

# FROM NATION-SCAPE TO NATION-STATE: RECONFIGURING FILMIC SPACE IN POST-SOVIET ESTONIAN CINEMA

*Eva Näripea*

ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS / ESTONIAN LITERARY MUSEUM

Tartu mnt 1,

10145 Tallinn, Estonia

evanaripea@gmail.com

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This essay is concerned with the shifting modalities of spatial representations in (Soviet) Estonian cinema in the transitional period between the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as with the changing procedures of narrating the nation, negotiating its identities and histories. By taking a closer look at two films – Peeter Urbla’s *I’m Not a Tourist, I Live Here* (*Ma pole turist, ma elan siin*, 1988) and Ilkka Järvilaturi’s *Darkness in Tallinn* (*Tallinn pimeduses*, 1993) – this paper attempts to offer some insights into the dynamic process of reshaping the cinematic imaginary of urban environments, as well as the psyches, histories and experiences of their inhabitants, both individual and collective.

KEYWORDS: Estonian cinema, representations of space, representations of history, national identities.

## INTRODUCTION

Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost (openness and freedom of speech) and perestroika (restructuring), as well as the subsequent abolishment of film censorship in the second half of the 1980s resulted in an entirely new take on representations of (urban) spaces in Soviet Estonian cinema, which was closely associated with the dynamic (re)surfacing of national narratives, local identities, and sharp criticism towards Soviet protocols, strategies and administration; this was witnessed, for instance, by films like *Please, Smile* (or *Games for Teenagers*, *Naerata ometi*, directed by Arvo Iho and Leida Laius, 1985), *Flamingo, the Bird of Fortune* (*Õnnelind flamingo*, directed by Tõnis Kask, 1986), *Circular Courtyard* (*Ringhoov*, directed by Tõnu Virve, 1987)

and *I’m Not a Tourist, I Live Here* (*Ma pole turist, ma elan siin*, directed by Peeter Urbla, 1988). All of them revealed a marked break with previous strategies and patterns of representation of built environments and communal identities, intertwined with gradually growing national sentiments and ever-increasing distaste with Soviet realities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, these so-called nation-scapes lost relevance, step by step, as the nation-state ceased being merely a distant dream and desire, becoming an immediate, and sometimes rather laborious, prosaic and quotidian fact of life. In the 1990s and 2000s, the overtly patriotic sentiments and mawkish national icons became limited, on the one hand, to the vocabularies of exoticising productions shot on location in Estonia by film-makers from abroad, such as *Darkness*

in *Tallinn* aka *City Unplugged* (*Tallinn pimeduses*, directed by Ilkka Järvilaturi, 1993; theatrically released in Estonia in 2008), *Candles in the Dark* (directed by Maximilian Schell, 1993) or *Letters from the East* (directed by Andrew Grieve, 1996); and later, on the other hand, to the few locally-initiated (and often governmentally commissioned) films, such as *Names in Marble* (*Nimed marmortahvlil*, directed by Elmo Nüganen, 2002) or *December Heat* (*Detsembrikuumus*, Asko Kase, 2008). At the same time, the greater part of Estonian post-Soviet films tend to lean towards trans-national imaginary, demonstrating the preference of “neutered” spaces and universal(ised) stories/identities (as suggested by Ewa Mazierska<sup>1</sup>), thus raising questions about the interrelationship and continuous negotiations between national and trans-national (spatial) narratives. This essay investigates the notable shifts in filmic space, the representation of (national) identities and (re)construction of historical narrative(s) in Estonian films of the perestroika period on the one hand and the immediate years upon the re-established state sovereignty on the other hand, illustrating these shifts with a comparative analysis of Urbla’s *I’m Not a Tourist, I Live Here* and Järvilaturi’s *Darkness in Tallinn*.

However, in order to understand the true scope and significance of the critical turn in spatial representations that completely changed the face of Estonian cinema in the middle of the 1980s, it is crucial to first map the general outlines of spatial matrixes dominating the Estonian film-scape prior to these cataclysmic changes.

#### NEGOTIATING SPACE: SOVIET-SCAPE AND NATION-SCAPE

As in other Baltic countries, in the aftermath of the Second World War the Soviet authorities established in (or, rather, expanded to) Estonia a new,

<sup>1</sup> Ewa Mazierska, “Postcommunist Estonian Cinema as Transnational Cinema”, in: *Kinokultura: New Russian Cinema*, Special Issue: Estonian Cinema, Toim Eva Näripea, Ewa Mazierska, Mari Laaniste (eds), 2010, <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/10/mazierska.shtml>.

completely state-subsidised and state-controlled system of film production and distribution, which, naturally, entailed a hitherto alien set of ideological instructions, thematic regulations, representational devices and spatial discourses.<sup>2</sup> The local cinematic scene of the 1940s and 1950s was dominated by Russian directors who were sent to cine-indoctrinate the Soviet periphery and who imported to the screens of the newly constituted Estonian SSR an imagery intensely imbued with the formulas of Stalinist socialist realism. The thematic plans, conceived and monitored by the Muscovite ideologists and (cinema) administrators, and intended for undeviating implementation throughout the Soviet Union, prescribed contemporary subjects and episodes from the Sovietised model of historical narrative; typical master plots<sup>3</sup> based on the codes of the *Bildungsroman* were enforced, concentrating on the ideological amending of older (heretofore bourgeois) generations and raising and rearing the younger ranks of the “working people” in the communist spirit; thus favouring either the environments of newly established collective farms or urban settings invested with progressive socialist spirit. All in all, these filmic city-, land- and mindscapes constitute a domain of the so-called Soviet-scape, i.e. Sovietised space.

By contrast, in the 1960s, as the first ethnically Estonian film-makers graduated from the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (Всесоюзный государственный институт кинематографии, VGIK) in Moscow, a refreshing artistic breeze rushed through the Estonian filmic arena, giving the contemporary critics and latter-day commentators an occasion to talk about the (re)naissance of

<sup>2</sup> For more detail see Eva Näripea, “A View from the Periphery. Spatial Discourse of the Soviet Estonian Feature Film: The 1940s and 1950s”, in: *Koht ja paik / Place and Location: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics*, Nr. VII, Special Issue: Via Transversa: Lost Cinema of the Former Eastern Bloc, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Estonian national cinema. Although many of the ideological instructions did not lose too much of their relevance, a noticeable break on both narrative and spatial level was clearly discernible. First of all, with considerable consistency the film-makers of the local lineage (whether Estonian or Russian by ethnicity, and whether theatre- or film-related in training and background) attempted to avoid contemporary subject matters, kolkhoz settings, and the “nodal points” of the Sovietised historical timeline. Instead, they sought to construct what I would call a “nation-scape” or “nation-space”, often realised in the narrative framework of the Estonian literary classics, such as *The Misadventures of the New Satan* (*Põrgupõhja uus Vanapagan*, directed by Jüri Müür and Grigori Kromanov, 1964; based on Anton Hansen Tammsaare’s novel), *The Dairyman of Mäeküla* (*Mäeküla piimamees*, directed by Leida Laius, 1965; based on Eduard Vilde’s work), or *Werewolf* (*Libahunt*, directed by Leida Laius, 1968; adapted from August Kitzberg’s play). Even if presenting a contemporary chronotope, most films of the period lack accentuated socialist didactics, concentrating rather on the subjectivity of the character(s). This “nation-scape” consciously dissociates itself from the immediate Soviet surroundings and realities, generating a somewhat nostalgic, escapist atmosphere, where once and again the sense of longing and subtle sadness evoked by failed hopes, cancelled opportunities and inaccessible aspirations surfaces as an apparent, stubbornly enduring, although more often than not carefully veiled, surge. Instead of the spaces appropriated by mechanised and gargantuan Soviet “agrocracy”, they provide a mnemonic-scape of the pre-war countryside, intimate, tender and familiar.

When compared to the relatively clear-cut Stalinist 1950s, the overall cinematic terrain of the 1970s was much more vague and indistinct. During this decade, which perhaps extends all the way to the launch of perestroika, the cinematic “Soviet-scape” stands side by side with the “nation-scape”. The intellectually cramped political and cultural climate of the earlier years of the period was shaped in the aftermath of the events of the 1968, witnessing

a firmer ideological grip in terms of acceptable subject matters, practices and procedures. Interestingly enough, the cine-scapes were again dominated by urban locations. During the course of the period, however, rural environments gained prominence once more, and 1977 saw the emergence of an “Estonian new wave,” as a group of young directors decisively begun to revamp the local filmic scenery, delving into the painful chapters of Estonian history and rethinking these events rather boldly from an unprecedented angle of native observers. In general, it seems that the films most often sympathetic to the local audiences and critics alike were yet again those that (at least apparently) separated themselves from the current socialist realities, sought cathartic contacts with historical traumas of the nation, representing them from a local point of view, and took place in relatively “closed,” and often also (semi)rural or peripheral, spatial arrangements – be it an island, a provincial town, a village community, a house or even a single room, probing the deepest layers of the characters’ inner universes. These choices of confined settings perhaps functioned as reflections of the state of mind characteristic to the late socialist mentality: the quiet, if reluctant, acceptance of the stagnated societal conditions.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the local spectators also seemed to welcome those films that emphasised, in one way or another, the connection of Estonian existence with the world beyond the Iron Curtain, both on the temporal/historical axis and in terms contemporary spatial configurations.

#### FROM NATION-SCAPE TO NATION-STATE

Precisely against these backgrounds of alternating episodes of “Soviet-scape” and “nation-scape” the radical break of the mid-1980s should be examined and measured. In the broadest sense I would describe it as an opening up, broadening perspectives and expanding, perhaps even challenging, boundaries

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lilya Kaganovsky, “The Cultural Logic of Late Socialism”, in: *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Nr. 2 (3), 2009.

and notions of ideology, history, nation and space. Previously forbidden topics, the seamy side of socialist everyday as well as the darkest chapters of history became to be, as George Faraday has noted, “pervasive feature[s] of most sectors of cultural production.”<sup>5</sup> In films like *Please, Smile* and *Flamingo, the Bird of Fortune* the real and acute problems of Soviet Estonian youth, as well as the contemporary urban spaces contaminated by violence, drug abuse and perverted sexuality, but also perhaps enriched by various subcultures of mainly Western origin,<sup>6</sup> make an arrogant and bold appearance. As Nicholas Galichenko has aptly observed, in typical perestroika (youth) films “[s]ocial maladjustment, lifestyles and attitudes outside the culturally accepted mainstream, even the dangers inherent in the state’s own ideology, are examined.”<sup>7</sup> The contemporary Russian commentators labelled this general trend with a slang term *chernukha* (or “black wave” in Graham’s befitting translation<sup>8</sup>).<sup>9</sup> It must be emphasised, however, that by no means was it an exclusively Russian phenomenon. Quite the contrary,

“one of the chief characteristics of perestroika-era *chernukha*: an all-encompassing sense of decay and hopelessness that permeates both society and environment”<sup>10</sup> can be diagnosed in the film production of the era throughout the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, as Lynne Attwood has argued that “[g]lasnost’ and *perestroika* were interpreted in a distinctly nationalist form in the other republics,”<sup>11</sup> the focal points of the non-Russian films often tended to be slightly different,<sup>12</sup> even though these “chronicle[s] of social horror” invariably mapped “a movement away from the visible and the public to the hidden and undiscussed,”<sup>13</sup> be it in a contemporary framework or from a historical perspective. In terms of general setting, Seth Graham summarises that the typical spaces of *chernukha* were “dirty and/or crowded apartments [...], littered courtyards (populated by feral dogs or cats), urban streets at night, beer bars or liquor stores, police stations or prisons, and hospitals.”<sup>14</sup>

In Estonia, then, the formerly somewhat introverted or at least escapist and often nostalgic “nation-scape” was filled with horrors of Soviet realities on the one hand, and torment, anguish and burden of the hitherto suppressed history(-ies) on the other hand. With only a couple of notable exceptions, most of the feature length narrative film production from the mid-1980s to the collapse of the socialist system regularly concentrated on the disturbing and sordid facets of both the contemporary and historical times, reflected upon the traumatised identities and scarred psyches, both

<sup>5</sup> George Faraday, *Revolt of the Filmmakers: The Struggle for Artistic Autonomy and the Fall of the Soviet Film Industry*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 174–175.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lynne Attwood, “Woman, Cinema and Society”, in: *Red Women on the Silver Screen*, idem (ed.), London: Pandora Press, 1993, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Galichenko, *Glasnost – Soviet Cinema Responds*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Seth Graham, “*Chernukha* and Russian Film”, in: *Studies in Slavic Culture*, Nr. 1, 2000, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Andrew Horton, “‘Nothing Worth Living For’: Soviet Youth and the Documentary Movement”, in: *Wide Angle*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1990; Andrew Horton, Michael Brashinsky, *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p.163; Alexandra Karriker, “Turmoil on the Screen: Shifting Perspectives”, in: *Soviet and Post-Communist Cinema*, Morgantown: West Virginia University, 1993; George Faraday, p. 159; Anna Lawton, *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years*, Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2007, p. 183, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald McCausland, “Katia Shagalova: *Once Upon a Time in the Provinces (Odnazhdy v provintsii, 2008)*”, in: *Kinokultura: New Russian Cinema*, Nr. 24, <http://www.kinokultura.com/2009/24r-odnazhdy.shtml> [2009-09-26].

<sup>11</sup> Lynne Attwood, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jean Radvanyi, “Cinema in the Soviet Republics”, in: *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Emma Widdis, “An Unmappable System: The Collapse of Public Space in Late-Soviet Film”, in: *Film Criticism*, Nr. 2 (21), 1996, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Seth Graham, p. 9.

individual and collective, and threw into cinematic relief the deformed souls and destinies caught between the cogwheel of epic historical events. The “liberated” history, unchained from the limitations of ideological shackles, burst with the vigour of a long-grown abscess, leaving no doubt about who and what was to blame for the misery of the violated and abused nation. The expansion mentioned above also implies that while the earlier Estonian cinema was very often concerned with private spheres, or retreated into some mythical (literary) past (admittedly, with some significant exceptions to this general rule), in many films of the mid- to late-1980s it re-establishes its presence in the public sphere, criticising the Soviet mode of existence and the public policies, which, notably, also have significant consequences in people’s private spheres and create “difficulties [of] living in a dehumanized environment.”<sup>15</sup>

Especially towards the end of the decade and immediately before the political disintegration of the Soviet Union, the excitement over the liberty of national expression becomes more and more noticeable in films, which are regularly adorned, sometimes to the verge of saturation, with countless signs of the Singing Revolution and iconic symbols of nationhood (such as the hitherto forbidden Estonian blue-black-white tricolour, national costumes, folk tunes and patriotic lyrics etc.). Alongside with this burgeoning re-building of (soon-to-be-state-supported) national imagery, however, a strong and steadily escalating sense of unease and apprehension can be detected, as the collective national psyche is increasingly troubled by the changing conditions of self-definition, existential grounding and identification.

The cinematic production of the immediate years after re-gaining independence, up to the mid-1990s, testifies to the fact which has been acknowledged by numerous commentators, namely that the re-establishment of the nation-state was followed by an anticlimax, a sudden bankruptcy of national ideals,<sup>16</sup> at least in the shape they had been conceived thus far. According to Aare Pilv, “for a

considerable part of our history, a sovereign fatherland has been a distant image of a Messianic future, and once it has been actually attained, a threat of dissolving or devaluation of national unity emerges, as one of the foundations of the national sentiment has ceased to exist.”<sup>17</sup> An entirely new project of reconstructing, rethinking and, perhaps most importantly, politically legitimising, collective national identity was initiated by the freshly instated political elite. While the cultural elite had been among the major agents of change in the collective effort of the Singing Revolution in the late 1980s, contributing a fair share to the “re-invention of national history”, in the post-1991 period they gradually left politics and the cultural and political public spheres became separated.<sup>18</sup> Marju Lauristin has expertly demonstrated that

During the course of transition, the entire symbolic environment has changed. Striking changes characterize the usage of language, which was freed from ideological rhetoric, at first of the Communist ideology, but after the first years of patriotic excitement, from the rhetoric of national liberation as well.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1991 and 1995<sup>20</sup> the Estonian cinematic scene was remarkable in a sense that both visually and narratively it seemed to proceed along an almost uninterrupted path the beginnings of which lay in

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Horton, “‘Nothing Worth Living For’...”, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Katrin Kivimaa, *Rahvuslik ja modernne naiselikkus eesti kunstis 1850–2000*, Tallinn, Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2009, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Aare Pilv, “‘Sa oled mul teine.’ Teisesusest eesti kultuuri analüüsis”, in: *Vikerkaar*, Nr. 3, 2007, p. 92.

<sup>18</sup> Marju Lauristin, Peeter Vihalemm, “Recent Historical Developments in Estonia: Three Stages of Transition (1987–1997)”, in: *Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition*, Marju Lauristin et al. (eds), Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997, p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the year 1996 evidently marks a certain watershed. Quite symbolically, it was the year when not a single feature length narrative film was made in Estonia.

the mid-1980s. Naturally, the economic environment had changed dramatically and the business of film-making had to be completely re-invented in every respect of the industrial conditions, but when it comes to subject matters and representations of spaces, identities and histories, the major political rupture of 1991 surprisingly had hardly any immediate impact. It appears that this radical change of political regime initially caused only rather mild shifts in the cinematic representations: the iconic signs and symbols of the nation-state acquired the role of occasional extras, exuberant bursts of patriotism disappeared almost completely and, as expected, no critical stances were taken in relation to the new government. At the same time, however, the extreme dreariness of subjects and spaces also faded away. Meanwhile, the film-makers seemed to be as if bemused after the cataclysmic events and confused in terms of positioning themselves, as the usual Other was suddenly gone and the long-desired capitalist West provided a dizzying range of new vistas. Additionally, the topic of historical wounds evidently lost a greater part of its former vigour. Most often, the films attempted to win the hearts and sympathy of the audiences with sentimental romances and scandalous stories (mostly without any political colour), frequently delving nostalgically into the interwar period, apparently seeking some sort of existential point of anchorage and emotional shelter. This trend of commercialisation resulted in a specific, “neutered” cine-scape, devoid of accentuated national and/or local elements, and dominated by universalised narratives, trans-national stories, plots and constructions of identities.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, it was also the year when the first class of young film-makers – directors of fiction films by speciality – graduated from the film programme recently set up at the Tallinn Pedagogical University in 1992 and supervised by Arvo Iho. This was the first time when professional training in film became available on Estonian territory, as in the Soviet times the only establishment of educating film professionals had been the VGIK in Moscow.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ewa Mazierska, as well as her essay in this volume.

At the same time, in the early 1990s, several foreign directors were drawn to the post-Soviet republics, eager to discover their dramatic history and use it as a raw material for potential box-office hits. Ilkka Järvilaturi's *Darkness in Tallinn*, Maximilian Schell's *Candles in the Dark* and Andrew Grieve's *Letters from the East* comprise an incomplete list of these efforts to Westernise/colonise and cine-fictionalise the local (hi)stories, experiences and identities. In what follows I will try to compare and contrast the way (urban) spaces, identities and historical narratives were negotiated and constructed in two of the most remarkable films of the period stretching from the waning days of socialism to the first years of political independence and nascent capitalism: Peeter Urbla's *I'm Not a Tourist, I Live Here* on the one hand, and Ilkka Järvilaturi's *Darkness in Tallinn* on the other hand.

#### FROM TIME-IMAGE TO MOVEMENT-IMAGE: DRIFTERS AND MOBSTERS

Urbla's film, set mainly in Tallinn and shot on location between April 1987 and spring of 1988, concentrates on the engagements, affairs and soul-searches of two middle-aged Estonian men – an illegal estate agent of flat exchanges, Mart Kangur, and a failed stage actor, Felix Kramvolt. Although diametrically antithetic in their personalities – Mart being the proto-capitalist business shark *par excellence*, a shameless speculator, whereas Felix is a friendly, and slightly naïve idealist, a former flower child, now working as an operator of the central heating facility at the city's central Viru Hotel – their existential condition, as well as that of most of the other characters of the film, including Tallinn, perhaps the true protagonist, is strikingly similar and defined by a fundamental sense of homelessness, a longing for belonging and psychological security. Having been appropriately diagnosed as an “artistic analysis of a moment”,<sup>22</sup> the film is replete with numerous attributes of the era, including those related

<sup>22</sup> Peeter Torop, “Mängufilmiaasta 1988”, in: *Teater. Muusika. Kino*, Nr. 9, 1988, p. 28.

to the national liberation movement (Estonian national flags, the picket of students protesting against phosphate mines etc.).

Järvilaturi's *Darkness in Tallinn* is similar in this respect: both its visual and sound-track are saturated with icons of national patriotism – from flags to national costumes and from the national anthem to the popular melodies of the Singing Revolution. Yet its narrative intent is of an entirely different register; it presents a partly fictional tale of a burlesque “parallel history”.

According to the English subtitles of the opening credits, “Estonia was independent for 11 years [*sic!*] between the World Wars, before the Nazis invaded it and the Soviet Union sucked it up. But the invaders couldn't get to the Baltic nation's treasury, worth \$970 million in gold. Luckily, it had been hidden away in Paris, where it's been kept for 50 years.”

The plot sets off on the eve the gold is returned to the Estonian Bank in Tallinn, and concentrates on the ultimately failed attempt of the (apparently Russian) mafia to rob it. The mobsters plan to execute their evil scheme by means of a total blackout of the city's entire electrical system. In addition to this main storyline, a parabolic, perhaps even somewhat Biblical scenario thread involves a young couple – Toivo, a slightly sapless Estonian fellow, an “everyday hero,” and Maria, his Roma fiancée – whose child is born after a complicated and nearly fatal delivery (notably assisted by a stereotypical Jewish obstetrician) during the night of the unsuccessful robbery and the subsequent riots around the city.

For theorising, comparing and contrasting the respective national and spatial narratives of the two films, I will employ Deleuze's concepts of movement-image and time-image. In the broadest sense, Deleuze invented these theoretical tools in order to analyse the different practices of editing in American and European cinema, distinguishing the movement-image of “unbroken, linear narrative, based upon the continuity editing rules established by the Hollywood studio system” and the time-image of “the cinemas of the new waves which experimented

with discontinuous narrative time.”<sup>23</sup> Connecting this distinction with the representations of national identities in films, David Martin-Jones has proposed that

A jumbled, fragmented, multiplied or reversed film narrative . . . , can be interpreted as an expression of the difficulty of narrating national identity at a time of historical crisis or transformation. Such narratives formally demonstrate a nation's exploration of its own ‘national narrative’, its examination of the national past, present and/or future in search of causes, and possible alternatives, to its current state of existence.<sup>24</sup>

Borrowing from Homi K. Bhabha,<sup>25</sup> Martin-Jones further suggests that movement-image tends to be more or less pedagogical “in that it aimed to establish one dominant view of national history, and identity”, while the labyrinthine time-image reflects the potentially ungrounding “performative rethinking” of those notions,<sup>26</sup> “the people's habits and practices re-created anew on a daily bases, the diverse and dynamic process of life.”<sup>27</sup> At the same time, however, Martin-Jones also suggests that in many films the elements of movement- and time-image co-exist and intertwine, even though one or the other ultimately defines the overall “ideology” of narrating time and space, nation and history.

Accordingly, then, I would argue that Urbla's *Tourist* is dominated by time-image: its loosely tied narrative underlines the passing of time itself;

<sup>23</sup> David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation”, in: *Nation and Narration*, idem., (ed.), London: Routledge, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>27</sup> Epp Annus, Piret Peiker, “Homi K. Bhabha”, in: *Kahekümnenda sajandi mõttevoolud*, Epp Annus (ed.), Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2009, p. 919–931, p. 928. Cf. Epp Annus, “National Mythology: Past and Present”, in: *Interlitteraria*, Nr. 5, 2000.

the characters, immersed into the flow of time, are largely deprived of the power to control the direction their lives assume, they become “dislocated from the linear continuity of spatialized time.”<sup>28</sup> The (spatial) processes are de-territorialized, that is, characterised by a strong drive for change and dynamism.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the film was produced in the midst of the turmoil of history, chronicling events as they emerged, but also recording the atmosphere of profound uncertainty and anxiety.<sup>30</sup> Despite the abundance of national attributes, *Tourist* is permeated with considerable difficulties in narrating the nation(-space), which finds its clearest expression in the fact that the film’s protagonists, the natives of Tallinn, as well as the city itself, are haunted by a constant sense of dislocation, drifting and placelessness,<sup>31</sup> dissolving the fixed fabric of national narrative into small and fragmented, complicated and unstable threads of personal experiences, intimate meditations, multiple and shifting identities, providing no clear conclusions. Furthermore, the loose narrative flow, divided in turn into multiple perspectives of narration (presenting the points-of-view of various characters), is suspended by numerous inner dialogues of the protagonists, which function to communicate the unhinged states of their mind, their spiritual drifting, much in the manner of the Flying Dutchman, as suggested by Urbla – this motif of a ghost ship occurring over and over again in the shape of Wagner’s famous opera.

Järvilaturi’s *Darkness*, on the other hand, is clearly a movement-image, set into the framework of certain generic rules (a combination of “post-

modernised” elements of *film noir*, gangster film and *chernukha*, designated as a “dark comedy” by a CNN reporter), and following the classical patterns of continuity editing and closed narrative structure.<sup>32</sup> The characters and their psychological motives – their decisions, choices, desires, and personal traits – act as the narrative’s main causal agents. Järvilaturi compresses the post-socialist chaos into an easily graspable, simplified and concise configuration of almost formulaic readability. His Tallinn emerges as if from a comic book, as a city defined by the epic struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. It proposes a (pseudo)pedagogical narrative of history and nation, providing a fixed perspective of a “finished” history, and promoting a static and stable national identity based on the legitimised chain of events and established set of symbols. From a local’s point of view, a search for and a construction of a fake, exoticised “authenticity” targeted at inter- or trans-national audiences is clearly discernible. The film creates a grand and stylised narrative, monumentalising Estonian history, even though it is a mythological “fictional world.” The narrative of nation(-state) is clear-cut and coherent, the evil is defeated, and the law and history of the newly born state eventually triumph.

On the level of spatial representations, the two films again differ greatly in terms of their points of departure. Although both of them have been shot on location in Tallinn, Urbla has mapped the space of the city from the unmistakably local’s point of view, presenting and following real spatial configurations and trajectories. The narrative stream runs along truly existing spatial channels of the city, so to say: when Felix catches a bus to Lasnamäe, one of the latest, largest and ugliest achievements of Soviet-style residential housing, a “dormitory” district built for and mostly populated by masses

<sup>28</sup> David Martin-Jones, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Eik Hermann, “Gilles Deleuze”, in: *Kahekümnenda sajandi mõttevoolud*, p. 749.

<sup>30</sup> Peeter Urbla, “Teel ekraanile. Tallinnfilmi kaheseerialine mängufilm ‘Ma ei ole turist, ma elan siin’”, in: *Ekraan*, Nr. 12, 1988, p. 10

<sup>31</sup> For more detail, see Eva Näripea, “Home and Away: Urban Representations in 1980s Soviet Estonian Cinema”, in: *Koht ja paik / Place and Location: Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics*, Nr. III, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> See e.g. David Bordwell, “The Classical Hollywood Style”, in: *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson (eds), London, Melbourne, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985; idem, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London: Routledge, 1985.



of “migrants” located to Estonia from distant Soviet republics in the Machiavellian scheme of the Soviet national policy, it evidently follows the route of the regular service; and when Mart hires a taxi to run his daily estate agent’s errands, the car travels along the clearly recognisable network of streets. Similarly, most of the neighbourhoods are as familiar and identifiable to the local audiences as they are to the film’s characters, and the buildings tend to serve their actual functions. On the other hand, the spatial patterns created by Järvilaturi distinctly reveal the perspective of an outsider: they are elliptically sutured together from separate and fragmented patches of places according to the particular narrative and/or generic intentions and in keeping with the laws of continuity editing. While this peculiarly semi-documentary approach to the spatial relations, and particularly the pictorial language of *Tourist* – especially the recurring aerial shots of the expansive labyrinthine cityscape of Tallinn, which, quite paradoxically, hamper the supposed “legibility” of the familiar space – reinforce the film’s underlying idea of complex and confused mindset of the era, also inviting comparison with the complicated process of repositioning identities and rethinking historical narratives, Järvilaturi’s choice to compose his image of Tallinn from isolated pieces of locations, stitched together arbitrarily and unconcerned with the actual geography of the city, as well as presented by means of an ostentatiously (pseudo)*film noir*-like pictorial vocabulary, on the contrary, generates a strongly fictional and generic space, which is at the same time simplified and reductive, supporting thus the stylised, straightforward and somewhat primitive portrayals of local identities and historical narratives. Perhaps it can even be argued that while Tallinn in *Tourist* is a definitive entity, in a sense that it would be nearly impossible to present the same narrative in a different city,<sup>33</sup> then in *Darkness in Tallinn* the particular locale plays a considerably less decisive role, and the same, or at least corresponding, story could be told under the title of, for example, *Darkness in Rīga* or *Darkness in Vilnius*. Additionally, Urbla’s Tallinn is an almost anthropomorphic creature; the existential

condition of the city is intertwined with the psyches of the human protagonists who address the city in their inner monologues as if it was their *alter ego*. Järvilaturi, on the other hand, covers the city with a veil of deepest darkness, as if concealing its characteristic, idiosyncratic properties from the audience, undermining the particular setting and drawing instead attention to the (trans-nationally comprehensible) action-driven plot and (melo)dramatic relations between the characters.

Finally, however, a whole range of notable similarities connect Urbla’s and Järvilaturi’s films, of which I’d like to draw attention to a couple of perhaps the most relevant elements. First of all, on both occasions the narratives and spaces are populated by characters from multiple ethnical backgrounds. Mostly these are Estonian and Russian, but in *Tourist* also English, German and Finnish communities/cultures are introduced on a linguistic level (Felix sings “Oh, what a beautiful morning...”, and wears a T-shirt declaring in English “I’m Not a Tourist, I Live Here”); a production of Wagner’s opera *Der Fliegende Holländer* is broadcasted on Finnish TV in German with Finnish subtitles), while in *Darkness* Toivo’s fiancée Maria is apparently of Romany origin and the somewhat repulsive obstetrician is clearly Jewish. Yet, again, while in *Tourist* Urbla refuses to provide any unambiguous assessments or judgments in relation to the Russian population as a whole in Estonia (although the “migrants” from other Soviet republics are clearly seen as a threat), and comes across as rather suspicious of the hasty endorsement of “positive Westernisation,” Järvilaturi’s representations of different ethnicities usually confine themselves to somewhat naïve, rather limited and profoundly stereotyped protocols of diagnosis and evaluation.

The second parallel I’d like to highlight here is the fact that in both Urbla’s and Järvilaturi’s films a

<sup>33</sup> Although, admittedly similar topics have provided substance to numerous films taking place in other locations, one of the contemporary examples being Wim Wenders’s *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987), which Urbla himself has noted as being concerned with comparable subject matter and mentality.

central spatial point can be identified. In *Tourist* it is the Viru Hotel, indeed standing next to the actual urban centre of Tallinn. Built between 1969 and 1972 by Finnish constructors (although designed by Estonian architects Henno Sepmann and Mart Port),<sup>34</sup> it acquired the image of a “Western oasis” *par excellence* in the midst of the socialist desert, as it was designated to accommodate only foreign visitors. Especially in the 1980s, this status naturally encouraged various versions of shadow economy, and groups of black-marketeers conducting their shady speculations in its vicinity are also recorded in Urbla’s film. More importantly, however, the hotel serves in the film as a locus and signifier of a multinational community on the one hand, and another marker of the existential and overwhelming sense of homelessness and also temporality, some sort of constant in-between-ness, on the other hand. Despite standing in the centre of the city, it fails to provide existential core or anchoring shelter neither to the characters of the film, to the city itself or to the rest of its inhabitants. Quite the opposite – it is the ultimate symbol of a lack of home, a temporary station for drifters. In relation to this, it must be noted that however complex or confused the film’s narrations of nation/identity/history might seem, the ideals and ideas advocated in *Tourist* in fact appear as rather conservative by nature: the film clearly conveys an assumption that a point of time has existed in history where nation-space and national identity were solid and sound, constant and consolidated. In order to communicate this opinion, Urbla uses once more a potent architectural figure: in his inner monologues Mart utters repeatedly a dream about dwelling in a house built in the 1930s – only then could he truly “begin to live.”

While the Viru Hotel retains its initial, real-life function (as well as diverse connotations) in *Tourist*, the central building of *Darkness in Tallinn* – the fictional headquarters of the Estonian Bank – undergoes a rather interesting functional metamorphosis. The bank of the film is actually the building

of the National Library of Estonia, designed by Raine Karp and built between 1985 and 1993. Considering its solid volume and massive limestone walls it is indeed not surprising that the film-makers chose to appropriate it in this particular function. However, this choice entails an additional interpretative layer for those who are familiar with its initial function and conditions of construction. First, literature has always been considered the ultimate form and expression of Estonian culture, which thus makes the National Library one of the most sacred treasuries of the national legacy and a significant container of national identity. Secondly, as the erection of the building coincided with the period of perestroika and the Singing Revolution, it also became an important signifier, and even an immediate agent, of the process of national liberation. It remains unknown if Järvilaturi was aware of these connections and references, but he indeed managed to choose a setting which, perhaps unexpectedly, resonates extremely well with his story of an epic struggle for national sovereignty and the right for self-determination, in this occasion aided and guaranteed by the ultimate capitalist instrument – pure gold.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that in cinematic terms the transition from nation-*scape* to nation-*state* was a gradual and subtle process, the full and comprehensive analysis of which remains beyond the scope of this essay. However, an initial inspection evidently suggests that the more radical break with previous modes of filmic expression and representational regimes related to spaces, identities and histories was in the post-Soviet era first introduced by film-makers from abroad, whose exoticising depictions of the newly discovered European “backstage” might seem naïve and trivial in their insights, yet nevertheless suggestive in their ability to notice and accentuate facets of local existence which can be uncomfortable to admit for the natives and therefore remain unnoticed and/or (deliberately) concealed.

<sup>34</sup> See Mart Kalm, *Eesti 20. sajandi arhitektuur*, Tallinn: Prisma Prindi Kirjastus, 2001, p. 306–307.

Received 2010-01-30

NUO „TAUTOS-ERDVĖS“ IKI „TAUTOS-  
VALSTYBĖS“: KINEMATOGRAFINĖS  
ERDVĖS REKONSTRAVIMAS  
POSOVIETINIAME ESTIJOS KINE

*Eva Nāripea*

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Estijos kinas, erdvės reprezentacijos, istorijos reprezentacijos, tautiniai identitetai.

SANTRAUKA

Michailo Gorbačiovo *glasnost* ir *perestroikos* politika bei kino cenzūros uždraudimas antroje 9-ojo dešimtmečio pusėje sąlygojo visiškai naują (miesto) erdvių vaizdavimą sovietiniame Estijos kine, glaudžiau susijusį su dinamišku anksčiau užgniaužtu tautinių naratyvų iškilimu, vietos identitetų pervertinimu ir griežtos sovietinių taisyklių, strategijų ir administravimo kritikos atsiradimu. 7-ojo ir 8-ojo dešimtmečių filmai bandė išvengti tam metui aktualių temų, kolchozo aplinkos ir pagrindinių sovietizuotos istorijos įvykių. Šie filmai siekė kurti taip vadinamą „tautos vaizdinį“ arba „tautos erdvę“, kuri sąmoningai atsiribojo nuo tiesioginės sovietinės realybės ir aplinkos kurdama šiek tiek nostalgiką, eskapistišką atmosferą. Paskutiniųjų sovietinės Estijos metų filmai, be kita ko, atskleidžia aiškų atsiribojimą nuo tų strategijų ir aplinkos bei kolektyvinių tapatybių vaizdavimo modelių. Ankstesnis iš dalies intravertiškas ar bent jau eskapistiškas ir dažnai nostalgikškas „tautos vaizdinys“ viena vertus

buvo kupinas sovietinės realybės siaubo, kita vertus – užgniaužtos istorijos(-ų) kančios, sielvarto ir naštos. Nuo 9-o dešimtmečio vidurio iki socialistinės visuomenės žlugimo sukurti filmai, tokie kaip Peeterio Urblos *Aš ne turistas, aš čia gyvenu* (*Ma pole turist, ma elan siin*, 1988), dažnai buvo nukreipti į nerimą keliančius ir niekingus šiuolaikinių ir istorinių laikų aspektus, vaizduojantys tiek individualias, tiek kolektyvines traumuotas asmenybes ir paženklintas sielas, deformuotas būtybes ir likimus, įstrigusius epinių istorinių įvykių ratuose. Žlugus Tarybų sąjungai šie vadinamieji tautos vaizdiniai pamažu tapo nebeaktualūs: dainuojančios revoliucijos metu filmuose drąsiai vaizduoti (tuomet neegzistuojančios) valstybės ženklai ir simboliai įgavo atsitiktinio priedo reikšmę, energingi patriotizmo proveržiai beveik išnyko, ir, kaip tikėtasi, neatsirado jokia kritinė pozicija naujosios valdžios atžvilgiu. Kino kūrėjai atrodė suglumę po kataklizminių įvykių ir pasimetę, nes įprastas Kitas staiga dingio, o taip ilgai laukti kapitalistiniai Vakarai atnešė svajinančią gausybę pasirinkimų. Dauguma Estijos posovietinių filmų rėmėsi transnacionaliniu įsi-vaizdavimu, demonstruodami preferenciją „belytėms“ erdvėms, kuriose dominuoja universalūs naratyvai, transnacionaliniai pasakojimai, planai ir tapatybės (pagal Ewą Mazierską, 2010). Tuo metu, 10-ojo dešimtmečio pradžioje, ieškodami savo bestseleriui tinkančios dramatiškos istorijos, į posovietines respublikas atvyko keletas užsienio režisierių. Ilkka Järvilaturi *Sutemos Taline* (*Tallinn pimeduses*, 1993) yra vienas iš tų suvakarietintų/kolonizuotų ir dramatinuotų vietos istorijų, patirčių ir tapatybių pavyzdys.