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## New Waves, New Spaces: Estonian Experimental Cinema of the 1970s

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### Introduction

Using the label of “new wave” in the context of Estonian cinema is highly problematic and controversial because, unlike in France or, to take a more similar socio-political framework, in Czechoslovakia, the (Soviet) Estonian filmic arena did not see a creative outburst synchronous with and comparable to, both in scope of innovative production and international acclaim, the cinematic practices adorned with the adjective “new” elsewhere in Europe. While the heyday of various new waves, both in Western Europe and in the Soviet bloc, is normally limited to the period between the mid-1950s and the ruptures of 1968, in Estonia, as the local literary critic Mart Velsker (1999: 1211) has accurately argued, the essence of the innovative 1960s “is manifested in its most vivid form some time between 1968 and 1972, that is, at the end of the decade and partly even beyond it.” Compared to other artistic genres, however, Estonian cinema was severely lagging behind, both in achievement and in reputation. The true “Estonian New Wave” has been defined by local critics as born and burgeoning in the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s (Orav 2003: 54ff; Kärk 1995: 117; Kirt 1980: 33-4), when a new generation of young filmmakers entered the stagnated cinematic stage with bravado, finally inverting the low ebb that had lasted nearly a decade. Yet, in the midst of the ebbing waters of the early 1970s, a



dark horse emerged, whose artistic contribution to Estonian cinematic heritage deserves to be identified as a new wave in miniature, a veritable diamond, albeit perhaps rough-cut. This author was Jaan Tooming, an actor and a theatre director, whose films constitute a fundamentally unprecedented phenomenon in Estonian cinema. His controversial, stylistically and semantically rich output, composed of unceasingly intriguing visual utterances, provides a fascinating order of spatial representations, which reconfigure Estonian cinematic territories in several respects and, at the same time, re-evaluate and criticize quite provocatively the historical and conceptual framework of imagining national, social and personal identities. The following investigation of Tooming's films will concentrate chiefly on the spatial representations and practices, with digressions into the domain of re/constructing identities, both personal and collective.

### Stagnation and Innovation

Although in the early 1960s Estonian cinema had seen a notable shift in content and style, away from the banalities and stereotypes of Stalinist socialist realism towards the emergence of both locally rooted and trans-nationally disposed film production, this development remained rather modest in its scope, both in terms of the force of its formally/narratively innovative impulse and its effect on the audiences, whether local or international. Moreover, the mainstream of cinematic output in the first part of the 1970s is usually seen as a product of an era of severe stagnation. According to Arvo Iho, "the 1970s were a time of stagnant water in Estonian narrative cinema; many films were made which had no effect on anybody and no connection with actual life" (Iho 1991).

In this regard, cinema—which has often been treated by critics and audiences alike as a not fully qualified part of Estonian national culture—stood in stark contrast with the rest of the local cultural arena, which saw a true boom of creative innovation in literature, fine arts and theatre. In the late 1960s and early 1970s this became especially visible in the university town Tartu, the second-largest city of Estonia, where a new generation of intellectuals and artists, born largely after World War II, formed a thriving circle of young critically minded and forward-looking thinkers and authors. One of the most important centers of these cutting edge developments was Vanemuine Theater, once the cradle of Estonian national theatre during the national awakening of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, first amateur and then professional. Kaarel Ird, the legendary creative head (1944-1948 and 1956-1985) of Vanemuine, invited several young talents—actors, writers and directors—to the theater, including Jaan Tooming, Evald Hermaküla and Mati Unt, who modified radically the face of Estonian theater during the late 1960s and the 1970s. This "theater revolution," breaking with the "cardboard and make-believe" (Hermaküla [1992] 2002: 315) aesthetics of the previous years, was deeply stimulated by the innovations generated in theater by Antonin Artaud ("Theatre of Cruelty"), Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Western avant-garde groups, such as the Living Theater in New York (Unt 1968, 1972, 2002; Valgemäe 1995: 120ff; Rähesoo [1976] 1995: 73; Sang 1986). According to Mati Unt, it was characterized, first, by a conscious "separation from literature and detachment from the word, an attachment to the human, the bodily and its presence," and secondly, by a "separation from the rational and the Apollonian, and an attachment to the subconscious and the Dionysian" (Unt 2004: 58; see also Rähesoo 1997: 13; Valgemäe 1995: 118). The first stage of this break, epitomized by Hermaküla's much-celebrated production of the *Cinderella Game* (*Tuhkatriinumäng*, 1969, written by Paul-Eerik Rummo; see e.g. Karja 2001), and aptly described by Jaak Rähesoo in Flaubert's



words as the period of *rage et impuissance* (Rähesoo [1976] (1995): 64), “found its expression in the aggressiveness and physicality of stage action, and in heavy reliance on symbols and metaphors,” which “reflected a hysterical rage born out of a feeling of political hopelessness after the Prague Spring had been crushed” (Rähesoo 2007: 248; see also Rähesoo 2002: 451; Epner 2006: 2439; Epner 2002). Later, between 1976 and 1983, Tooming staged a whole array of productions in Vanemuine, which “pumped new life into a series of Estonian classics by Kitzberg, Tammsaare, and Vilde” (O’Connor 2006: 194), and, even more importantly to the following discussion, “pointed to various Oriental and Occidental spiritual or folkloristic traditions, and actively satirized all manifestations of human oppression, greed, hypocrisy, and vanity” (Rähesoo 2007: 249; Rähesoo 2003: 71).

In the first half of the 1970s, Jaan Tooming’s brimming creative energy also overflowed into cinematic endeavors,<sup>[1]</sup> giving occasion to talk about experimental film—in fact, for the first time in the history of (Soviet) Estonian cinema. His works, although few in number and extremely limited in terms of exposure to audiences even within Estonia, introduced in the field of Estonian filmmaking an entirely new narrative, visual and spatial discourse.

As already indicated, Tooming’s cinematic output is small in quantity, yet undoubtedly great in significance, encompassing only four films: *Endless Day* (*Lõppematu päev*, Eesti Telefilm/Eesti Kultuurfilm, 1971, rel. 1990) and *Colorful Dreams* (*Värvilised unenäod*, Tallinnfilm, 1974), both co-directed with Virve Aruoja; *The Misadventures of the New Satan* (1977, Eesti Telefilm; initially a play he directed in Vanemuine, adapted for stage and screen from an Estonian literary classic) and, finally, *Man and Pine Tree* (Eesti Telefilm, 1979). For several reasons, the largest portion of my discussion concentrates on the *Endless Day*. Foremost, it was Tooming’s first and shortest, yet undoubtedly most radical film, both in terms of its visual and narrative style and controversial content. It was not only banned even before its completion, but also designated for destruction, sharing thus the same level of “ultimate political threat” as, for example, Jan Němec’s *The Party and the Guests* (*O slavnosti a hostech*, 1966), which was infamously “banned forever” by the reactionary administration of the Czechoslovakian period of “normalization” in 1973. The *Endless Day* thus never reached its contemporary audiences and was completed nearly twenty years later, in 1990, after the materials, miraculously preserved in a shed of one of the film’s cinematographers, Vello Aruoja, were found and brought to light.

Another critically important fact is that three of Tooming’s films, including the infamous *Endless Day*, were produced by Estonian Television Film, a secondary studio alongside the republic’s main film studio, Tallinnfilm. Whereas the latter belonged to the Union-wide system, topped and carefully controlled by Goskino in Moscow, whose Russian-speaking and rigidly Soviet-minded management was undeniably (one of) the main reason(s) for the suspicious treatment of the whole Estonian cinematic output by local audiences and critics alike, the Television Film studio, a unit of film production under Estonian Television (as, in fact, the greater part of local television as a whole), enjoyed much more liberal conditions in the 1960s (Šein 2005: 25, 31), as well as greater sympathy and support of local audiences. This in turn means that the





production of the Television Film studio must be considered in a different light from that of the main studio in terms of intent, content and reception. In the beginning of the 1970s, however, the ideological grip also tightened in television, affecting also the unit of film production (since 1971 all scripts had to be approved in Moscow, in addition to the Artistic Council of the studio itself; Šein 2005: 77). Nevertheless, although in the aftermath of 1968 “the ideological demands brought about the lessening importance of creative criteria,” Estonian Television Film still managed to produce, even if not always broadcast, a whole array of remarkable narrative and documentary films (see Unt n.d.). Finally, among Tooming’s filmic works, *Endless Day* provides perhaps the most eloquent material for investigating the radical renewal of visual and narrative form, as well as the shifting registers of spatio-social portrayals and critiques in Estonian cinema.



### Form: Image, Narrative, Space

According to Peeter Linnap, the “dynamism and expressivity of the formal language” of Tooming’s films resembles first and foremost the ambiance of the works of the French *nouvelle vague* directors (Jean-Luc Godard and many others) as well as that of the kindred styles adopted at the beginning of the 1960s by many filmmakers in the Eastern bloc (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary) and Soviet Russia (Linnap 2002: 62; see also Kärk 1996). Among those, the Polish and Czechoslovakian influences were especially pertinent to the Estonian (film) culture in general and to Tooming’s development as an author in particular. The Polish connection, that is the influence of the Polish School of film (see e.g. Falkowska 2007: 35) had been strong from the late 1950s onward, making a lasting impression on the so-called first generation of (Soviet) Estonian filmmakers of the 1960s in particular, and Estonian culture in general (one of the most direct and pertinent examples would be Eino Tomberg’s ballet *Joanna tentata* (1970), which was directly inspired by Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s 1961 film *Mother Joan of Angels* (*Matka Joanna od Aniołów*); see Kõrver 2004; also Kärk 2008; Sobolewski 2008; Post 2008). Moreover, the Polish theater, especially the work of Jerzy Grotowski, had a profound, although to a large extent indirect, effect on Estonian theatrical innovations of the 1960s and 1970s (see Ramp 1969; Laasik 2005; Unt 2004; Vahing 1997; Epner, Unt and Vahing 2002; Epner 2006: 2439-40 etc.), a process where Tooming played a central part, as outlined above. Additionally, the works of Czechoslovakian filmmakers and theatre directors became a constant source of admiration and stimulation for their Estonian colleagues. For example, the thriving Czechoslovakian theatre, especially the productions of the small, “democratically attuned” production companies in Prague, encouraged Evald Hermaküla to use projections of filmic images in his play *Midsummer 1941* (*Südasuvi 1941*, 1970) (Laasik 2004: 45; Unt [1972] 1997: 143-4). In the context of film production, Lennart Meri’s seminal article from 1968, “The great loner,” reveals a fair amount of professional jealousy towards the achievements of Czechoslovakian directors. In particular, he mentions Jiří Menzel and his film *Closely Observed Trains* (*Ostře sledované vlaky*, 1966), as an example of remarkable talent (Meri 1968). Perhaps it is also relevant to mention that Jaan Tooming visited Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1967 and was so excited by the “joy and hope boiling in the youth there” that he decided to learn the Czech language and subscribed to various Czechoslovakian cultural and theatre magazines (e.g. *Divadlo*) (Neimar and Visnap 1988: 70). Finally, among the photographers, a number of whom also worked as cinematographers, the ideas distributed via the Czechoslovakian magazine *Revue Fotografie* and the Polish *Fotografia* gained immense popularity (Linnap 2000: 82; Tooming 1995:



29), encouraging them in the mid-1960s to shoot “back yards, gutters, puddles, old doors and windows, crumbling plaster etc.” (Tooming 1995: 40).



Linnap's eloquent and persuasive analysis of the formal structure of Tooming's films concentrates mainly on the characteristic aspects of their cinematography, carried out by the directors of photography such as Rein Maran (*Colorful Dreams*), Andres Sööt (*The Misadventures of the New Satan*) and Jaan Tooming's brother, the “emblematic documentary filmmaker and photographer,” Peeter Tooming (*Endless Day*, *Man and Pine Tree*), who, according to Linnap, belonged to the “avant-garde generation.” Linnap discusses the shift apparent in these films, from the “classical” mode of filmmaking, which applied the so-called passive, observational optics, to the modernist approach of “active optics,” which “emphasized the ‘ways of making’” of the shot/frame, “turning the camera into a human-camera: the cinematographer and thus the spectator do not stand idly outside the action of the shot, but rather are participants in its very essence” (Linnap 2002: 63; cf. Unt 1965). In the subsequent section I would like to build upon Linnap's review and take a closer look at the narrative and visual form of Tooming's

films in a wider sense, mapping some of its cinematic kinships and, finally, scrutinize the (spatial) relations and aberrations between Tooming's works and the mainstream (Soviet/Estonian) cinema.

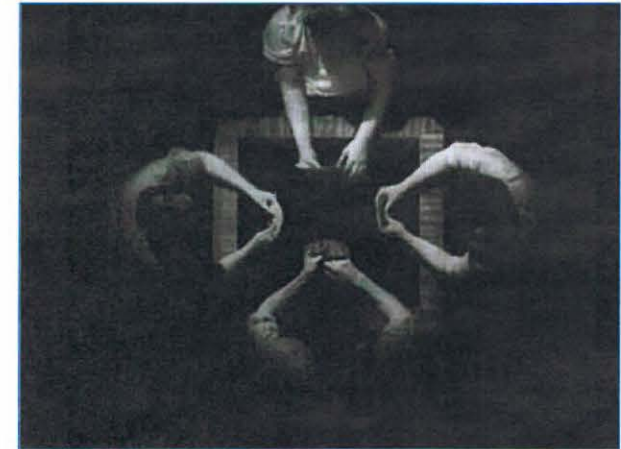
It seems to me that, rather than drawing on comparisons to the French or any other Eastern European/Soviet versions of early new waves (that is, from the late 1950s to the early 1960s), Tooming's *oeuvre* should be situated within the conceptual territory and formal framework of the experimental filmmaking in a broader sense. The experimental, or avant-garde cinema, which is an umbrella term covering an extremely diverse array of cinematic practices, and in general indicates artistic activities “that challeng[e] institutionalised cultural forms” (Butler 2007: 89) and designates “politically conscious, antibourgeois, activist art movements” (Kovács 2007: 14), is—according to its broadest definition—associated with the following formal/stylistic features: the rejection of traditional (linear) narrative; the use of abstracting visual devices; and unconventional treatment of the soundtrack. All of these characteristics indeed apply to Tooming's works, although to a varying degree and in somewhat different renditions in each case.

First, neither *Endless Day*, nor *Colorful Dreams* or *Man and Pine Tree* tell stories in the conventional sense. Dramaturgically they clearly stand apart from the cause-effect narratives modeled on the psychologically “realist” example of the 19th-century novel and theater, which—according to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (2008: 101ff)—were linear, purposive, oedipal and “tended towards a happy or, failing that, a redemptive end.” Rather, the narrative models in Tooming's films constitute a continuation of the process of narrative “shrinkage,” which in Estonian cinema begun in the second half of the 1960s, when the chain of events in Kaljo Kiisk's *Midday Ferry* (*Keskpäevane praam*, 1967), radiating an air of nonchalant, cool indifference (although still linear in its chronological design) demonstrated a strong sense of casualness. Naturally, the context of theatrical “revolution” has to be taken into account as well,



which, as suggested above by Mati Unt, demonstrated a strong distaste towards the “literary” (Unt 2002). Tooming’s *Endless Day*, revealing in its title the inclination towards a cyclical rather than linear approach, brings this route to radical fragmentation, disintegration and the multiplication of plotlines, provoking a sense of perpetuity and insolubility, openness and randomness.

Secondly, the pictorial worlds of these films include an abundance of visual devices, which evoke a whole array of parallels from different discourses of avant-garde filmmaking. For example, the editing techniques of *Endless Day*, which are characterized by an intermittent rhythm of sometimes extremely fast-paced montage sequences and those cut more slowly and/or shot in long takes, seem to be a fair step towards a greater degree of extremeness compared to many of the digressions from the normative—that is from Hollywood studio-style, patterns of cutting (e.g. violation of the 180° axis, rapid changes of scenes etc.—made by French filmmakers a dozen years earlier. Moreover, some of the images, visual juxtapositions and constellations in Tooming’s works in general, but specifically in *Endless Day*, reveal strong surrealist undercurrents *à la* Luis Buñuel. Additionally, and perhaps even more importantly, one must not dismiss the deeply-rooted absurdist-surrealist-grotesque tendencies in the neighboring Czechoslovakian and Polish (film) cultures (see Kovács 2007: 326;



Richardson 2006: 107; Coates 1996). Also, some frames in *Endless Day* bear a close resemblance to early avant-garde films, such as Fernand Léger’s *Ballet mécanique* or René Clair’s *Entr’acte* (both 1924). In the context of historical avant-garde filmmaking, however, *Endless Day*, and even more so *Colorful Dreams* and *Man and Pine Tree* (albeit thoroughly experimental) do not resonate with the branch of avant-garde cinema of the 1920s which grew out of the “pure experiments with form,” mainly associated with authors whose background is in fine arts (e.g. Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Oskar Fischinger), but rather share common ground and similar (social) sensibilities with filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov who, according to Peter Wollen, “recogni[z]ed that a new type of content, a new realm of signifieds, demands formal innovation, on the level of the signifier, for its expression” (Wollen 2004: 132). In terms of narrative, however, not all of Tooming’s films can be associated with the characteristic tendency in Eisenstein’s approach, according to which “The most clearly avant-garde passages and episodes in Eisenstein’s films (experiments in intellectual montage) remain[ed] passages and episodes, which appear[ed] as interpolations within an otherwise homogeneous and classical narrative” (Wollen 2004: 131). Instead, as suggested above, Tooming’s inclinations tend towards a uniquely fractured and spastic narrative style, which is further emphasised by his idiosyncratic pictorial universe. Furthermore, in *Endless Day*, another layer of visual patterning is constituted by the *cinéma vérité* techniques, an approach which gained significant ground across European cinemas, including those of the Eastern bloc (e.g. Hames 2005: 106ff; Cunningham 2004: 102), and which—according to some authors—had influenced Estonian filmmaking since the early 1960s (Ansip 2007: 151-2). In this respect, the context of Estonian Television, where *Endless Day* was conceived and then suffocated in the embryonic stage, has to be evoked too. In the history of Estonian Television the brief period between 1965 and 1969 has been considered a high point of TV-journalism and documentary filmmaking, an era of a true “documentary explosion” (Elmanovitš 1984: 32), which had been characterized,



among other things, by on-the-spot reportages and staged set-ups, using the hidden cameras and other devices of the *cinema vérité* style (see, e.g. Unt n.d.; Šein 2005: 28). Although *Endless Day* is not a documentary (on the other hand, neither is it a fiction film in the mainstream sense), it does employ extensively hidden camera, as testified by Tooming's co-director Virve Aruoja (1992: 10). Additionally, the filmmaker—that is, Jaan Tooming who was both the (co-)director and the actor playing the leading role of the nameless Man—interacts with ordinary people on the streets, provoking situations and stimulating spontaneous reactions. Most importantly, however, one of the main goals of the film, and probably the major cause for its ban, was a desire to reveal something about society, something deeply disturbing about the truth(s)—as in *cinema vérité*—of the (Soviet) system and the effects of its ideological apparatus.

Finally, the experimental leanings of Tooming's work are also defined by the distinctive treatment of the sonic architecture. In *Endless Day* this is constituted through a complete absence of diegetic sound; instead, the forceful songs (composed and performed by Tõnu Tepandi, another legendary member of the contemporary theatrical innovation, and written, along with the screenplay, by Paul-Eerik Rummo, one of the central figures of this intellectual and artistic rejuvenation of theater) haunt the listener throughout the film, providing voice—sometimes sad, sometimes ironic, sometimes excited or anxious, sometimes triumphant—to the Man who roams and traverses the city in a frenzy. In *Colorful Dreams* the improvised dialogue and specific aural design lends a sense of spontaneity and incidental nature to the film, as if the spectators were secretly listening in on children playing in the countryside, on Kati's dialogues with her parents, and on her unfeigned and playful musings. In *Man and Pine Tree* the imaginary voice-over dialogues between the eponymous Man and Pine Tree alternate with diegetic sequences of people talking to the Man, with aural flashbacks and the Man's melancholic inner monologues about the miserable decline in human morality and poeticism of masonry. In all these cases, both the image- and the sound-track serve to alienate audiences from the “normative” experience of reception and spectatorship.

Having said all that, it is still unavoidable to make a brief reference to the corresponding outlines of the filmmaking practices stemming from the tenets of the French *nouvelle vague* (as well as the East European/Soviet versions of their French counterparts) and Tooming's filmic output: both camps rely heavily on existential and, even more importantly, decidedly everyday subject matters (e.g. Hames 2005: 78); both were the result of (relatively) low-budget productions shot on location (cf. e.g. Cowie 2004: 142); and both place a strong emphasis on improvised actions and dialogue (e.g. Woll 2000: 195), as exemplified by *Colorful Dreams* where the camera records children's largely un-programmed interaction. Finally, the fragmentation of the narrative, another overarching characteristic (e.g. Nowell-Smith 2008: 171; Mazierska 2008: 26), is especially striking in *Endless Day*, whereas *Colorful Dreams* and *Man and Pine Tree* adhere to a somewhat more linear, although still erratic and thus certainly non-conventional mode of storytelling.



The final part of this section is informed by a somewhat unconventional coupling of certain cinematic structures on the one hand, and conceptual frameworks borrowed from an architectural/spatial theory on the other hand. I will use the concepts of “abstract space” and “differential space” as discussed by Henri Lefebvre in his seminal





study on the production of space (see Lefebvre 1991: 49ff) in order to establish the fundamental disparity between mainstream (narrative) cinema and experimental modes of filmmaking as appropriated by Jaan Tooming in his directorial efforts. As indicated by Andy Merrifield, Lefebvre's notion of abstract space is closely linked to Marx's conception of abstract labor: both reduce the (possible) diversity of (labor) activities and practices of a (social) system "to one quantitative measure: money" (Merrifield 2000: 175). "Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions," maintains Lefebvre (1991: 49) in his theorization of abstract space. It "tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities" (Lefebvre 1991: 52). Furthermore,

abstract space is "the repressive economic and political space of the bourgeoisie" (Merrifield 2000: 175), that is, by extension, of the dominant authority and ideology:

The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there. Differences, for their part, are forced into the symbolic forms of an art that is itself abstract. (Lefebvre 1991: 49)

The "differential space," on the other hand, which the abstract space "carries within itself and which seeks to emerge from it" (Lefebvre 1991: 50), strives towards and honors distinctiveness, variation, diversity. As such, it poses a real threat to the stability and perseverance of the abstract space, which thus struggles to cancel it, or at least to disguise or delimit and confine it.

In the cinematic framework, the juxtaposition of mainstream/dominant mode of filmic operation and production practices of a more experimental nature, such as implemented by Jaan Tooming, both in terms of industrial infrastructure and protocols of representation, can be codified within the Lefebvre's model of abstract versus differential space. In this layout, Hollywood-Mosfilm's (as described by Godard; see Butler 2007: 92) "zero point of cinematic style" (Burch 1973: 17) functions as, and produces, abstract space: it prescribes a set of firmly established (visual) rules, most prominently the system of continuity editing, which is also extremely relevant in terms of spatial representation, creating a highly abstract diegetic space, which conceals from the spectator, or renders invisible (thus the designation of "invisible style"), the mechanics of the production, "the production apparatus of the cinema (camera, film-stock, lens, lighting, processing)" (Drummond 1979: 9), the utterly illusionary essence, as well as the manipulative and carefully controlled construction of this cinematic space. In narrative terms, the domain of abstract cinematic space also subscribes to a certain cluster of narrative codes, which—in the Soviet (Estonian) case—include, for example, the doctrine of socialist realism (even if the precise meaning and content of this might have changed over time). The synergy of these visual and narrative agents served to establish a cinematic form which was, above all, ideologically suitable for the dominant power, but also (relatively) easily marketable to mass audiences. In the Soviet Union, the official policies of the 1970s "promoted a model of filmmaking that combined ideological orthodoxy with entertainment qualities" and the decade "also saw an attempt to address at last the industry's long-standing failure to produce films of mass entertainment," related to the fact "that a Soviet leadership striving, in Brezhnev's immortal words, to "make the economy more economical," was reluctant to see the substantial revenues generated by



cinema ticket sales reduced" (due to the gradually widening "spread of television ownership") (Faraday 2000: 87, 89; cf. Golovskoy 1986: 143). Evoking Lefebvre's formulations, what else is this than a system "reduced to one quantitative measure," its logic having "no *real* interest in qualitative difference?" Although at first glance the intentions of these policies may appear twofold (or possibly even conflicting)—first, the earning of profits, and secondly, the ideological indoctrination with communist/socialist tenets—the closer inspection reveals that, in fact, they were the two sides of the same coin, that is, they served to maintain and buttress the (ideological) hegemony of the existing regime, which resulted in the (re)production of an abstract space of social interaction, whether cinematic or "real."

Tooming's experimental works, on the other hand, are an expression of the Lefebvrian differential space, exhibiting the "true concrete qualitative space," which "celebrates particularity—both bodily and experiential [...] True differential space is a burden. It cannot, must not, be allowed to flourish by the powers that be. It places unacceptable demands of accumulation and growth" (Merrifield 2000: 176). In terms of the mode of production, experimental cinema is never profit-seeking, as was also the case with Tooming's films, three of which (*Endless Day*, although ultimately banned, *Misadventures of the New Satan* and *Man and Pine Tree*) were produced for television screens only, never intended for theatrical release; and while TV-films and programs were often also sold to central Soviet and foreign stations (mainly countries in the Soviet sphere of influence), Tooming's works were much too eccentric to be considered as lucrative export articles. In visual terms, the differentiability (of their spatial configuration) translates into an audiovisual matrix of disruption and fragmentation, which challenges the human perception (e.g. the incredibly fast-paced montage sequences in *Endless Day*, the vertiginous, fish-eye cinematography of *Colorful Dreams* and *Man and Pine Tree*, the claustrophobic frame compositions of *The Misadventures of the New Satan*) and, in contrast to the easily readable generic formulas of the dominant cinema, places rather high demands on the audience in terms of (narrative) comprehension. Finally, the protagonists of Tooming's films, too, demonstrate a remarkable deviation from commonly/ideologically accepted norms regarding characters and attributes of conventional filmic heroes: for instance, the Man in *Endless Day* is an aimless wanderer "with no clear purpose" (Nowell-Smith 2008: 104), not unlike the characters, for example, in Michelangelo Antonioni's films, and apparently without a proper professional position. Moreover, since unemployment was seen as a social practice of an outright contemptible nature, utterly undermining Soviet society, the Man comes across as a true Soviet antihero. Comparably, the Man in *Man and Pine Tree* is a potential vagabond, an ex-construction worker with a poetic mind, disillusioned by the Soviet version of massive modernist building methods, who embarks on a journey with no discernible destination, traversing the physical and mnemonic space, haunted by social trivialities and futile people.



In Lefebvre's conceptual framework, the differential space "doesn't look superficially different, but is different, different [from the



abstract space] to its very core" (Merrifield 2000: 176). In the juxtaposition outlined above, however, the two modes of filmmaking, corresponding, as proposed, to Lefebvre's theoretical pair, appear extremely different on the surface. Yet the comparison seems still valid and revealing, not least because the basic apparatus of filmmaking, the specific infrastructural configurations in the particular Soviet-Estonian context were not so different after all; perhaps to the greatest extent only in terms of the scale of the system of production/exhibition/distribution, but these two—the mainstream filmic output and the more experimental approach to filmmaking—still functioned in the same overall conditions (the official studios and their Artistic Councils, the system of censorship etc.), in the same social order, using the same fundamental cinematic tools and devices (35mm film-stock, professional equipment, knowhow and manpower etc.).

### **Spaces and Places: From Stalinist Fantasy to Experimental Ferment**

Although *Endless Day*, as well as the rest of Tooming's cinematic work, clearly stands out from Estonian film production in general and that of the 1970s in particular, for a multitude of reasons (the exhausting account and analysis of which remains beyond the scope of this article), it is undoubtedly appropriate to suggest that among these reasons Tooming's approach to the portrayal of spaces and places holds a special position. *Endless Day*, which was shot in 1971 on location in Tallinn, is diametrically opposed to the spatial discourse that dominated Estonian narrative cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, as does the whole corpus of Tooming's filmic output. In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the newly-established film industry of the Estonian SSR had been governed by (mostly Russian-speaking) directors appointed to this peripheral studio by the central film authorities in Moscow, especially during the 1950s, as a leftover manpower of the so-called era of "film-famine" (*malokartin'e* in Russian; cf. Elmanovitš 1987; Liehm and Liehm 1977: 68; Kenez 2001: 188). Often they belonged to the less talented ranks of these "creative forces," yet were still deemed sufficiently experienced, and, even more importantly, unquestionably loyal to the Soviet ideological project, to serve as "cinematic ambassadors" to jump-start the republican industry on the periphery. As a rule, they followed the socialist realist mode of representation, which resulted in airbrushed pictures of immaculate and presentable cityscapes that revealed no evidence of the deep scars left on Tallinn's urban fabric by World War II, or equally unrealistic depictions of the glory, wealth and prosperity of the recently constituted collective farms, showing the local countryside as opulent, with fertile fields and prolific pastures (for more detail, see Nāripea 2008). In contrast to these audiovisual products of the so-called tourist gaze (see Urry 1990; Widdis 2003: 138-9), the new generation of Estonian filmmakers who graduated from VGIK (the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow) in the early 1960s (and who were predominantly ethnic Estonians) introduced a considerably more locally bound vision of spaces and places, which relied heavily on nostalgic images of the so-called national landscapes, creating a cinematic nation-space at a time when the nation-state seemed to be a political entity irretrievably lost in the turmoil of history. These idealized filmic portrayals of the Estonian countryside were, in fact, on many occasions just as far off from the reality as their Stalinist predecessors, only while the latter had been sweepingly grand visions of an imaginary communist future, the former functioned as mnemonic aids for commemorating the past, that is, the intimate and comforting farm-scapes of pre-war national independence. Moreover, they also served as quasi-subconscious tokens of the latent persistence of the nation-state despite the imposed Soviet regime. Modern urban environments and contemporary settings had little space in this national imaginary and during the 1960s their filmic



depictions in the context of narrative cinema remained an exception rather than a rule. The frantically fragmented urban space and frenzied rhythms of Tooming's *Endless Day* stand in absolute contrast to these somewhat romanticized and often comparatively composed and serene rural scenes, whose veiled allusions to nationally centered ambitions are altogether something else than the air of arrogance and provocatively biting criticism of the Soviet system offered by Tooming. The spatial domain of *Colorful Dreams* is defined by a stark contrast between the countryside and the city, which is a relatively new topic in the Estonian context, although an archetypical one in the history of Western (European) culture in general, and cinema (e.g. F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, 1927) in particular. Seen through the eyes of a little girl, these juxtapositions take on almost "pre-cultural" connotations, revealing Tooming's fundamental uneasiness towards the ways and workings not only of Soviet realities (his immediate socio-political surroundings), but also towards the paths taken by the urbanized, commodified and institutionalized civilization, whether capitalist or socialist. This tendency is further intensified in his last film, *Man and Pine Tree*, where the protagonist's escape from his suburban home and the journey through the "agro-urbanized" (Maandi 2005: 180) Estonian countryside communicate a sense of complete hopelessness, demonstrating the author's desperate discovery that even the wilderness, represented by the eponymous pine tree, might not provide a viable alternative to the utterly corrupted existence of humankind and to the artificial environment created by it. In the following I shall analyze in depth the particular spatio-representational regime of *Endless Day*. Drawing on this, as well as Tooming's other films, I will also argue that they reveal a relatively distinctive attitude towards issues of (national) identity(-ies) as compared to the conceptual perspectives embodied, whether overtly or covertly, in the mainstream of Estonian narrative cinema of the 1960s and 1970s.

### ***Endless Day: The Expansion of Tallinn on Film***

The lion's share of *Endless Day* is shot in the Old Town of Tallinn, which was and still is a unique urban setting in its well-preserved integrity of historical atmosphere and medieval structure. Since the times of the inter-war Estonian Republic (see Paas 1982), throughout the Soviet period (Näripea 2005) and up to the post-socialist years of re-established statehood, the "official" matrix of spatial representations of the Old Town has remained surprisingly constant, exploiting its potential as a desirable tourist attraction and rendering it a perfect product of the so-called society of the spectacle (Debord [1967] 1995). Its romanticized medieval imagery became especially popularized in the second half of the 1960s, materializing "in countless articles of consumer goods, numerous interior designs and in a whole range of films" (Näripea 2004). The nature of these images, however, is far from uniform or monotonous, and the sanitized, beautified, and de-contextualized imagery of some of these products, cinematic or otherwise, signified only one, even though heavily dominant and officially sanctioned representational model. In cinema, this blatantly touristic protocol was applied to a whole generic range of productions: first, historical adventures/costume dramas, such as *The Last Relic* (*Viimne reliikvia*, directed by Grigori Kromanov, 1969), a Union-wide blockbuster produced by Tallinnfilm, *Stone of Blood* (*Verekivi*, directed by Madis Ojamaa,



Don Juan in Tallinn



1972), the former's pallid clone, or *Between Three Plagues* (*Kolme katku vahel*, directed by Virve Aruoja, 1970), a more serious and art-house film produced, unlike the first two, by Estonian Television Film, and, notably, with Tooming as a member of the cast; secondly, feature-length musicals, such as *Old Thomas was Stolen* (*Varastati Vana Toomas*, dir. Semjon Shkolnikov, 1970) or *Don Juan in Tallinn* (*Don Juan Tallinnas*, dir. Arvo Kruusement, 1971), as well as shorter concert programs for TV-broadcasting; and, finally, numerous touristic scenery/travel films promoting Tallinn as a charming holiday destination. Besides, a few more controversial shorts, following the generic patterns of city symphonies and revealing a somewhat different, that is, more experientially grounded point of view, were made in the second half of the 1960s, including *Pikk Street* (*Pikk tänav*, directed by Hans Roosipuu, 1966) and *Secrets of Tallinn* (*Tallinna saladused*, directed by Ülo Tambek, 1967).



Tooming's *Endless Day* evokes intriguing dialogues with these traditions and films on various levels, commenting on these orders of representations, quoting and criticizing, occasionally even ridiculing them. For instance, an entire sequence dedicated to satirizing established norms and conventions is set in the central Town Hall Square, which is used by Tooming as a stage for the simultaneous shooting of three different films.<sup>[2]</sup> During his wanderings in the city, the main character, the nameless Man, stumbles upon and, in a rather comical manner, becomes involved in the filming of, first, a scenic/documentary about Estonian national culture featuring people in folk costumes, then, an historical adventure presenting a duel between men clad in Three-Musketeers'-like garb, and, finally, an action film entailing kidnappings and fist-fights, explosions and gunfire. This short sequence is abundant with a multitude of references to the above-mentioned productions, criticizing, above all, three partly overlapping tendencies. First, the scene with the folk dancers and singers caricatures the socialist

realist formula of "national in form, socialist in content," which hand-picked certain elements of local tradition(s) and turned them into icons of transnational Soviet culture. Alongside the scenic vistas of the Old Town, this folkloric imagery formed an essential part of the touristic mode of representation, which was recycled again and again, film after film. Meanwhile, it is also possible that Tooming's criticism addresses the conservative, sentimental and, most importantly, normative and institutionalized construct of national identity, stemming initially from the period of national awakening in the late 19th century, which first became established as an official norm during the inter-war period of independent statehood, and managed to retain popular relevance even after being semantically colonized by the Soviet representational regime. In the Soviet era, this fundamentally paradoxical and innately antithetical version of the national imaginary became most clearly manifest in the form of the much-celebrated dance and song festivals, but also found expression in the aforementioned nation-spaces of narrative cinema of the 1960s. Tooming's work, on the other hand, as also testified by his theatrical "experiments with folk poetry" (O'Connor 2006: 194; see also Rähesoo, [1994] 1995: 304), and the use of music (mainly in his later films) reminiscent of ancient folk songs, which have been dubbed "Kalevala songs," "runic or runo songs" or "folksongs in the *regivärss* meter" (see Ross and Lehist 2001: 7), seems to reject this standardized and fixed concept of national(ity/identity), both in its official and popular, "underground" manifestations, endorsing instead ancient,



mythological and perhaps, at least in the case of *Endless Day*, also multiplied form(s) of (pre)national/group/personal identities. The narrative framework of *Endless Day*, as an example of the “jumbled, fragmented, multiplied or reversed” form of story-telling, characteristic of many post-war European new wave films, can be “interpreted as an expression of the difficulty of narrating national identity” (Martin-Jones 2008: 1). By mocking the major icons and narratives of (national) history, as exemplified by this brief episode with folk singers and dancers, Tooming “offer[s] a ... critique of the pedagogical time of the nation” (ibid.: 37), which establishes a conceptual hegemony, erasing margins, silencing minorities, masking ruptures, digressions and gaps. Secondly, the fragment with the historical adventure film, refers not only to its Estonian generic cousins, but also to the fact that Tallinn was systematically exploited as a ready-made set for countless Soviet productions in search of a “European-looking” environment (including, perhaps most famously, the (later) Soviet version of Dumas’s *Three Musketeers*, a three-part television miniseries/musical *D’Artagnan i tri mushketera*, dir. Georgii Iungval’d-Khil’kevich, 1978). Thus, Tallinn and its Old Town was “neutered,” as argued by Ewa Mazierska elsewhere in this issue, and perhaps, paradoxically, even turned into a faceless “non-place” (Augé 1995; see also Relph 1976), “where people do not belong to but engage instrumentally in scripted performances” (Coleman and Crang 2002: 2). It became a mere picturesque backdrop for random, essentially unconnected and thus de-territorialised (historical) actions, losing its particularity precisely due to its specific, that is, “medieval” / “Western” character. Thirdly, the action-film sequence refers explicitly to a scene from an earlier film, *Old Thomas was Stolen*, and by association to numerous other (audiovisual) products of the touristic “place-marketing,” which signify not only the commodified nature of particular practices related to the Old Town and tourism, but also to a more broader spectrum of the fundamentally petit-bourgeois mindset, the monetary/consumerist ambitions, of the formally egalitarian and “communist” Soviet society. In this respect, Tooming’s critique is perfectly in sync with a fairly wide-spread contemporary attitude among the local intellectuals who condemned and satirized the parvenu-mentality of the bureaucratic/commercial elite. According to Rudolf Rimmel, for example, “the single eye of the upstart Cyclops stares at things, it has no second eye for seeing the other values of life. Nobleness, spiritual purity and love in its authentic form are suffocated by mental degeneration, the prevailing of material interests and the ego striving towards the top of a junk-pile.” (Rimmel 1973) Meanwhile, these critics themselves tended to forget that they, too, profited from the institutional structures set up by the Soviet system in service of the creative intelligentsia (in the cinematic context see Faraday 2000: 87ff). Indeed, it is somewhat paradoxical, perhaps even ironical, that both Tooming and Hermaküla were granted the title of “Merited Artist” in 1976.

In contrast to the firmly established representational modes which concentrate cinematic imagery around particular iconic objects and perspectives, the camera in *Endless Day* carefully avoids overused views and vistas, roaming restlessly about the small and peripheral streets, dilapidated back yards, neglected corners and ramshackle passages. At first glance, the film seems to share at least part of its (spatial) sensibilities with the city symphonies indicated above, which focus mainly on the imaginary viewpoint of a local, native inhabitant, rather than a passing traveler (or perhaps a Soviet immigrant). Even more importantly, the representational protocols of *Endless Day* correspond to a certain extent to the conceptual impetus behind many of





the initial products of the genre from the 1920s, that is, “the conviction that [...] a city is first and foremost a way of life” (Sorlin 2005: 33), and not merely an architectural ensemble. Furthermore, there are moments when the nodal points of actions in *Endless Day* coincide with elements belonging to the deep structure of these classic city symphonies. For example, the chain of events apparently begins in the morning and unwinds, even though somewhat fragmentally and with numerous digressions, ellipses and loops, throughout the day. Also, the latter part of the film concentrates on different leisure activities (such as choral singing and ballroom dancing, chess and skating, dining and napping). Finally, the themes of existential cyclicity, youth and death, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, have a strong presence throughout the film. Nevertheless, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that *Endless Day*, unlike earlier Estonian versions of city symphonies, is *not* a story about a city as a built environment *per se*; instead, it is very much a story, or rather a meditation, about the Man, about his personal relationship with the surrounding space—physical, mental and social. More broadly, it is also a meditation about multiple networks of social relations. In this respect, at least to a degree, Tooming’s view of city spaces approximates that of a whole mass of post-war European films, according to which, as proposed by Sorlin (2005: 35), “Towns gain life from the expansion of human exchanges; they are nothing but the relationships that exist between their inhabitants.” Moreover, unlike the officially endorsed productions—and these include the Estonian versions of city symphonies from the late 1960s—*Endless Day* broadens the scope of spatial depictions significantly, introducing to Tallinn’s cinematic image not only the pictures of a different kind of Old Town, but also portrayals of pre-Soviet housing districts, the wooden slums, which were left to decay and destined for demolition by the local authorities. Most of them, however, stayed intact throughout the Soviet period, in a miserable and increasing state of deterioration, providing lodging for a diverse range of residents: the underdogs and the unfortunate on the one hand, the non-conformist intellectuals and artists on the other. Until the late 1970s, these slums were entirely off-limits for cinematic representation in any contemporary context and they were tolerated to a small extent only as part of portrayals of the exploitation of the working class in the pre-Soviet capitalist society. Tooming’s *Endless Day* breaks this ultimate taboo and shows the grim reality without much poetry or lyricism.



### Haptic Spaces, Dialogic Selves



As already indicated, Tooming’s interest in places does not focus on specific architectural features, although he uses them as indicators of certain conditions and concepts. Rather, he treats the places as expressive *loci* of human thought, identity and (inter)action. In fact, in close relation to and stemming from the latter, central to all Tooming’s films is a strong sense of body and the bodily experience, as was the case with his theatrical productions (Unt 2002). The respective spatial experiences of the Man in *Endless Day* and the Man in *Man and Pine Tree* are framed and presented not only as visual experiences; the sensory specter of their communications with the surroundings also encompasses the senses of smell and, most importantly, touch. In





*Colorful Dreams* the world seen through a child's eyes is not only visual, the images evoke forcefully the warmth of the sun, the wetness of the water, the softness of the kitten's fur, the elegant odor of the urbane mother's perfume etc. Moreover, in all of these films, the presence of a certain "inner eye," capable of sensing the imperceptible,

is clearly recognizable. Nevertheless, in relation to the spatial sensibilities of these works, the tactile qualities hold a special position, emphasizing the centrality of the bodily sphere. Their manifestations and connotations may perhaps be best explained through two intertwining concepts: textures and movement.

First, the textures of various surfaces, even though presented by the optical apparatus of the film camera, acquire a particular tangibility through extreme close-ups of walls and pavements, of the bark of the pine tree, of the human skin, of the caterpillar discovering the "landscape" of a girl's face. In *Endless Day*, but equally in *Man and Pine Tree*, the accentuation of textures serves a specific critical function: it draws attention to the deterioration of the urban and built environments. Whereas in the city symphonies of the 1960s the coarse and rustic surfaces of limestone walls, the expanses of red tiled roofs, the picturesque façades covered with a rough and sometimes slightly crumbled coat of plaster and faded colors, and uneven cobblestone pavement of the winding streets never challenged or crossed the officially tolerated limit of "romantically aged features," in *Endless Day* the crumbling and cracked walls, rotten fences, piles of garbage and bumpy asphalt lay bare the dirty Soviet reality, connoting simultaneously the morally declining face of this society. The close-ups of rickety and slapdash brickwork of newly erected constructions and the miserably dilapidated masonry of old buildings in *Man and Pine Tree* similarly speak of the inevitably and increasingly degenerating state of the Soviet system.

Besides this architectural tactility, however, the bodily contacts between humans are even more important to Tooming, as exemplified in extreme by what was probably seen by the members of the Artistic Council of the Estonian Television Film as the most scandalous sequence in *Endless Day* and undoubtedly played a crucial role in the eventual banning of the film, namely, the random sex scene involving the Man and a woman who seems to run an illegal private nursery in her tiny slum-house apartment. Although not at all explicit by today's standards, its apparent casual and prosaic nature still comes across as somewhat disquieting, even more so considering the immediate historical context of this representation. The surroundings and the furnishings of the apartment, which unmistakably point towards an educated and humanitarian owner (a type-writer and a copy of the literary journal *Looming* on the table, a wall full of rather disarrayed bookshelves etc.), as well as the crowd of children crammed next door, and an odd hamster running around on the loose, all accompanied by the jovial tunes of the sound-track, merge into one conceptual potpourri, creating a bizarrely festive atmosphere of uncontrollable fertility, both bodily and intellectual, which in the Soviet context was most likely read as an unambiguous and thus inadmissible attempt of ideological





subversion, as “socialist ideology was hostile towards spontaneous festivity” (Mazierska 2008: 104), and, for that matter, any spontaneous activities.

This scene, and *Endless Day* on the whole, invites consideration of the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque. According to Bakhtin, the carnival “challenged the utterances of ‘official culture’” (Holloway and Kneale 2000: 80), and

celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order: it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. (Bakhtin 1984a: 10)

Importantly, the carnivalesque or grotesque body is “open to the outside world,” especially through the “material lower bodily stratum,” including genitalia and breasts; it is “not a closed, complete unit: it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin 1984a: 26). Bakhtin’s carnival, then, belongs to Lefebvre’s above-mentioned space of differentiality, which rebels against the dominating tendencies of the abstract space that “erases distinctions ... which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity) [and] denies the sensual and the sexual” (Lefebvre 1991: 49-50). I will return to these ideas in the following discussion of questions related to the changing concept of (national) identity(-ies) in Tooming’s films. For now, suffice it to say that the overall ambience of *Endless Day* was indeed somewhat carnivalesque, resembling a hectic Brownian movement, a chaos of dynamic bodies, challenging both the physical and conceptual perception of the viewers and problematising “hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”

Movement, the second major characteristic of these “haptic spaces of bodily experience,” is manifested in Tooming’s films through the constant mobility of the respective protagonists in *Endless Day* and *Man and Pine Tree* and the children running about and away in *Colorful Dreams* on the one hand, and through the restlessly roaming camera—the “active optics,” as described by Linnap—on the other. Both articulate further the human body as a predominant element of the spatial order of these films. Linnap argues that the “optical turbulence” of Tooming’s works is an expression of a “social nausea,” and that *Endless Day* is an extreme example of his approach to the concepts of (national/personal) independence and freedom, which chooses “a naïve escape” instead of active rebellion or resistance. According to Linnap (2002: 68), “Jaan Tooming’s four films cover a territory where the (historical) naïve Western notion of individual freedom can be recognized, along with the typical refuges that go with it: the so-called pristine wilderness (*Man and Pine Tree*), the pre-cultural wise savage (*The Misadventures of the New Satan*), the dream (*Colorful Dreams*) and, finally, I Myself [*Endless Day*].” While I agree with Linnap’s diagnosis of Tooming’s films as expressions of “social nausea,” I doubt his view about the “naïve escape,” or rather I believe that this argument needs further elaboration. In *Endless Day*, the “active optics,” the agitated camera movements, turbulent rhythms of cutting, and, most notably, the anxious and impatient dynamism, both spatial and mental, of the Man himself, his fevered interactions with the surrounding spaces and people, clearly speak of an extrovert, rather than inward-looking or autistic frame of mind. It becomes apparent from the very beginning of the film that, instead of withdrawing from society, which he obviously regards as less than perfect, he engages quite actively with it, running around in the city, talking to strangers on the street, getting involved in different activities. He does not observe his environment passively, but is rather “open to the outside world,” busy with the production of the lived space in Lefebvre’s terms, evoking the



“essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic” representational space (Lefebvre 1991: 42). As such, *Endless Day* stands very close to the simultaneous creative urban practices of the young Estonian avant-garde artists, designers and architects (cf. Linnap 2002: 62), who, as has been pointed out by Andres Kurg (2004: 141), produced in their work “autobiographical [and multi-layered] urban landscape[s]” by “encountering and rediscovering” “town districts and courtyards,” “uniquely perceived wooden houses, fragments captured in passing and details which surprised the idle stroller” on their “walks through the city.” By doing that, they, and Tooming likewise, did not cut themselves off from the surroundings but rather adopted their own point of view and reclaimed, in a way, the urban spaces abandoned by the official discourse of Lefebvre’s conceived space. Instead of just retreating to the private sphere and creating their own escapist cell of existence, they appropriated the public space by making use of the tactics available to them (see also Laanemets 2005; Allas 2008). Both Tooming’s films and the artists involved in those “happenings, games and walks in Tallinn in the 1970s” (Laanemets 2005; see also Epner 2004) ultimately attempted to provoke and seize “[m]oments’ of revelation, emotional clarity and self-presence as the basis for becoming more self-fulfilled,” which could be seen as acts of rebellion, “against the banality” of the *quotidienneté* (Lefebvre, cit. Shields 2004: 209), against the everyday life which is “in thrall to abstract space” and denotes “programmed consumption” (Lefebvre 1991: 59, 89). As modern-day *flâneurs*, their drifting in the city space was “opposed to the established rhythm of life, to the rational organization of time” (Laanemets 2005: 164).

The notion of bodily experienced and lived space, which seems to underlie the “spatial politics” of *Endless Day*, as well as the Man’s visibly open and active attitude towards his surroundings, calls for an investigation of Tooming’s approach(es) towards personal and social identities. While Linnap sees the Man of *Endless Day* as an ultimate manifestation of the artistic ego (and Tooming’s *alter ego*), who believes uncritically in the possibility of a naïve escape from the hostile conditions of the surrounding social reality and is simultaneously convinced that some kind of refuge can indeed be found, I argue that the Man in *Endless Day*, and his relationship with the world, can, in fact, be described and understood in terms of Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic self, which ultimately denies any possibility of encapsulation. According to Bakhtin (1984b: 287),

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*) [...] The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. To *be* means to *communicate* [...] To be means to be for another, and through the other for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary: looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another* [...] I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another. (emphasis in the original)

As proposed by Julian Holloway and James Kneale (2004: 75), “the Bakhtinian Self is [...] characteristically open and in a constant state of Becoming,” it “will never be brought into stasis and fixity.” The Man in *Endless Day*, taking on different tasks, roles and positions, shifting constantly between a multitude of activities, places and spaces, is precisely the incarnation of this self in a constant state of flux, “open to the outside world” as was the aforementioned carnivalesque or grotesque body. Meanwhile, Tooming’s various critiques—towards the bourgeois, consumerist mentalities, towards the fixed, normative and standardized mode of “national” identity—as well as two brief scenes in the film which seem to indicate the possibility of a homosexual identity, can



perhaps be also read as a criticism of both a single and static Self and a single (personal or national) Identity, be it that of *homo soveticus* or some(one) else (not surprisingly, though, his outlook is still dominated by relative masculinity, leaving little room for contemplating female identities). Indeed, as described by Rein Veidemann, the mentality of the so-called sixties' generation promoted dialogism, openness to new knowledge and fresh experiences, they valued "communicative interaction, mutually activating generational dialogues, truth-seeking" (Veidemann 1991). Additionally, the extremely suggestive soundtrack of *Endless Day* switches effortlessly between lyrics in Estonian, German, Finnish, English, French, Russian and Italian. This presence of different cultural/linguistic spaces (notably without excluding Russian) communicates a radical expansion of mental territory, maybe indicating the infinitely rich potential of intellectual, emotional and creative exchange, and opens thus up the Estonian filmic space to an unprecedented extent. Compared to the identities and spaces represented in mainstream narrative cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, *Endless Day* thus proposes an entirely new, more extensive, diverse and controversial spatiotemporal matrix.

## Retreat



Tooming's subsequent films, along with his theatrical productions, however, channel these multifarious and apparently rather undogmatic inclinations into a more clearly and narrowly defined conceptual watercourse. *Man and Pine Tree*, made eight years later, retains the "active optics" and spatial mobility (as a narrative form borrowed from road-movies/travel films), yet, unlike in *Endless Day*, the protagonist is in an inextricable conflict with and irretrievably alienated from the surrounding physical, ideological and mental environment. The (morally) disfigured nature of this environment is emphasized both by the distorted visual language of the image-track filmed in color with an extremely wide-angle lens, and the woebegone, archaic chant of the sound-track, contrasting with the colorful imagery, yet also complementing its alienating fisheye effect. The sound-track plays with the tradition of runic folksongs, which "can hardly be considered 'singing' in the traditional sense of the word. It is more like a mixture of recitative and calling, with some melodic features as well. The runic song might well be described as a kind of drama including both the initiation of sounds from

nature, and mime" (Jan Ling, cited in Ross and Lehist 2001: 9; see also Jirgens 2006: 64). Instead of the previous orientation towards differentiability, ambiguity and perhaps even hybridity, the momentum behind *Man and Pine Tree* seems to be a purist striving towards mythical "beginnings" or "roots." However, it is equally important to emphasize that this surge apparently overleaps the sentiments of the inter-war nation-state, as well as those of the 19th-century national awakening, and is evidently directed towards, and maybe even beyond, the deepest layers of history, testifying thus that Tooming apparently subscribes to the Herderian, that is "essentialist" or "primordialist" understanding of ethnicity and nationality, as well as the genesis and nature of the nation.<sup>[3]</sup> The film's protagonist, as summarized above, leaves behind his job as a bricklayer and his home in the suburbia, which has been taken over by petty and consumerist neighbors who are enclosed in their narrow personal universes: he takes to the road, in search of a



refuge. In the beginning of the film, he seems to be fairly confident that nature, the “untamed wilderness,” as termed by Linnap, will provide a comforting alternative to the utterly corrupt (sub)urbanized society, perhaps even a domain of personal freedom for thought and mind. His journey takes him through Estonian territory, and the spectators see towns and villages, landscapes and cityscapes through his eyes. Here, Tooming’s criticism extends to the “Sovietised” Estonian terrain, but especially acute is his denigration of the “agro-urbanized” countryside and of the bourgeois lifestyle of the so-called agrocracy who commissioned pompous kolkhoz-centers and erected middle-class private housing. Equally, though, the protagonist is unhappy with the simple-minded common villagers, represented by an elderly woman who has finally been allocated a new apartment in town and cannot hide her utter delight of escaping the “uncomfortable” (yet traditional) life in an old farmhouse. The man sees the whole of Estonia as being gradually taken over by corrupt—presumably Soviet but equally consumerist—mentality. Finally, however, he discovers that no “untamed wilderness” actually exists any more: in the woods, the ghosts from his past—a treacherous friend and a demanding wife—haunt him mercilessly, shaped as sonic and visual flashbacks. Thus, the potential coupling with the nature offers no retreat, no way out. At the same time, the film still seems to endorse a clearly pantheist *Weltanschauung*, suggesting that if nature perishes, so will the human race. In the end, then, the only possible escape route appears to lead to pure metaphysics, to religion perhaps, yet not to the institutionalized kind, rather to a pre-cultural, simple spirituality, or certain pagan practices (cf. Rähesoo [1994] 1995: 304, 307; Rähesoo 2007: 249; Tooming 1976). The endorsement of an archaic, almost mythic, pre-national world becomes even more apparent from the film’s sonic design, as the runic folksong tradition on which Tooming builds his musical architecture dates probably “from the last millennium BCE when the Balto-Finnic tribes had not separated, and spoke the same Balto-Finnic protolanguage” (Ingrid Rüütel, cit. by Ross and Lehist 2001: 9). Even more importantly, the practice of runic songs was forced into decline by an organized religious movement, the Moravian Brethren in the 18th century (Ross and Lehist 2001: 9). Thus Tooming seems to promote a (re)turn to some kind of “pure indigeneous culture,” “a culture defined as an organic totality, fixed in a place” (Coleman and Crang 2002: 6; cf. Rähesoo [1994] 1995: 307-9). Indeed, as testified by Irena Veisaitė, Tooming was extremely thrilled by the similarity of certain motifs of folk poetry of different nations, arguing (apparently under the influence of Uku Masing, an Estonian poet, theologian and ethnologist; see Rähesoo [1994] 1995: 308-9) that this provides convincing proof that “the human civilization is not composed of hostile tribes, but is rather unified in its base” (Veisaitė [1979] 2002: 199). Hence, Tooming rejects the possibility of the forking and multiple identities suggested in *Endless Day*, and offers instead a much more rigid standpoint regarding the supposedly “true” nature of a single national identity, even though he is thoroughly pessimistic in terms of its realization in the present time. In conclusion, then, the message of *Man and Pine Tree* retains Tooming’s previous suspicion towards institutionalized and normalized identities, whether personal or national, religious or political, bourgeois or Soviet, capitalist or communist, but it also speaks of the permanent state of entrapment, providing no positive and viable program of its own. In this respect, Linnap’s interpretation of the escapist surge behind Tooming’s oeuvre is indeed partly accurate, pertaining mainly to his later filmic works.

## Conclusion

The brief episode of experimental filmmaking in Estonian cinema, as represented by Jaan Tooming’s filmic output, added a



significant thread—although marginal in its exposure and limited in its effect—to the fabric of spatial representations. Tooming's innovative and extremely expressive renderings of filmic form, both visual and narrative, introduced an unprecedented (and largely inimitable) regime of depiction, which promoted, at least in its initial articulation, a greater openness and variety of city-, land- and mindscapes. His (spatial) critiques were equally bold and penetrating towards both the inadequacies of the "official" Soviet system and the "unofficial" or "underground," yet still normative and ossified constructions of national identity. While the fluid bravado of his earlier, decisively recalcitrant works, especially that of *Endless Day*, froze into more stable, and perhaps even conservative standpoints in his later films, his productions continued to offer alternatives to mainstream cinematic space and provided for the audiences a conceptual place for contemplation, a refuge of sorts, which, however, failed to afford consolation and instead functioned as a constant and uncomfortable reminder of the present socio-cultural deficiencies.

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#### Notes

1] In fact, Hermaküla had also been interested in filmmaking, and between 1966 and 1971 he worked as a director for Estonian Television, but left the studio after realizing that his artistic pursuits would be severely limited by the censorship politics under Brezhnev, which affected the mass media far more seriously than theatre (see e.g. Hermaküla 1992: 6). According to Hermaküla, theatre was preferable because it was less "state-controlled and industrial" than cinema or television (Hermaküla 2002: 36). Equally interesting is what remains unsaid, namely that behind the breakup were also, or perhaps even chiefly, creative tensions with the older generation who, according to Hagi Šein, did not trust the modernist experiments of the younger cohorts (Šein 2005: 31). In addition, the "planned production television," emerging around the turn of the decade (ibid.), did not leave much space for innovative zest.

2] It is also noteworthy that *Endless Day* is one of the very few Estonian self-reflexive films, that is, films concentrating on or revealing the cinematic industry and apparatus. In fact, from the Soviet period only one other example comes to mind: *Man and Woman*, a short mock-documentary by Mark Soosaar (*Mees ja naine*, 1972), which belongs, too, to the category of experimental cinema and presents a truly stylish "reportage," mimicking the jargon of Soviet news-stories, from an imaginary film festival (the title of the film and of the festival alludes to Claude Lelouch's award-winning film *Un homme et une femme* from 1966, which had been "immensely popular and influential" everywhere in the Eastern bloc (see Iordanova 2003: 95)). A number of filmmakers whose names resemble actual authors (e.g. the Estonian directors Silgo Niisk/Kaljo Kiisk and Gregor Kormoranoff/Grigori Kromanov, as well as internationally acclaimed authors, such as Bonarrotti Antonini/Michelangelo Antonioni, Koltazanov & Surowskii/Kalatozov & Uruzevskii, and, most amazingly, Albert Cuntcock/Alfred Hitchcock) compete at this festival with entries aping their respective styles, all starring "John Wedding" (played by the legendary Estonian actor and poet Juhan Viiding) and "Linda-Linda" (portrayed by Ada Lundver, a famous Estonian actress and a veritable "sex-bomb").

3] See e.g. the so-called Warwick Debate on the nature of nationalism between Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith, and Brubaker *et al.* 2004, as well as Kivimaa 2009: 159-160.

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