

Svetlana Karm and Piret Koosa

Materialising Kinship? Ambivalences in Finno-Ugric Collecting

Drawing on field diaries from Estonian National Museum expeditions conducted during the Soviet period, this paper explores how Finno-Ugric kinship was experienced, negotiated and materialised through encounters with local communities. We argue that Finno-Ugric collecting was simultaneously an expression of solidarity and a practice through which authority was exercised. Our analysis shows that concern for Indigenous peoples, cultural advocacy and a sense of shared identity coexisted with paternalistic attitudes, hierarchical notions of cultural value and forms of othering. Situated within a shared yet unequal Soviet context, Finno-Ugric collecting emerged through negotiations between affinity and distance, solidarity and authority. These tensions reveal the ambivalent character of ethnographic collecting and knowledge production. By highlighting these ambivalences, the paper reflects on the legacies of ethnographic collecting and their significance for the museum today.

Laur Vallikivi

Gods, Idols and Museum Objects: The Lives of *khekheq* in the Nenets Tundra

This paper asks what becomes obscured when Indigenous power objects are treated as representations of culture, religion or heritage. Drawing on fieldwork with Nenets reindeer herders, I examine how, in speech and practice, people shift between treating *khekheq* as objects, beings or both. I trace how feeding, hiding, burning, returning, collecting and displaying can sustain, alter or sever relations, and how responsibility may shift through these acts. Christian missionaries call *khekheq* “idols”: objects wrongly worshipped that carry demonic power and must be destroyed. In museums, they may be preserved and displayed as heritage objects, while some relations persist or are remade there. I argue that what *khekheq* are and what they can do shift with the situations in which they are handled and the relations they form. Decolonising collections therefore requires asking not only what objects represent, but what relations museums preserve, alter or sever through collecting, conserving and displaying them.

Stefan Dudeck and Liivo Niglas

Collaborative Practices in Lennart Meri’s Film Project *Toorumi Pojad*

Lennart Meri’s *Toorumi Pojad* (1989) occupies a unique place in the visual documentation of Khanty culture. This paper examines collaboration between the film crew and the Khanty

community. The approach of Meri and his team was rooted in an interest in Finno-Ugric culture and solidarity with peoples affected by assimilation and Russification, while also reflecting romanticised notions of Indigenous cultures. Drawing on interviews with film crew members and Khanty participants, it examines negotiations through which Khanty participants shaped the film's ethical approach: what could be filmed, how the ritual should be approached, and how conflicts between ritual time and filming time were to be navigated. Ultimately, *Toorumi Pojad* emerges as a complex form of collaborative ethnographic practice whose legacy continues to shape cultural memory, Indigenous representation and knowledge production in visual anthropology.

Alo Paistik

Archival Isthmus: Notes on Returning Images

This presentation explores an isthmus that is both real and figurative. The physical isthmus intersects Ittonjárga (the Lyngen peninsula in Arctic Norway), a historical point of confluence between Northern peoples and foreign traders and travellers. Between the late nineteenth century and the early 1960s, it also became a primary site for generating visual imagery of the Sámi people. As the Kõnkämä Sámi migrated with reindeer from the northern Swedish region of Sápmi to the peninsula's coastal summer pastures, they were positioned as attractions for cruise ship tourists alongside other natural spectacles. Brought back to Western Europe and North America, the photographic images taken for and by the tourists, framed by a mix of ethnographic codes, constructed a prevalent Western imaginary of the Sámi. It is this dispersed collection of images that forms a figurative isthmus: a site of converging imaginaries and colliding visual histories that now calls for ongoing and creative processes of reactivation and restitution.

Katherine Zubovich

Late Soviet Petrosapes: Estonian Materials and Builders in the Oil Town of Kogalym

In late 1980, the first contingent of Estonian builders arrived in Western Siberia to help construct the oil town of Kogalym. As marshy ground froze and the winter construction season began, they worked alongside crews from other Soviet republics to build “high-rises on the Taiga”, as one newspaper put it in 1985, the year that Kogalym and other oil towns in the region formally became “cities”. When they first stepped into the swampy West Siberian oil basin in 1980, Estonian builders did more than participate in the USSR's latest labour mobilisation scheme. Beyond helping to extract remote resources in “fraternal cooperation” with city and

road builders from Lithuania, Latvia and elsewhere, the Estonian builders—and, importantly, the Estonian shale oil-derived building materials that travelled with them—forged links between one Soviet petroleumscape and another. This presentation examines labour regimes, urban spaces and the intertwined landscapes created by late Soviet extractivism.