was a huge task to accomplish. Notwithstanding the absence of preliminary scenario, the ethnographer is the one to make the choices, to determine the message of the film: he was supposed to be able to generalise the knowledge accumulated in a vision of the reconstructed culture. The film is based on his or her knowledge, not the reverse: the film is not an *a priori* way of acquiring knowledge and to organise it thereafter, but an *a posteriori* way of presenting it synthetically. Therefore the knowledge must come prior to the filmmaking: the participants must not be trusted blindly, they must do what the ethnographer/filmmaker bids them to do. Of course, they are chosen for their skills.

One of the most serious problems is the choice of the person behind the camera, for his job is a highly technical one: "Professional cameramen not only do not know anything of ethnographic filmmaking, but impose discreetly their own understandings, for instance aesthetic" (Peterson 1982: 6). "Hence, an ideal thing would be to have a cameraman who is also an ethnographer. Such people don't grow on trees" (Peterson 1975: 186). One must be realistic: there were no such double-skilled people at the time. That's certainly one of the reason why in other texts, Peterson is less direct, more cautious when talking about professional cameramen: "Even an experienced professional cameraman, good at making educational science films, as a rule does not know all the peculiarities of making an ethnographic film, which is to be used as a scientific document" (ibid.).

So, although it would be good to have a cameraman who is an ethnographer, one must accept choosing one who at least, "is to work in close contact with or preferably under the direct supervision of an ethnographer. [...] As our experience has shown, in this case, only a close cooperation between the cameraman and the scientific advisor results in a fully-fledged scientific documentary film" (ibid.).

How did Peterson actually act himself? He had to be realistic. Although he was the one to know what should be in the film, he never touched the camera: as the previous section shows, the difference between the period we talk about and ours is enormous, and he could not improvise knowledge he had not. So he was to rely on cameramen he chose and worked with. His cameramen were not *a priori* ethnographers, although one of them eventually became such. Peterson created a specific position within the photography laboratory in the Estonian National Museum for a film person. The profile was quite wide: the responsibility for film was to be his cameraman in his projects; he was supposed to edit the shot materials and to manage the film archives of the museum. Although the position was formally included in the photography lab, hierarchically it was still under the direct authority of the director. This shows how much Peterson personally doted on film and how he wished to keep the reins in his own hands. In any case, he achieved the idea that the cameraman should be part of the Museum's staff.

His first cameraman was Toivo Pedak, who worked as a senior engineer at the museum, and shot the films made in Estonia and of the Vepsians. In the 1970s, Peterson worked with Vello Ojanurme, who was employed by the museum as a cameraman and who edited the film about the Estonian village (see below). In 1979 he hired a young cameraman who had worked at Tallinnfilm with Lennart Meri on his ethnographic films. Aado Lintrop had decided to continue his studies and to join his future wife in Tartu and looked for the job. He got it some months later, when the man formerly responsi-

ble for films left the Museum. Lintrop's first big task was to be the first Udmurt film, made in cooperation with Udmurt Museum of Local History in Izhevsk (now Kuzebai Gerd National Museum of Udmurt Republic), or more precisely the department dealing with the pre-revolutionary material, led by Serafima Lebedeva. Moreover, in addition to shooting the Udmurt series, Lintrop edited previously shot material, especially those about the Vepsians.

By choosing Aado Lintrop, Peterson made a decisive choice, because although Lintrop was not previously an ethnographer, he became one, and one who was able to use film material in his personal research. When we analyse the films made by the Museum in the period from 1960 until the end of the 1980s, we see that there are two main kinds of films: so-called film monographs, and other films that were not made according to a previous plan, but which are stem from Lintrop's personal initiative and were accepted by the Museum's leadership. The relationship between time and subject is fundamentally different in the two categories.

The group was extended to include more technical personal, which helped with the coordination, with the furnishing of film stock and practical organisation, for example Jüri Karm. On the scientific side, Peterson attempted to include in the preparation of the films the most recognised authorities in the field: it is very clear in the Udmurt films, as we will see in detail below. This was a basic requirement, because of the principles of ethnographic filmmaking.

The Technical Conditions of Filmmaking

Actually the technical conditions of filmmaking are very much connected to this institutional situation, in which the Museum was not forbidden, but also not officially allowed, to make films. So they had no access to the institutionalised ways of acquiring to equipment and film stock. The camera the Museum bought in 1961 was a first model Konvas[12] camera (Lintrop, interview 2009). The advantage of these cameras was firstly the price, and also the size, which was relatively small. Despite this, especially compared with later equipment, it was heavy to use without a tripod. It was a 35 mm reflex camera with a three lens turret system; there were also additional lenses, from wide-angle (28 mm) to telephoto (128 mm). Aleksei Peterson chose 35 mm film format because, among other criteria, it has the same dimensions and perforation pitch as photographic film, allowing photographs directly from the movie film print. There were also difficulties using this camera for shooting other than its weight. The first is connected to the loading system: the camera worked with a 60 meter load of film, via a detachable camera magazine. The initial top-latch magazines were difficult to load, representing an additional challenge (*Konvas* 2007). The camera had five magazines, each allowing filming for ca. 2 minutes, then the magazines had to be reloaded. Therefore it was necessary to plan the shooting time according to the limits imposed by the film equipment. In addition, the camera was steady for working in summer, but unreliable in winter conditions: "it had to be monitored/checked all the time" (Lintrop, interview 2009).

Another difficulty with the camera was the sound: the camera could not record synchronous sound and was quite noisy. So sound had to be planned separately. Sound was a serious issue for all producers. Filming took place without any sound gathering,

with the sound added in the editing room. In 1980, Aado Lintrop had a borrowed tape recorder with him, but there was nobody to use it – and the cameraman could not do both the filming and sound recording. For the final sound track, the editors used recordings from other expeditions (Jaan Sarv was a participant in the 1981 Museum's expedition, with equipment from the Estonian Radio). For the last Udmurt film, in one expedition the filmmakers used a video camera, using it simultaneously with film in order to record sound for the editing (Lintrop, interview 2009, comments 2010).

There were other problems, which were to give the cameraman headaches, such as the film quality. As the museum was not allowed to buy film through official channels, it had to find different ways to get it. The film supply was not regular and usually it was acquired from Tallinnfilm, which gave away its expired film stock. These conditions had a two-fold consequence: firstly, there was never enough film. Each shot had to be thoroughly thought out and there were not enough material for proper editing: "each more or less successful shot had to be put in the final cut" (Lintrop, interview 2009). Secondly, there were huge problems with the film quality, mainly with its sensitivity. On the one hand, the sensitivity of expired film was irregular, so that the cameraman had to test the film before shooting in order to ascertain what had to be done in order to achieve a proper image. Moreover, as the film was often old, the sensitivity was low and it was not always possible to film inside. The film team had to use additional lights, but it was not always possible to transport them or to use them, for not in every village could the electrical wires stand the additional load of spotlights.

Only a couple of films were edited all the way by a professional editor at Tallinnfilm, the others had to be at least partly cut at the museum. At the end of the 1980s, it became possible for the museum to acquire 16 and 35 mm editing tables. Before that, the editing of the positive workprint was done manually: the editor had to project film on a screen before each cut; there was no Scotch tape and the film clips had to be glued together with acetone – this way any change in editing resulted in cutting off a frame from both ends of the film clip, so during the editing the film became shorter and shorter. In the case the film negative was edited in Tallinnfilm, Lintrop had to fill the lost frames with pieces of black film in order that the editors at Tallinnfilm could edit the negative properly (Lintrop, interview 2009).

THE PRINCIPLES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING

The Goal

Peterson, as director of the Estonian National Museum, focused his activity in collecting objects, both in Estonia and in the Soviet Union's Finno-Ugric regions. Expeditions were organised not only to collect knowledge, but mainly to bring back objects to the collections, where they would be described, classified and deposited in the Museum's storeroom – because the Museum, for all the time Peterson lead it, had no exhibition hall. Peterson was an adept of quantitative extensive gathering, not only of objects, but of all kinds of information connected with them. Objects were important because of the importance of material culture in Soviet ethnography. However, not all objects were to be put into museums: architecture was difficult to bring back home unless under other

forms like photographs or drawings. One could gather folk costumes, but in order to know how people wore the items, one had to record more extensive information. To the traditional means such as photography and drawing, Peterson added film.

For him, film is a finished product: its goal is to present in an easy visual way the conclusions and generalisations achieved by the researcher. Film is neither a tool, nor a process for analysis, it is a summary of what research has already found out. The more the film is constructed, the more valuable it is, because the goal of ethnology is to fix a general picture of the investigated phenomenon: "ethnographic films must be research documents, fixing ethnographic facts" (Peterson 1983: 32). One does not film concrete situations directly from life, where nothing ever appears in its sheer form.

The Means: Construction and Reconstruction

Thus, the Estonian National Museum's films never report spontaneous situations, and even when they happen to be such, it is only by chance. These films are an attempt at reconstruction. In film as well as in science, any reconstruction is inherently artificial. As is artificial the reconstructed proto-Uralic language that Finno-Ugrists learn at university: it transmits what is known (or is supposed to be known) at a certain moment; the fact this knowledge is presented as a language does not mean that anybody ever used such a language to express themselves – it is not a real language. The same is true of the museum's films: they sum up what ethnographers thought they knew at that moment about the Estonian countryside or the life and beliefs of the Udmurt at the beginning of the 20th century. The fact that the film partly coincides with what really happened at the moment of the shooting is not, *per se*, significant. It is not part of the observation, it does not interest the filmmaker, because he lacks the time distance he needs to get an overview of the culture and to distinguish the important from the insignificant (see below). The individual and his relation to his own culture are not meaningful for the film. One must erase from the person all individual dimensions, in order to change it into an archetype, which represents his people as a whole.

The contemporary spectator might suspect that one of the aims of this choice of reconstruction might have been to avoid political tensions connected with the discussion of social issues; it was more innocent to show a time in which "the fertilising influence of Soviet power" wasn't yet exercised. Still, Peterson denies it: avoiding all that is contemporary in the films was not for him a matter of ideology, it was just the only scientific way envisaged to make ethnography. He considered that there was distance enough with older material and that more modern material would be inevitably random, for time has not permitted the identification of the structuring features selected from the massive amount of data available.

The Ways of Transmitting Knowledge

Some of Peterson's principles are very similar to today's visual anthropology basics. He declares in an article that explanatory commentary should be added only if absolutely necessary: the picture must speak by itself (Peterson 1982: 9). On this principle,

Peterson seems to be quite radical: titles are also part of what he rejects: "Neither can we support titles within the frame that reduce the visibility of the image. The film must be accompanied by a short explanation brochure." (ibid.) As an overview of a culture at a certain time, both being indicated in the title, the film did not need further explanation. Music was also excluded: adding for example folk songs to scenes showing activities to be led in silence would be cheating and give a false impression to the audience, who could suppose that they could be accompanied by singing. "Music disturbs watching and may lead to misunderstandings. For instance, in a hunting scene, music disturbs because hunting is a silent activity. All kinds of music, especially emotional, attracts the spectator, repels attention from the film – music is a kind of opium for the cinema." (Peterson 1983: 35)

What is filmed must be precise like an ethnographic description: "When filming some labour process, it is absolutely necessary that it be shown in a comprehensive manner, and reflect in the minutest detail every operation and the role of every tool used in the process; the aesthetic side of the work, montage effects, etc., are all relegated to the background". Here is the difference between a film made for a larger audience and an ethnographic film: "For an ordinary audience such a film is only a bore, while for an ethnographer, it is a source of rich, and sometimes unique, information" (Peterson 1975: 186). It is essential information, because working processes are the main information to be transmitted. Still, for Peterson, it is important to create proper conditions within which the 'actors' behave in a natural way: any interference from the ethnographer, causing repetition of the working process or a tense and nervous atmosphere, may change the worker's behaviour and thus alter the value of the testimony (Peterson 1975: 187).

So we see that Peterson's requirements of scientific seriousness are very severe. Although this is only in principle: in the films he directed, these principles are often broken.

Principles and Practice

Peterson must himself recognise that these requirements are not fully complied with in the films made by the Estonian National Museum "because they are intended to be shown not only to ethnographers, but to a wider audience. In German, an extended version of the texts accompanying four films has been added"[13] (Peterson 1982: 9). So the rules could not be identical, because the films also have to be interesting for a non-professional audience.

Still, Peterson may make compromises on the means, but not on the essentials: there is certainly a voice over, which should not be included in a truly ethnographic film. However, the text is very technical and precise, and full of exact information both in contents and in vocabulary. Professionals would not need explanation of the techniques followed by the camera, but a wider audience would. Professionals would not need to be informed about who the Udmurts are and where they live – a wider audience would. There are folk songs, but they are certainly scrupulously placed where they belong. Unfortunately, in his theoretical writing, Peterson omits to reflect on which should be the rules for a wider ethnographic film, but he seems to consider it the task of a museum

to produce only films for specialists. Actually we have the impression that he was personally not especially interested in wider audience films: in 1975, he does not mention at all the possibility of making films for a wider audience (Peterson 1975: 185–186). The films were shown abroad in a couple of festivals and in Estonia to small specific audiences. They never achieved the status of Tallinnfilm's productions.

These are the films we are going to comment on in this article and which remain to history as the productions of the Estonian National Museum. Despite this, for Aleksei Peterson, the most important of his film achievements is not this. It is the shorter, more focused materials that were shot both in the Vepsian region and in different Estonian regions.[14] The monographs were built from these raw materials, but the shorter films are the real valuable items produced by the Museum. However, what remains from this period as a public production, which were quite successful, are the monographs, which are edited and elaborated films, and they deserve closer attention.

THE FILMS: TWO PERIODS

Reconstruction/Monographs

These films were shot during expeditions led by Aleksei Peterson in Estonian, Vepsian and Udmurt villages. The period chosen was the beginning of the 20th century – a kind of ethnographic 'present' which represents the closest and the most affordable state of traditional culture. Later on, marks of modern life start to interfere – things that do not belong to the field of the ethnologist's research. After the beginning of the 20th century, moreover, in Udmurtia, traditional culture was disrupted by the arrival of Soviet power, which brought, at least according to the official doctrine, considerable material and ideological transformation to life in the countryside, starting with the use of modern technology aimed at saving human effort, up to the inevitable fading of the religious worldview.

The Estonian Village

A very important film in the production of the Estonian National Museum is a film about the Estonian countryside at the beginning of the 20th century. Peterson emphasises that the initiative of editing raw material was Vello Ojanurme's, who worked then as cameraman for the Museum. He actually is the director of the film. The film is very important because it inspired later productions. The aim of reconstruction is already clear from the title. It was produced in cooperation with the Estonian Agricultural Museum.[15] The latter's task was to find the places and activities to be filmed and to create the proper conditions for shooting (Peterson 1982: 3). The goal was to film work devices and it is mainly focused on traditional crop culture. It is a choice: the film presents neither horticulture nor cattle breeding, which were certainly important means of subsistence for Estonian farmers at the beginning of the 20th century, but concentrates on collective agricultural activities in crops, particularly rye culture. Crop culture is one of the spheres that are the most connected with technical equipment and thus it has changed most in time. Moreover, as is explained in the film at the beginning, bread was the Estonian's staple food, all the rest was secondary, and this explains the focus

of the film. There are stupendous shots of haymaking. The film shows the instruments that were used and how they were used. Comparing with a museological exhibition, the film presents a clear advantage: we see not only the instrument, but also the way it was used in a real situation. Despite this, the environment in which this film was shot was not a real countryside environment, it was the open-air museum, in which traditional buildings are to be found.

Although this point is not emphasised in this particular film, in 1978 it was still not possible to show the Estonian countryside at the beginning of the 20th century without mentioning the society's division into classes and adding that, today, in Soviet Estonia, all has changed for the better. In the film, the changes are mentioned, and some shots show, alternatively with reconstruction of the old way of life, and contemporary views of the Soviet village: concrete houses, presented as a major achievement in progress – while the dominant values in the Estonian countryside today are completely different and consider concrete collective houses in the countryside as an unfortunate heritage of the Soviet era, where live rootless people… However, the choice made by Peterson leads him to minimise the ideological weight of official discourse. Not only is this one short part of the film, but its artificiality, if compared with the rest of the film, in which Soviet ideology is entirely absent, suggests it is just a compulsory exercise. Watching this part, one cannot avoid thinking that this artificiality was sought for and the obligation was met with ironic shift. Perhaps our reaction is influenced by the way of seeing things twenty years after the collapse of the USSR, but on the other hand, Estonians were well aware even at that time of the discursive nature of these formulas.

In the 1970s, Estonia was one of the most developed and efficient regions of the Soviet Union. Agriculture was highly mechanised, and handicrafts were disappearing, at least in their traditional forms. So, indeed, the film had to be entirely staged, with 'actors' recruited who followed the instructions of the ethnographer.

On some points, the scientific text read as voice over makes the difference between the Estonian regions, when they are significant. Peterson's precision took into account the regional peculiarities, although he would endeavour to emphasise the general features. He highlighted the importance of having in one sequence people implementing the same regional technique, chosen by the ethnographer. He states that one of the principles of ethnographic filmmaking is to avoid recording working techniques and tools from a large region: the aim should be to show techniques and tools used in a specific place at a specific time. As a negative example, he describes how they were filming the making of shocks of rye in Viljandi Parish. Only later was it discovered that some men had done it "in their own way", because they were from Tartu County (Peterson 1982: 7–8).

For the sake of reconstruction, local specialists in folk culture were associated with the filming. It is curious and sometimes funny to recognise in a film which is supposed to show how things were at the turning of the 20th century, people who have since made a career in the university. Of course, the fictional aspect is not hidden and it is a part of the rule that is announced in the title, but to be reminded of it disturbs the acceptance of the fiction: as Estonia is a small country, the chance of recognising people is very high. This is certainly an unavoidable risk in this genre.

The Udmurt Films

Two films about Udmurtia were shot and edited by the Estonian National Museum team. They were made as an experience of cooperation between the Museum and the Udmurt Museum of Local History, which is based in Izhevsk. As the Udmurts were impressed by what Peterson had achieved with the film on the Estonian village, they proposed the making of the same kind of film about Udmurt rural culture. The projects were well prepared. Peterson had been conducting fieldwork in Udmurtia for some time and had a good knowledge of Udmurt material culture. Serafima Lebedeva, as mentioned before, dealt with pre-revolutionary items. They were able to prepare, if not a real scenario, then the main guidelines for the shooting, and to select the aspects of traditional Udmurt culture that were to be shown in the films. The scientific authorities were chosen at the highest level: the two films – about the southern and the northern Udmurts – were scientifically warranted by names still nowadays very well known in Udmurt cultural life. Vladimir Vladykin is today Professor in Ethnology at the Udmurt State University, a specialist in Udmurt folk religion. Another of the three advisers was Kuzma Kulikov, who was for decades the uncontested leader of the Udmurt Institute of History, Language and Literature. He is a historian who has dedicated himself since 1990 to the delicate points in Udmurt history that were taboo before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The third was Mikhail Atamanov, a highly valued linguist, a specialist in onomastics who has since become an Orthodox priest and has acted for the defence of Udmurt language Orthodoxy, but who also publishes books about Udmurt folklore and especially his home region Egra's oral tradition. The quality of the scientific supervision is thus very impressive and gives huge authority to the reconstructions. Moreover, the filmmakers could also take advantage of all the knowledge gathered in the museum: as well as the human knowledge, they could use items stored in the collections, such as clothes or tools, in the shots.

Two different films were shot consecutively, one about the southern Udmurts, the other about the northern Udmurts. The decision was absolutely justified by the ethnographic realities, for there are indeed two main regions in the Udmurt culture, with in between a transition zone, in central Udmurtia. The main differences between these ethnographic groups are due to history and to the two different contact networks they were included in before the inclusion of all the Udmurts in the Moscow Empire after 1552. The northern Udmurts were included in Vyatka state, which was absorbed by Moscow in 1489, and the southern Udmurts were included in the Moscow Empire a century later, for they belonged to the Golden Horde, the Tatar state run in Kazan until the defeat under Ivan IV, called the Terrible, in 1552.

Unlike the previous film about Estonia, which focuses only on one dimension of village life, the Udmurt films attempt to give a general overview of the traditional culture. They dwell on several phenomena connected with material culture: apart from agriculture, they show village architecture, different crafts, cooking and wedding traditions. Other aspects of traditional culture are mentioned briefly; but oral traditions and spiritual culture belonged to another scientific discipline, the study of folklore.

Both those films, as the previous one, were shot as reconstructions. Because in Udmurtia no open air museum existed at the time, the shots, unlike those of the Estonian film, had to be made in real villages (Lintrop, comments 2010).[16] The film was made according to the following system: the ethnographer, i.e. Peterson, had a clear

idea about the way the Udmurts lived at the beginning of the 20th century. Serafima Lebedeva also had her personal representation of the same subject. She proposed the places, knowing in which village and in which area they should still find people able to perform precise tasks. Peterson accepted or refused – he usually accepted the proposal. Full reconstruction was attempted where they were both convinced the skills had been annihilated by the collective experience. The villages were also chosen according to their appearance and for the presence of old buildings (Lintrop comments 2010). Despite this, much of what is seen had to be specifically staged: it was recommended that the cameraman not shoot electric wires and other modern features, which compelled him to carefully select the point from which he filmed. They chose for interiors abandoned houses still in decent shape, in order to be able to eliminate all anachronisms and fill the space with objects from the museum without disturbing anybody's life. They gave the people folk garments and footwear from the museum.

As far as the activities were concerned, some had to be staged for timing reasons: harvesting crops for example, was staged specially for the film, because it was June, far too early for real harvesting – an experienced audience can notice that the crops in the film are actually not ripe. Most of the agricultural activities also had to be staged because after fifty years in the Soviet Union, the collective agriculture system had undergone fundamental changes: the lands that were cultivated by the rural community, which distributed them to its members, were taken over by the Soviet collective system, both state and cooperative, and had been thoroughly mechanised. Therefore, the traditional techniques were no longer in use, although most of the peasants remembered them.

These films remain interesting not only because we may visualise historical information, but also because some scenes, despite the title of the film, and despite their having been staged, still reflect not only the beginning of the 20th century, but also the time they were shot. How can we explain it?

The fact is that although most industrial sectors had undergone fundamental changes during the 20th century, in many fields the lives of the peasants were still very similar to what they had been at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike Estonia, a monetary economy had not completely penetrated the Udmurt village and many needs were satisfied outside the commercial network, either by handmade production or by barter. These domains had remained unchanged, and probably the backwards position of Soviet agriculture and of the Soviet countryside led to fixity in traditions, so that they had not really changed. As most parts of the public scene had been greatly transformed, conservative islands tended to be very conservative and insisted on continuity. Therefore, by doing what they were used to doing, the people in the film provided information that still corresponded to reality, while the main difference between the 19th century and the 1980s was often the clothing, especially for men – women still used their traditional dresses for everyday work. This situation lasted long into the 1990s – Eva Toulouze remembers personally visiting, in 1994, the Karamas-Pelga weavers, the older Mazitovas sisters, who were always dressed as we see them in the films.

Some of the techniques that were operating both at the end of the 19th century and at the end of the 20th century concern handicraft and homemade items, for example all that is made of textile: Although there were weavers of renown, as with the Mazitova family, there was a loom in many families homes even in the 1990s. Other issues that

are shown in the films – such as felt boot making, brewing, wood and food techniques – have not changed much. So we agree with the paradox that a film made with a clear attempt at artificial reconstruction, achieves communication of, at the same time historical, and contemporary, information. Of course, one of the main difficulties is to guess what the actual status of each activity is, whether it is entirely a reconstruction or a sign of continuity. One solution could be to present, in a future edition, the film as a DVD with comments from the filmmakers. This would certainly add to the informative value of the films.

The two films are very similar in character, although they present some differences, which are mainly due to experience and time. The film about the southern Udmurts was the first to be shot. Certainly, the film about the northern Udmurts got the benefit of this experience, both of the practical knowledge of the country and of team-work with the Udmurt museum. Moreover, while the southern Udmurt film was the first, Lintrop shot and edited shot, and had while filming in northern Udmurtia the editing experience that allowed him to improve his camera work. In addition to this, times had also changed and techniques had evolved. The filmmakers also had a video camera and there is sound in the film, as well as the voice over. Despite this however, the sound was reproduced by the studios of Tallinnfilm – none of it is original.

As mentioned before, there is a voice over, probably due also to the absence of any original sound. It gives very dense information throughout the film, presenting all the details of the techniques visually shown on screen. Actually, Peterson uses for his explanations not only film shots, but also drawings made by his team: the film allows presentation of plans of the houses in a very simple, didactic way. Even more than in the film about the Estonian village, the commentary is absolutely devoid of any ideological nuance: in the general part when presenting the Udmurts, the text emphasises the richness of their traditional culture, material as well as spiritual, but does not mention any of the essentials of Soviet ideology. Unfortunately the absence of synchronised sound makes it impossible to hear the voices of the participants, to discover their comments and even to admire their language and their singing. This is certainly one aspect that gives the spectators the impression the films are much older than they actually are.[17]

Films Documenting Real Life

The filming expeditions were what Peterson used to call "complex expeditions". Their aim was to obtain materials on different media: film was one of them, although actually mainly the cameraman and Peterson himself dealt with this. The other members of the expeditions each had their own field – drawing, photography, object collection. While the main task of the cameraman was to film for the monograph, he still had some autonomy, and, although the amount of film stock was limited and he had to make choices, he happened to attend one ritual in the southern Udmurt village of Varklet Bodya. He filmed it at a length, and this material became a third, unplanned, Udmurt film.

The Udmurt Ritual

The third film is much shorter than the previous two: *Udmurt Religious Practice at the Beginning of the 20th Century* is 20 minutes long. Some shorter sequences were included

in the monograph about the southern Udmurts, but they were more allusive than informative. In this short film, Peterson and Lintrop present a spontaneous ritual: the people were not asked to stage anything, they just did what they intended to do and the camera was there.

We must keep in mind that religion was a delicate issue in the Soviet period. In Udmurtia, the Tsarist power had achieved, with great efforts, the general integration of the indigenous peoples of the Volga region into Orthodoxy through baptism, but it had not succeeded in changing the roots of their worldview, which was very close to nature. In spite of the brutal campaign led against religion – both Christian and animist – in the 1930s, the Soviet power could not achieve the change of the Udmurt worldview. The Udmurts continued worshipping nature and spirits, at first in a hidden way, later more openly. When the Museum's team was in southern Udmurtia shooting architecture and work techniques, they happened to run across a community sacrificial ritual. The result was this film, which is unique among the other productions by the museum at that time for its genuinity.

The only thing that is not really genuine is the title: certainly we may imagine that rituals, according to the descriptions we have, were quite similar at the beginning of the 20th century, but nevertheless these are shots from the end of that century, of people who were not asked to do what they normally do. Certainly it was the best way to present them, and to ensure the security of the people involved, to show them as if they were reconstructions and if the people were acting. Although in the last years of the Soviet Union the pressure on religion was not as heavy as it had been previously, it was still safer to be discrete about such activities.

Actually this shooting, made also by Aado Lintrop, may have had a decisive influence on the cameraman: later Lintrop specialised in Udmurt traditional beliefs and defended his PhD thesis on that subject (Lintrop 2003). At a subsequent date he had other opportunities in the same village to record rituals, although by then with more flexible equipment: he was able to record original sound and had no time limitations. For his first experience, technical difficulties undoubtedly hindered his activity. It was, for example, difficult to film within the *kuala*,[18] because of the inappropriate sensitivity of the film stock. It would have been possible with strong additional lights, but as these were not staged activities, the lights would have interfered with the ceremony. Lintrop made use of both drawings of objects inside the *kuala* and photos of what happened there. These were photos both made by the museum's photographer Priit Härmas and borrowed from a Finnish book (Lehtinen, Kukkonen 1980).

Comparative Study

The last film we want to comment on is *The Making of a Canoe*, which introduces us to another ethnic group, the Vepsians, who were also filmed over several expeditions. A peculiarity of this film compared to the others is that it is a comparison between two cultures: the viewer may observe and discover the similarities and differences between the techniques of the Vepsians and the Estonians in making a canoe from a single tree.

Actually, there was lot of material shot in Vepsian area from the end of the 1960s, mainly genuine documents on working techniques, until the 1980s, when indoor activities were shot (Peterson 1982: 4). Aleksei Peterson went through fairly adventurous expeditions with the southern Vepsians with cameraman Toivo Pedak from 1966. There

was no cooperation with any local institution whatsoever and the conditions were difficult, because access to Vepsian villages, situated in forest and bog areas, was very hard, with no available transportation except travelling by horseback, by foot and by motorcycle (Peterson 1982: 2). So all the Vepsian shots are documentary and genuine, giving testimony of their time. Peterson was actually very satisfied with them, because due to the villages' isolation, many techniques were well preserved, and he qualifies some of the materials as unique. They also filmed pre-Christian rituals.

Aado Lintrop was asked to edit this material in order to make a film similar in spirit to the Udmurt monographs. It was made and achieved, but this film was not available in the proper format and thus we are not able to comment on it.[19] Lintrop did not only edit the monograph, he knew well the existent film data in the Museum archive and found enough similar Estonian material to build up a comparative film on canoe-making techniques. Although Peterson was often the one to decide what to film, he was open to suggestions and he did not interfere with editing. He often accepted ideas proposed by the editor, as in the case of the film that was Lintrop's initiative (Lintrop, interview 2009). Being asked to use the Vepsian material, the first film he edited was this comparative study, for which the final object is very similar in both cultures. The film follows in parallel a Vepsian and an Estonian master making a canoe from a single tree trunk. The good ethnography reflected in the way those processes were filmed is peculiarly enhanced by the comparative aspect. It was shown at the Turku Congress of Finno-Ugrists in 1980 and was probably the incentive for the editing of the monographic film (1982). Curiously, this theme was developed later by another Estonian filmmaker, Mark Soosaar, who widened the subject in *Grandma of Boats* to include the American west coast natives and the Siberian Khantys, insisting also on the symbolical value of the canoe and its connection to death.

The Making of a Canoe is the only film made at the museum that focuses on a comparative approach. Peterson has stressed that one of his important goals as director of the museum was to collect data on different Finno-Ugric cultures in a manner that would allow scientific comparison between cultures, and filmmaking was also aimed at realising this task. No other comparative films was edited from the museum's film materials, mainly because, as Peterson explains, the main objective was collecting new film documents rather than working on old footage (Peterson, interview 2010).

CONCLUSION

Whether it was the intention of the authors or not, these films are still enjoyable today for two reasons. First of all, there are no disturbing factors: they lack, even in the film dealing with the Udmurts' religious practices, the typical discourse of Soviet social analysis, according to which all that is old is obsolete, even reactionary. All these films emphasise the richness and diverseness of the traditions of the Estonians, the Vepsians and the Udmurts.

Secondly, the films are based on good ethnography. The didactic dimension is well presented, the picture is completed by drawings and diagrams and the voice over is thoroughly informative, sometimes it is even very technical. The picture perfectly illustrates the text. The authors have conducted very serious preliminary research, gathered

information from several ethnographic sources, and summed it up in an overview of traditional culture, according to which they chose what to show – a building, an object, or an activity. They have made huge efforts to cut out of what's filmed any sign of modern life, and to restore a picture that corresponds with the supposed reality at some time at the beginning of the 20th century.

When we watch the films made by the Estonian National Museum in the 1960–1980 period, we must keep in mind all the conceptual, ideological and technical conditions. Still, we cannot forget that these films were not what their author most valued and what he wished to leave as a heritage: real ethnographic films, in which activities could be followed long and thoroughly. These materials still exist in the Museum's archives, although the task of giving them back to specialists is still to be achieved. The rediscovery of the films commented upon in this article is a promising first step.

NOTES

1 Estonian National Museum, in Estonian Eesti Rahva Muuseum, literally Museum of the people of Estonia. Its official name, from 1952, was Eesti NSV Riiklik Etnograafiamuuseum (State Museum of Ethnography of the Estonian SSR). As the same institution's name was previously, and again after 1988, the Estonian National Museum, we use this name here for the sake of simplicity.

2 27 December 1917, or, according to the Julian calender used at the time, 8 January 1918.

3 According to Aleksei Peterson, the Museum regularly used a film camera from 1961. Tartu University's Cinema Studio (*kinokabinet*) produced in 1955 the full-length folklore film *Kihnu Wedding* (Peterson 1983: 30). Peterson omits to mention Pääsuke's work in his articles and manuscripts because he did not consider Pääsuke's films ethnographic or scientific, although at the same time he acknowledges the importance of Pääsuke's role in the history of ethnographic photography in Estonia (Peterson, interview 2010).

4 Estonian film production was already concentrated in a single organisation before WWII. The Soviet rulers nationalised it in 1940. The Kunstiliste ja kroonikafilmide Tallinna kinostuudio (Tallinn Studio for Artistic and Chronicler's Films) became, in 1963, Tallinnfilm (Ruus 2010).

5 Let us not forget that the Soviet Union was a closed country, with some open points. Most of the Finno-Ugric regions, included Estonia with the exception of Tallinn, were closed.

6 The science called anthropology was dedicated exclusively to physical anthropology.

7 For example, the main textbook on ethnography in Estonian was titled *Ürgühiskonna ajalugu* (The History of Primeval Society), and was used to train professional ethnographers until the fall of the Soviet Union (Peršits, Mongait, Aleksejev 1988). It was a translation from Russian (Pershits, Mongait, Alekseyev 1982).

8 A. Peterson mentions 1953–1955. One may suppose this is the time in which the film has been shot and prepared (Peterson 1983: 30).

9 Academic ethnography was institutionnally very much connected with the National Museum (Suomen kansallismuseo): the ethnography professor has his rooms in the Museum until 1959 (Anepaio 1998).

10 For example, *Winter Game of Lapland*, 13 min., 1955; *The Making of the Church Boat of Kyrösjärvi*, 8 min., 1956; *The Journey to Church by Boat*, 13 min., 1957; *Abounding in Salmon*, 15 min., 1964.

11 The name comes from its designer, Konstantin Vasilyev.

12 The texts of the films were published in Peterson 1985.

13 For example, Peterson (1975) lists the following films while describing the Museum's film

work between 1961 and 1971: *Netting and Fishing in the Gulf of Pärnu* (1961); *Net-fishing Through Ice-Holes in Water* (1962); *Counterpane Weaving Methods in Rannu* (1962); *Old Farm Buildings on Hiiumaa Island* (1963); *Weaving Ropes and Baskets and Making Bow-Staves* (1963); *Village and Farm Buildings on Saaremaa Island* (1964); *Old Tilling Methods of Southern Vepsians* (1965); *Villages, Homes and Farm Outbuildings of Southern Vepsians* (1966); *Old Failing Methods of Southern Vepsians and Initial Drying of Grain in the Field* (1967); *Making a Dugout in Southern Vepsians* (1968); *Making a Dugout Boat in Estonia* (1969); *Harvesting and Flailing in Southern Estonia*; *Old Flax Growing Methods in the Southeast of Estonia* (1971).

As Aado Lintrop points out, many of these films were poorly edited because of lack of specialist equipment and materials, the editing was done without an editing table and a screening copy was assembled directly from a positive workprint; the films had no sound (Lintrop, interview 2009).

14 The Estonian Literary Museum is listed as one of the co-producers in the film credits.

15 The filming expeditions were used for preparing the building of such a museum: the expeditions were accompanied by restaurators from Moscow for this aim (Lintrop, comments 2010).

16 When the films were shown in 2009 at Worldfilm, the Tartu film festival, they were very much appreciated. A Belgian filmmaker was fascinated by them and commented on them with enthusiasm, and we discovered thus that he was convinced they were indeed from the beginning of the 20th century.

17 Log hut used for ritual purposes.

18 At the time this article was written, the VHS copy of this film was not available at the Estonian National Museum. It has since been found.

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Interviews with Aado Lintrop (2009, comments 2010) and Aleksei Peterson (2009, 2010). Recordings are kept by the authors.

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