

MAP 3

## NIVA TO NENETS

### TOWARDS TOGETHERNESS

PROBING AS A DECOLONIZING APPROACH FOR ARTISTIC INQUIRY

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**LUCA**  
SCHOOL  
OF  
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*“The art of inquiry moves forward in real time, along with the lives of those who are touched by it, and with the world to which both it and they belong. Far from answering to their plans and predictions, it joins with them in their hopes and dreams.”*

Tim Ingold (2015, p.8).



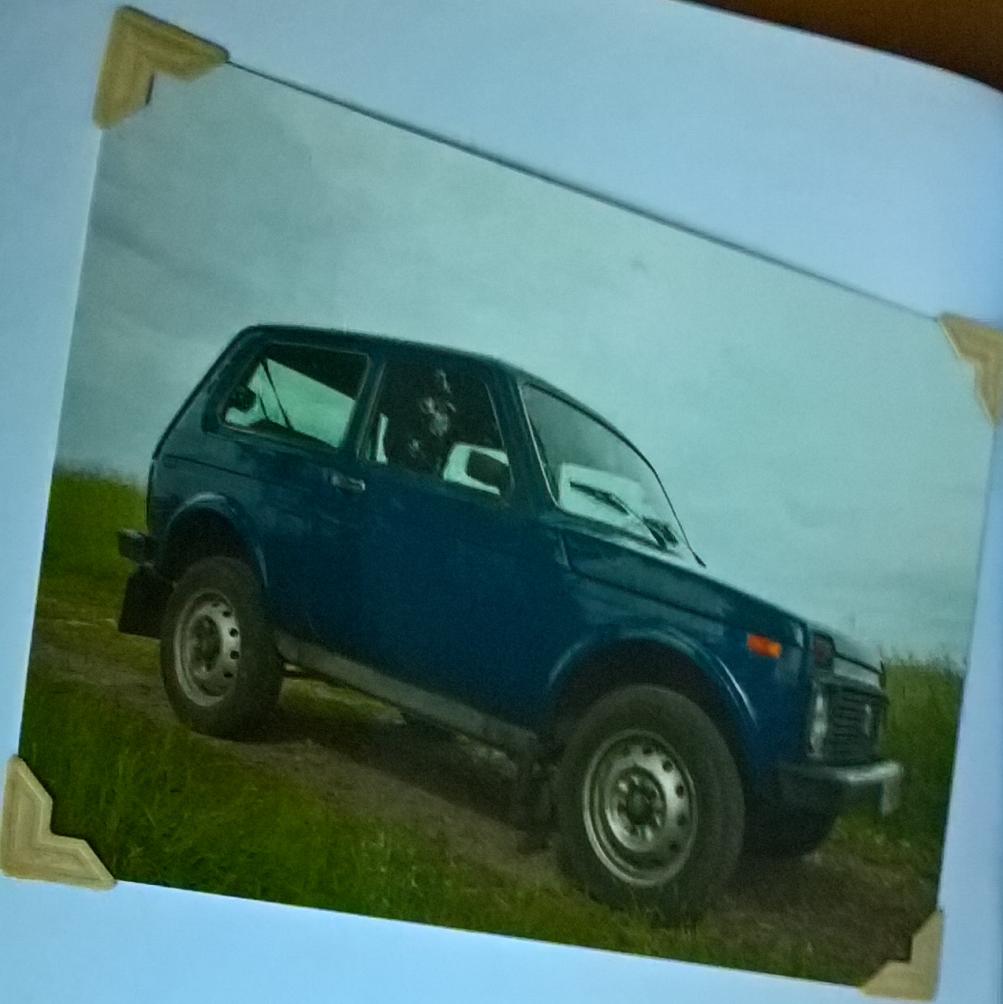


[WWW.NIVATONENETS.org](http://WWW.NIVATONENETS.org)

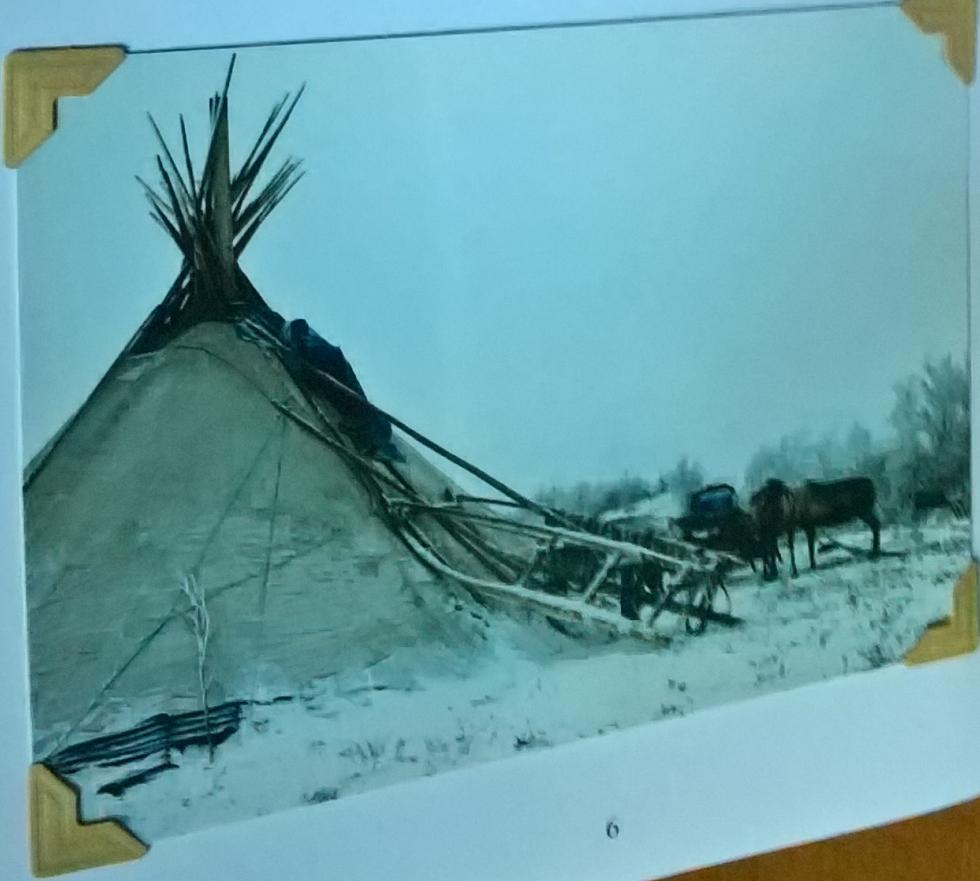
*Niva to Nenets* is an interactive road-movie and a case study within the doctoral research project *Towards Togetherness*. Conditions and circumstances for knowledge sharing during the making of this experimental film are the aim of research. In the project, a Lada Niva is driven from Belgium towards the Nenets people in Arctic Russia. Participants, who were co-driving the car or whom I met during picnics, responded to my intention to give the car to a Nenets family. In and around the car, I probed for their opinions and concerns related to gift-giving and decolonization processes. Recordings of these conversations, combined with recordings of the travel itself, are implemented in an interactive road-movie. Intertwined storylines expose the plurality of the recorded reality.

I worked on the *Niva to Nenets* project between 2011 and 2018. Actor network theory (ANT) was used as an ontological tool to explore the agency of the Lada Niva and the connections between the probing results. Besides the protracted participations of the co-drivers, other people participated provisionally during Picnic-Quizzes (as discussed in *Map 4*). Altogether, the road-trip facilitated conditions for interesting conversations and circumstances.

*Kunstendecreet, Fund Roger Dilemans, and the Dutch Embassy in Moscow supported the Niva to Nenets project financially.*



In the project, the Niva device study found that the feeling of semantic becoming, giving is still decolonizing realization. These problems recorded interactive c



The concept design of this project leans heavily on the main goal within this doctoral research: to experiment with conditions for knowledge sharing through an artistic and media-technological approach. Like in the *Food Related* project (see *Map 2*), the artistic inquiry for opinions, experiences and concerns through probing motivated the implementation of participatory practices, while the representation of the collected knowledge stimulated experimental media use. Where the *Food Related* project focussed on food culture, the inquired knowledge within *Niva to Nenets* relates to gift-giving and decolonization processes. To legitimize conversations about these topics, the premise of the road-movie is my wish to give the Lada Niva to the Nenets.

In this map, several aspects of the *Niva to Nenets* project are discussed. After a short introduction of the Nenets and the co-drivers, I first reflect upon the role and the agency of the car as a probing device. Within these reflections, Victor Turner's study (1969, 1973, 1978) on liminality and the notion of *communitas* during pilgrimage clarifies how the act of travelling supported a temporary feeling of togetherness. ANT study unravels semantic associations and experiences of the car become. Second, probed knowledge about gift-giving is shared and described in the context of a decolonizing approach. And third, I discuss the realization of an experimental representation of these probing results, combined with other recorded travel experiences, in the shape of an interactive documentary road-movie.





### **Who are the Nenets?**

The Nenets are one of the indigenous peoples of the Samoyed language group that inhabit the tundra landscapes of the Russian Federation. There are 45.000-50.000 Nenets, among which approximately 7.500 live in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO) on the west side of the Ural Mountains. Most other Nenets live in the Yamal Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO), which is on the east side. Despite only 14% of the Nenets in the NAO still continue their nomadic lifestyle, reindeer husbandry is considered central to the Nenets' way of life (Tuisku 2002, p. 190). Challenged by the effects of accelerated climate change, rapid modernization, and the impacts of oil- and gas exploration on their herding grounds, the Nenets are struggling to sustain their traditional herding culture. They are dependent on freedom to travel with their reindeer, and need support to preserve their language and traditions (Stammler 2006).

Illustration 8 and 9. *Nenets on the Yugorsky peninsula. R. van Klaveren 2013.*



While I drove my Lada Niva to the Nenets<sup>1</sup> in the summer of 2013, specific people were invited to drive certain parts of the road-trip with me. These co-drivers were:

***Samuel Bootsman (BE/NL)***

Samuel is my youngest son. At the age of twelve he moved to Belgium with his older brother and me. Samuel travelled with me from Hoegaarden to Hasselt.

***Jan and Betty van Klaveren (NL)***

Jan en Betty are my parents. They travelled with me from Boskoop to The Hague.

***Cunera Buijs (NL)***

Cunera is curator Arctic regions at the Dutch National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. She has her main focus on the Inuit of East Greenland and is involved in several repatriation projects, including Roots 2 Share. Cunera travelled with me from The Hague to Copenhagen.

***Kulunnguaq Petersen (GL/DK)***

Kulu is a Greenlandic psychology student who temporarily moved to Denmark for education. As one of her parents is Danish, she often experienced strong us-and-them dichotomies. Kulu travelled with me from Copenhagen towards Stockholm.

***Iben Mundrup (GL/DK)***

Iben is an author, artist, and curator who grew up in Greenland. Her work is strongly influenced by contemporary Greenlandic culture and her upbringing. Iben travelled with me from Copenhagen towards Stockholm

***Anders and Anna Sunna (SE)***

Anders and Anna are from the Kiruna region in Sápmi (Lapland, Northern Sweden). Their Sami identity is strongly defended in Anders' art. Anders and Anna travelled with me from Stockholm to Mariehamn.

***Svetlana Usenyuk (RU)***

Svetlana is designer and researcher at Aalto University in Helsinki. She visited the Nenets in the Yamal region for her dissertation on co-creation for transport vehicles. Svetlana travelled with me from Helsinki towards St. Petersburg.

***Alexey Platova (RU)***

Alexey lives and works in Naryan Mar. He is Komi, but married to a Nenet. I hired him as a driver to travel with me from St. Petersburg to Naryan Mar.



Illustration 10. Screenshots from the co-drivers.



## RELATIONAL AGENCY OF THE NIVA

While I drove my Lada Niva from Belgium towards the Nenets in the Northwest of Russia, the car played multiple roles within the project. Besides being a vehicle of transport, she situated a space in which we spend a considerable amount of time. A maximum of five GoPro action camera's recorded conversations and other happenings within the car simultaneously. Attached to the roof rack, two additional GoPro's recorded the outside environment of the car. As a result, the car not only functioned as a transport vehicle, but a small mobile film studio as well. And because the premise of the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie consists of my wish to give my beloved car to a Nenets family, the Lada Niva was considered to be a gift too. She became a bureaucratic burden and a moral challenge when Russian import procedures turned impossible to follow, raising questions whether to pay bribes or not. The specific brand and background of the car, designed during a Soviet regime, influenced perception and viewpoints during many discussions. The fact that the car was driven to the high north of Russia triggered imagination and adventurousness. In the eyes of participants, the car was, amongst others, the embodiment of a recording device, a safe haven away from home, a questionable gift, an object of camp,<sup>2</sup> a Soviet icon, a contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and even a piece of garbage. As she broke down three times during the road-trip, she even influenced the course of action. Overall, the Lada Niva functions as the energizing centre of the project, multiple in essence, both as object and as subject.

Specifically in relation to the knowledge sharing during the participatory practices, the strong presence and multiple roles of the Lada Niva fascinated me. Back home, and during a working period in Estonia in the course of the ADAPT-r program, this fascination grew stronger. While reviewing the recorded film footage, I realized that the Lada Niva functioned as a strong vehicle for participation, in various ways.<sup>3</sup> Thus, I further explore the identity and agency of the Lada Niva. From my aim to research how participatory practices and probing can create favourable circumstances for decolonization processes, I review how the car's presence enables the interaction between different kinds of knowledge and viewpoints. I start with a reflection upon my own relationship with the car, and continue with descriptions of embodied experiences within such relationships. Then, motivated by insights from Victor Turner and Martin Buber, I share some

thoughts about '*das Zwischenmenschliche*'. At the end of this sub-chapter, an ANT reflection upon the agency of the car is outlined on the yellow pages.

### My beloved car

When I bought my Lada Niva second hand in 2006, no other car make could compete with the desire that I felt to own this four-wheel drive vehicle. One can say that I fell in love with the car, initially with Lada Niva's in general. But it was my own copy that I grew an intimate relationship with. I found her at a shady car dealer in Charleroi, south of Brussels. At that time I already knew that these cars more or less continuously need repairs. Somehow my attraction to her archaic shape blinded me into thinking that she would thus be the perfect car to teach me to perform reparations myself, and to teach me about off-road driving too. I would become just as sturdy as the car, I imagined.



Illustration 11 and 12. *My Lada Niva and me, before departure.* R. van Klaveren 2013.

Over time, I got familiar with her idiosyncrasy, which was a binding factor for our relationship. To name a few characteristics that I considered charming: the way she stirred and jolted, specifically on the highway; the fact that she almost never started at the first attempt; the hard labour that was needed to turn her around, as she lacked servo steering; the out-dated plastic and synthetic interior design; the effort that was needed to reach out for her gear stick; and last but not least the congenial look of her small rear mirrors, which blew inwards when I was driving above 100 km per hour. But above all, her archaic shape always filled my heart with joy. I truly loved this car! However, I was not a good student to her teachings. A full agenda left me no time for off-road driving, let alone for the constant reparations that she indeed demanded. With the recurring breakdowns she became unreliable and too expensive for me, as I was not able to repair her myself. As I am a Dutch living in Belgium, I often drive long distances to visit friends and relatives. But when I did that using my Niva I myself was usually broken upon arrival. On the highway, I often felt a slave driver, as she was shaking and shuffling with so much noise that she seemed to scream out that she was not made for this. The rear-view mirrors snapped inwards because of the wind drag, again and again, as if she was closing her eyes in disagreement. Thus, I figured out, we were not a perfect match. But I still felt so much joy induced by this

car, even when I saw her perfect shape being towed by the roadside assistance service. Only when the LPG installation broke down beyond repair, making the car as polluting as most other Lada's, I could grow some distance between us. I started to cheat on her with multiple other cars when opportunities occurred, neglecting her more and more, until I was finally able to accept that we were not made for each other after all.

Although I emotionally approach my Lada Niva as a living creature, I usually do not use the pronouns 'she' or 'her' for any other car or for technological objects in general. Maybe I incidentally say about my phone, laptop or photo camera that 'he' is not working properly, but that will be it. I don't remember when I started doing so for the Niva, but I suppose it was part of the bonding process. While we drove the Niva from St. Petersburg towards the Pechora river, Alexey Platova turned surprised that I didn't give her a personified name like 'Lenka' or 'Natka' or 'Masja'. This is common practice in Russia, he said, just as the rewarding pat on the back, which is usually given on the dashboard, after good performance. Giving her a pet name had never crossed my mind, maybe because 'the Niva' is to me enough of a name already. But in Russia, where Lada Niva's are plenty, name giving is probably part of personification.<sup>4</sup>



### Embodied with its personality

In Sherry Turkle's *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (2007), Judith Donath celebrates her 1964 Ford Falcon, which she calls 'the Falcon'. She says it had a clear personality: "it was old, a little cranky, and insecure about its appeal, vacillating between feeling like a proud antique and a rusting junker (p. 159)". In her perception, this old car had much more character than the new BMW that she bought to replace it. As long as a car is working perfectly and does exactly what it's supposed to do, Donath says, we experience it as pure machine. But when it acts different then we instruct it to do, it becomes an almost autonomous agent (p. 159). It is no longer a tool and needs to be negotiated with: it transforms into a seemingly sentient creature with emotions, desires and intentions of its own. Curiously, pieces of technology have a stronger tendency to become a 'he' or a 'she' when they are performing against our will. From this perspective, our relationship with cars becomes stronger through opposition and malfunction. But on the other hand, our bond with technological objects can grow from synergetic experiences or feelings of oneness through embodiment. When I drive underneath a low obstacle, for example a bridge or a bar, I automatically duck a bit. If my car is parked somewhere, I am parked at that location. One time, to my own surprise, when the car bumper accidentally hit a wooden pole during parking, I

spontaneously jelled 'ouch', as if it hit me physically. Cars can become extensions of our legs, but also of our skin: "As we inhabit our skin we inhabit our cars, surrounded by a rubber, glass and metal automotive skin that is both protective and expressive. Blemished with dents, rust marks, and scratches, it is an interface between the outside world and the inner self (p. 156)." Like clothes, car choice can communicate our identity towards others. My choice to buy a Lada Niva entailed the wish to become as sturdy as the car. Maybe some people indeed saw me this way, as their responses included a focus on my gender. For example Cunera Buijs, during our travel from The Hague towards Copenhagen, joyfully remarked how people responded to us: "They then saw us inside this car, two women!"

On the Åland Islands, Anna Sunna observed how her husband Anders was driving the Niva. She said: "It looks good on you. It looks like it has always been your car!" We made fun of the fact how the car, almost as an accessory, influenced the perception of her husband. But the perception of signals is not completely in our hands, as "a car can signal taste, money, or their lack. (...) The Porsche driver in wrap-around sunglasses allows himself to be admired as he revs his car at the stoplight; some see him enmeshed in an aura of wealth and animal magnetism, others see him as the embodiment of the midlife crises (p. 156)." At the gas station in

Helsinki I enthusiastically told Svetlana Usenyuk that the employee complimented me for having a nice car. When Svetlana imagined I would get many positive responses, I confirmed but remarked that I sometimes witnessed hostile looks.<sup>6</sup> Her response was: "Maybe the perceptions of the Lada Niva demonstrate how people in Europe perceive Russia?!".

"As we drive, our car changes our sense of personal space", says Donath (2007, p. 156). This is experienced the strongest during the process of becoming a driver, when we learn to be one with the car: "To know how wide you are, to judge what spaces you can squeeze into, to maintain the right distance between you and the car in front" (p. 156). I observed short but similar learning moments when co-drivers drove my Niva for the first time, especially during parking. When a car is yours for a longer time already, you are not only accustomed to the (in)flexibility of the gearbox, the amount of force that is needed for operating the pedals, the (lack of) acceleration speed, and the power that is needed for steering. Besides the outside space that it occupies, you sense the mechanical connections to the car and the inside space that the car has to offer. One of my experiences during the *Niva to Nenets* road-trip stretched my feeling of oneness with the car to the max. In Finland, I spent one night inside the car. I can't say that I had a good night sleep, but I was impressed by the cosiness of this experience. In between sleep and wake, associations of lying in the arms of a big Teddy bear alternated with associations of holding a smaller version of the same bear, until I felt so intimately connected with the car that I somehow became her while she became me. Such a deep sense of a hybrid personal space never occurred to me before, or after. How much stronger can one become embodied by a car's personality?



#### Antistructural space

Besides the influence on my personal relationship with the car, I noticed how the road-trip supported the bonding between the participating co-drivers and me. Three spatial aspects had their impact on our temporary feeling of togetherness: the Lada Niva as a constant factor, the changing landscapes as the environment we drove through, and the Nenets tundra that we had on our minds as the final destination. When it comes to the experience of these spaces, I find the distinction between absolute and relative space worth mentioning. If we perceive space to be absolute, Devereux (1996)

says, we see it as a stationary void or a unitary spatial framework. But if we consider space to be relative, existing only as the relation between objects, it is no longer 'something' to be perceived but instead an "inborn organizing principle of the mind that is used to construct the perception of the world from the data received through the senses" (p. 175). Referring to John O'Keefe and Lynn Nadel, both brain researchers, Devereux explains how the brain handles relative space as an egocentric space. Relations between our values, long-term memory and the objects surrounding us influence our perceiving and understanding of space deeply, resulting in semantic mappings that structure our egocentric experience of reality (p. 178). As such, the car, the environment we drove through, and the final destination, functioned as absolute spaces framing the integrated mental models of our relational, egocentric spaces.

The Lada Niva drove us away from our familiar surroundings and thus created a distance from the comfort and structures of home. This distance, which was experienced together, within the car, created a feeling of togetherness that is similar to the notion of *communitas*<sup>7</sup> as described by Victor Turner in his comparative study of pilgrimage (1969, 1973, 1978). As a component of antistructure, *communitas* creates equality during a shared experience that occurs outside regular structure. For example, pilgrims can experience feeling of togetherness or oneness among each other when their background, including social ranking, no longer holds. Turner indicates, "...as the pilgrim moves away from his structural involvements at home his route becomes increasingly sacralized at one level and increasingly secularized at another, (...) fuller of possibilities of *communitas*, both as secular fellowship and comradeship and sacred communion, than anything he has known at home" (1973, pp. 204-205). Being away from home and spending time in and around the car, together, had its influence on our social relation at the time. But the travel, as a liminal condition, possibly influenced our perception. Liminality, which is a component of anti-structure, forms an essential part of Turner's comparative study. Turner had taken up the concept of the liminal by Arnold van Gennep (1960), who described it as the stage of disorientation or ambiguity at the transition between a pre-ritual status and the ritual establishes that are aimed for. "A limen is, of course, literally a 'threshold', " Turner explains. "And a pilgrimage centre, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a 'threshold', a place



Illustration 13. Re-packing the Niva after picnicking in Stockholm. R. van Klaveren 2013.

and moment 'in and out of time', and such an actor -as the evidence of many pilgrims of many religions attests-hopes to have their direct experience of the sacred, invisible, or supernatural order, either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality" (1973, p. 214). Betwixt and between structures or situations, with the travel itself as a liminal between-ness, the pilgrimage path heads towards a sacred centre that symbolically embodies the meaning of the process. "It is as though such shrines exerted a magnetic effect on a whole communications system", Turner continues. "Pilgrimage centers, in fact, generate a 'field' (p. 228)." Although the Nenets or the city of Naryan Mar cannot be seen as a shrine or a sacred centre, it does form the destination of the road-trip. As such, it gives meaning to the travel. The 'field' that it generates is magnetic for two reasons. First, there is the intention to reach the final destination of the car, and consequently the end of our complicated relationship. Second, there is the aim to break post-colonial patterns. These patterns are subject of discussions on the road and during picnics, and from all the advice and opinions that I collected through these participatory actions, I am drawn towards the possibility to perform in practice.

Turners hermeneutical lens for interpreting pilgrimage experience through the concepts of liminality and

communitas interests me because these concepts play a role in stimulating temporary feeling of togetherness. But, as a model of sociability and a way of experiencing unanimity with other human beings, a rite de passage is often mentioned an obligatory aspect in Turners earlier writings. Although the main character within a good story always changes, and for sure I did change a bit from my experiences, it seems exaggerative to proclaim similarity to a rite the passage. Nevertheless, Turner later applied the concept of liminality much more broadly into popular usage, for example in analysing the annual Burning Man Festival in Nevada and consumerist shopping rituals (1978). This stretched perspective makes it appropriate to view my mission to bring a beloved car to the Nenets through the metaphor of pilgrimage a bit further.<sup>8</sup> In comparison, the *Niva to Nenets* project is not about a mutual trip to a sacred place, as an act of religious devotion. It is rather a shared journey to an indigenous culture under threat, as an act of researching post-colonial patterns. If the pilgrims experimented communitas through a shared rite of passage, perhaps the co-drivers and I did so through a shared between-ness. Betwixt and between home and host, the participants who drove certain parts of the road-trip with me were in a state of being neither here nor there. Such antistructural state of liminality, for Turner, "is the space of greatest invention, discovery, creativity, and reflection. It is in this state of



Illustration 14. Screenshot of the Niva, acting out her agency in Finland.

liminality where we are at the threshold of systems, not stepping into the system to the right, nor the system to the left, but reflectively, creatively, or ceremoniously assessing both" (Madison 2005, p. 174). Thus, liminality can be beneficial to participatory practices with an aim for knowledge sharing. Because, if knowledge from lived experiences is shared in these conditions, we may easier handle contradictory, incoherent, or even discomforting information. Liminal conditions, thus, can pave the way for understanding both sides.

#### ***Das Zwischenmenschliche***

In *Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-structure* (1969), Turner mentions how *communitas* represents the 'quick' of human interrelatedness (p. 127). He compares this to what Buber (1958, 1961) has called '*das Zwischenmenschliche*'. Turner says that for Buber, "Community is quintessentially a mode of relationship between total and concrete persons, between 'I' and 'Thou'. This relationship is always a 'happening', something that arises in instant mutuality, when each person fully experiences the being of the other" (p. 136). It is the existential quality of *communitas* or *das Zwischenmenschliche*, "that involves the whole man in his relation to other whole men" (p. 127). Recalling the road-trip within the *Niva to Nenets* project, I consider aspects of travelling beneficial to a deeper understanding of each other. More specifically, the

spending of time, the distance we covered, the eating together, the sleeping in unfamiliar beds, all helped us to experience each other more as 'whole person' instead of seeing only certain roles or labels attached to us. Although I invited the participating co-drivers for their ethnic background or their expertise, I wanted to portrait them as whole human beings instead of 'talking heads being interviewed'. Reviewing all recorded material, I believe that the travel, and the Lada Niva as a shared personal space, supported this aim. This is, for example, visible during conversations between Anna and Anders Sunna and me, which were recorded inside the Lada Niva while we were waiting in line for the ferry to the Åland Islands. It was too warm and we had to wait for a long time, but still the atmosphere was cosy and friendly. We had a good time together, which was spontaneously emphasized by Anna. I am sure that it was not just the travelling that brought us in this good mood, but the presence and personal space of the Niva as well. When it was finally our turn to board, while the Niva started at my second attempt, Anders joyfully remarked, "It is still alive!"

The conditions of this conversation stretched the 'whole person' aspect of *das Zwischenmenschliche* more than a plain Q&A interview usually does when it is restricted to a narrow time slot within a full working day. We probably had shared more than dialogue. According to



Illustration 15. Screenshot of the Niva, acting out her agency in Russia.

Buber (1992), *das Zwischenmenschliche* is the synthesis of the ‘action and passion’ of two or more individuals. He says, “The ‘action and passion’ of one are intertwined with those of another, each finding in this abiding tension opposition and complementarity” (p. 93). I suppose our interlaced experiences from the day before, as well as from breakfast time, as ‘action and passion’ that we shared on forehand, first influenced the understanding of each other as whole men, which secondly influenced the conversation. Earlier Buber wrote: “Only when I have to do with another essentially, that is, in such a way that he is no longer a phenomenon of my *I*, but instead is my *Thou*, do I experience reality of speech with another—in the irrefragable genuineness of mutuality” (1961, p. 72). Thus, the existence of an us-and-them dichotomy is necessary for exchange and dialogue. In case of the conversations with Anna and Anders, the ‘I’ and ‘Thou’, or ‘us’ and ‘them’, can be considered a meeting between individual, whole persons. The notion of *das Zwischenmenschliche* assumes these persons are diverse, distinctly constituted intentional beings. Buber states, “We do not regress to the fact of individuation, the incontrovertible existence of individuated beings, and raise it anew as a problem; rather, we accept this fact and proceed from there” (1992, p. 94). Moving on from there, we can experience what Buber calls ‘an essential We’, a community of several independent persons, who have a

self and self-responsibility. Paraphrased by Turner (1969): “The We includes the Thou. Only men who are capable of truly saying Thou to one another can truly say We with one another. (...) No particular kind of group-formation as such can be adduced as an example of the essential We, but in many of them the variety which is favourable to the arising of the We can be seen clearly enough (1961, pp. 213-214).” (p. 136). In other words, in order to experience a ‘We’ as communitas or a temporary feeling of togetherness, we first need to divide *I* from *Thou*, or *Us* from *Them*.<sup>9</sup> To Buber’s description of ‘the essential We’ as a transient, if highly potent, mode of relationship between integral persons, Turner adds that it “has a liminal character, since perdurance implies institutionalization and repetition, while community (which roughly equals spontaneous communitas) is always completely unique, and hence socially transient” (1969, p. 137). Altogether, the notion of communitas, liminality, *das Zwischenmenschliche*, and the intertwined ‘action and passion’ of the *I* and *Thou*, highlight and explain certain aspects of the experience of the time, the space, and the connection that we shared inside the Lada Niva. They form the foundation for my understanding of the Lada Niva as a vehicle for togetherness within the project.





## ANT IN PRACTICE

My fascination for the multiple roles of the car encouraged me to study actor network theory (ANT). ANT is considered a theoretical framework or ontology that helps exploring relational ties in between things and concepts. As such, it structured and situated my reflective thoughts about the road-trip in general and about the role of the Lada Niva in particular. While reading Latour (2004, 2005 and 2013) the realities of participants in the *Niva to Nenets* project became clearer in relation to the topics and contexts that influenced them. I reflect upon the road-trip through critical engagement with ANT categories as described by Latour (2005), in order to investigate what actually did happen. As this investigation uncovers the boundaries of ANT, I focus on fluidity in comparison.

### Translation

As I wanted to know more about the ability of the car to become such a strong vehicle for participation, I studied the translational rules as described by Latour (2004). Before actors become part of an actor network, they are displaced and thus changed through translation (Callon 1986). Latour worked this out as a process that follows four general rules or chronological phases (in summary):

The first rule focuses on perplexity and surprise. Potential actors need to be notified and should get enough space to join. The second rule focuses on consultation. Different viewpoints are made explicit and discussions take place to consider possible strategies. The third rule focuses on hierarchy. New actors find their position in the existing structure, which influences and alters the network. The fourth and final rule focuses on the institution of agreements. That what has been agreed upon during the previous phases, should be fulfilled (Latour 2004, p. 109)

In an attempt to analyse the role of the Lada Niva within the participatory processes of the *Niva to Nenets* project, application of these translational rules brings the following (in summary):

1. The characteristics of the Lada Niva, such as its design and its origin, triggered the interest of the participants. The fact that the car was considered to be a gift for the Nenets, stimulated engagement. The participants were invited to take part in the public events and/or to drive part of the road-trip with me.
2. The participants expressed their ideas, opinions, questions and concerns during the participatory moments and while driving to Russia, which lead to discussions about possible strategies of action concerning the intention to give the car away to a Nenets family. For example, possibilities for dealing with Russian bureaucracy were mapped out.
3. The process of discussion clarified the characteristics of both the participants and the issues discussed. For example, concerns about the giving away of the car, as consulted during the second phase, not only signified the specific participants but influenced this aspect of the project too.
4. When agreements were made during the participatory practices, for example in relation to the conditions of the gift-giving, I had to act upon that. However, according to the first rule, one should always preserve enough space or openness for potential new actors to join the network. New locations, new participants, and new circumstances in the course of the *Niva to Nenets* project indeed changed the agreed proceeding related to the gift-giving continuously.

Although I found the making of this exercise meaningful, I consider this outcome a bit trivial. The translation rules didn't give me any new insights. However, during the act of analysing these four steps, I simultaneously realized that relational influences between actors in a network go in all directions. It was not only the car that influenced us, but we had our influences on the car too.<sup>10</sup> And so had the Russian bureaucracy, the road, and even weather conditions.

More illuminating, under these influences the Lada Niva was finally experienced as a burden instead of a beloved friend. Reflecting on the relational ties within the network, I could no longer consider the Lada Niva to be a static object with fixed boundaries. It is possible for actors to undergo fundamental changes, I understood, even if they are non-human actors.

### **Fluidity**

In their analyses of a Zimbabwean water-pumping device, Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (2000) investigate what it means to be an actor. Focusing on the nature, the power and the intentions of the actor in actor network approaches, they claim: "Effective actors need not stand out as solid statues but may fluidly dissolve into whatever it is they help achieve" (p. 227). Boundary objects, or solid statues, are not flexible in essence. They just move between (social) worlds, during which they get interpreted differently. Fluid objects, however, intertwine with 'worlds' and have the capacity to shape 'worlds' (p. 257). The Zimbabwean water pump is not only a mechanical object, but also a device installed by the community, a health promoter and a nation-building apparatus. Besides that, whether its activities are successful or not, is to answer in fluid terms alone as many aspects influence its success (p. 252). Similar to the Zimbabwean water pump, the many identities and activities of the Lada Niva enhanced its fluidity. While reflecting on the participatory practices of the *Niva to Nenets* project, during which the car indeed 'shaped a world' or at least intertwined with it, I was flowing further away from Latour's ANT towards Tim Ingold's *meshwork*. For example in 'Being Alive' (2011), Ingold acknowledges the notion of fluidity. He is critical towards ANT and introduces an animic ontology instead, in which an actor "should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space" (p. 64). He distinguishes Latour's notion of the network, as a set of interconnected points, from his own notion of the *meshwork*, as an interweaving of lines. Sets of relations, called *haecceities* by Deleuze and Guattari (2004), are not what we perceive but *with* what we perceive, "since in the world of fluid space there are no objects of perception" (Ingold 2011, p. 88).

### **Risky, rhizomatic, and relational truth**

During the participatory practices of the *Niva to Nenets* project, people were asked to give their opinions on complicated aspects of the project. For example in relation to dealing with Russian bureaucracy, or the question whether it would be a good idea to give the car away. It was the purpose of these practices to give space for others to influence the course of action, like actors in a network or meshwork. This can be considered a risky act. In 'Participation is Risky, Approaches to Joint Creative Processes' (Huybrechts, Storni & Schoffelen 2014), participatory projects are characterized as 'risky trade-offs' that take place between makers and participants. Liesbeth Huybrechts et al. analyses how generative participatory projects involve risks and uncertainties that may lead to unexpected and unintended results (p. 268). These projects are defined as

"socio-material assemblies where the partaking elements, being people and objects, mutually define and shape each other" (p. 275). As all the elements have a relational understanding of agency, they have a potential impact on the participatory process (p. 185) and thus create uncertainty. Within this receptivity, it is the uncertainty that enables both the richness and the risks. These uncertain and controversial parts of participatory projects are inherent to the omnidirectional and multidimensional character of the rhizomatic relations of the everyday. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that it is in the rhizomatic that we can hold together the tension of multiple points of view that seem in opposition. In ANT, the rigor of investigation is located one step further into abstraction "so that actors are allowed to unfold their own differing cosmos, no matter how counter-intuitive they appear" (Latour 2005, p. 23). According to ANT, agencies are "never presented simply as matters of fact but always as matters of concern, with their mode of fabrication and their stabilizing mechanisms clearly visible" (p. 120). Referring to Heidegger, Latour pleads to take these uncertain agencies, which are real, objective, atypical, and above all interesting, not exactly as objects but rather as gatherings (p. 114). The associations, connections, situations, experiences, insights and new questions that were gathered as matters of concern during the *Niva to Nenets* project should not be objectified; they better stay as plural as possible. There is not just one way to look at the situation: reality is more holistic and rhizomatic in structure. Knowledge can go everywhere. It is not a domain, but a network that traces its own particular trajectory (Latour 2013, p. 85). Truth, as a dynamic order, is not relative but relational. Giving space to others to influence the course of action is therefore not a simplified four-step procedure, like the one described above. It is more about leaving space for fluidity to shape new worlds, organically.



## BUMPY PATHS OF GIFT-GIVING

The premise of the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie is my wish to give my Lada Niva to the Nenets. This intention shaped the preparations and precautions that took place before departure, directed many discussions while on the road, coloured perceptions, observations and insights during all stages of the project, and influenced the ending of both the trip and the movie greatly. The idea of giving away an old car to an indigenous people gave entrance to many questions, opinions, and hooks. For example, the car is more polluting than average cars while the Nenets struggle with the effects and threats of climate change.<sup>11</sup> Also, the car is a Soviet icon, and perhaps even my personal garbage, as I preferred to fly back. Besides these diverse aspects of the gift, the act of giving in itself can be approached from many angles. Thus, this premise gave way to varied perspectives and entrances for people to communicate their knowledge. While driving the car towards Russia, I discussed possible side effects of my wish to do 'good' for an indigenous reindeer herding people. The most important parts of these discussions, if recorded, became part of the *Niva to Nenets* movie. They are presented in the yellow storyline, which is named 'Issues'. In this part of *Map 3*, I will reflect upon the varied perspectives and entrances that the gift-giving theme brought up, and share some collected responses too.

### Background of the premise

During the development of my first ideas for the *Niva to Nenets* project, I remember clearly how the Lada Niva influenced my thought process.<sup>12</sup> Although I was very fond of this car, I had struggles with it. Our complicated relationship, which is described underneath 'my beloved car' on this same map, made me realize that the Lada Niva was not the best car for me, nor was I the best owner. Thus, I needed to find a new owner. After I found out that I could only sell her for a disheartening amount, being around 1000 euro, I searched for another option.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the idea that it would be more satisfying to give her away triggered and organized my thoughts and ideas for this project. Before letting her go I wanted to make one final big trip together, preferably on challenging roads. As the car is of Russian origin, it made sense to travel towards the Russian Arctic, a region that I wanted to explore for a long time already. Combined with my aim to make art that somehow supports the Arctic peoples, all parts and pieces fell into place. I would bring the car back to Russia and gather people to discuss my desire to support indigenous peoples. So the search for a good solution for my car clearly boosted the shaping of this project. And I can be frank about it: my primary motive was to create a more satisfying feeling, for myself, than approximately 1000 euro can do.

Many steps followed this initial project outline. A road trip towards Tromsø and Tanabru was necessary to arrange an introduction to a Nenets support organization called Yasavey (meaning *Guide who knows the terrain* in Nenets language).<sup>14</sup> As a result, I was welcome to discuss my project proposal with this organization during short visits to St. Petersburg, Archangelsk and Naryan Mar in November 2012.<sup>15</sup> Galina Platova, who works for the sub-department Yasavey Manzara, confirmed to me that the Nenets could indeed make good use of an old Lada Niva. There are no roads towards the nomadic families that herd their reindeer on the tundra. But roads exist from the villages towards oil- and gas drilling industries. Places along these roads are used by families to reach their relatives as close as possible, after which they are 'picked up' with reindeer sledges. Galina explained to me that these visits between the nomadic Nenets and the Nenets who are settled in the villages are important for sustaining the Nenets culture and traditional way of life. On the one hand, the villagers bring potatoes and other groceries to the tundra. This supports the household and health of the herders. On the other hand, being connected to the traditional reindeer herding life is important for the villagers to 'feel and be Nenets'. Often they receive reindeer meat in return for

the groceries brought, which is an important *cultural mark*. Because many villagers don't own a car, my Lada Niva could be of good use for a certain family. Even if the car were broken, it would be useful. There are enough cars of this make and brand that can use spare parts. Galina told me that this car would not be a very big or expensive gift: in their eyes it is just an old car. As a gesture, however, it can be meaningful and highly appreciated.

#### Questioning the premise

A gesture that can be meaningful and appreciated, that was all what I wanted the Lada Niva to be. But with my focus on postcolonial pitfalls, I was still worried about possible side effects unintentionally initiated by my act of gift-giving. There is no colonial history between the Nenets and Western Europe, but the idea of an oppressed indigenous people being approached by 'an ambassador' of a country with slavery on its record concerned me. This concern grew deeper after being rejected by some 'ambassadors' of the Sami in Tromsø

during the *Food Related* project.<sup>16</sup> Thus, if I would roughly sketch a black-and-white image of the Nenets and the powers that oppress them, my origin would position me inside a threatening and opposing black cloud that demands oil and gas for its polluting industries and lifestyles. This demand not only hampers reindeer herding on the tundra, where oil and gas are extracted from, but also accelerates the climate change that threatens the herding culture even more. Of course reality comes with many shades and colours, but where can we draw the line? Can I gesture as my own humble self when others position me among the oppressors? Can I ever truly step out of this black cloud and act as an individual? I have been probing the participants with these questions at the Picnic-Quizzes during the road-trip from Belgium towards Russia (see *Map 4*, pp. 31-36). As probing questions to dig deeper on the main question whether it is a good idea to give my car to the Nenets, or not, they generated many responses. These are some of the responses I recorded, which became part of the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie:

- "Western people have very often come to take things – it can therefore be nice to give something back. But of course this can go wrong. But if you never try something, it will never work out well."
- "It is terribly important how it is done, I think. You can give in arrogance, but you can also give in a vulnerable way. All arrogance will dissolve if Rosanne gives with a sensitive, open gesture."
- "You can, of course, give the car away. But then, if they have this used Lada, can they repair it or will it just stay there as scrap iron?"
- "Maybe it is a good idea. It is a good idea to travel. But about the car, I don't know if they drive. The first thing I think about, do they have a driving license? They probably do... and then it is nice to have a car."
- "On the one hand I am pretty sure that the Nenets will be happy, because I know the situation there. I know they will be happy with any vehicle that can drive in bad conditions, but on the other hand, it's just wrong to give such a car there. That is because how all these machines were designed. They were not properly designed for those roads, from an engineering point of view. Not from a sustainable point of view or the social, cultural and so on. When we're talking about an artistic action we should, I think, consider some future aspects. It is quite okay in short term perspective, as they will drive it with happiness, but for the future... I'm not sure."



Illustration 16. Screenshot of the Picnic-Quiz on Suomenlinna, Helsinki.

- “It is actually a nice, good idea, both from a moral and an economical point of view. If I would take the environmental approach, I would say that this car has been produced. Most of the energy in its lifecycle has been used by producing the car and it cannot be regained. I would say that the car has to be used as long as it is technically possible, and as long as it is socially desirable to keep on using the car, they should. It will not be used where it is, but it will be used where you’re bringing it. Probably it will be used and make a big difference for the people using it. Provided they have roads to drive it on, it is a car that has more value there than it has where you take it from. And it is probably easier to either find spare parts, or to give it a second life as spare parts over there. (...) And of course the thing is polluting like hell; it is a Lada, please! But that doesn’t mean that it can mean a huge difference for a family somewhere.”
- “I am still in some doubt. The car will be useful, at least it is for the part of their life where they have to be in the village. Because in tundra, it doesn’t make real sense. And it won’t help reindeer herding at all.”

Besides this selection of responses, more words of advice, doubt, support or concern were spoken. In case these were words of encouragements and incitements, the premise to give my car away was usually considered to be a good idea. Seen from this perspective, generosity is something to cherish and can’t be bad in essence. Other responses questioned my intention, the purpose of this gift, or the gift itself. These words of doubt or discouragement focused either on the car, on the Nenets, or on the act of giving. For example, I was asked why I wouldn’t sell the car instead, what it would be worth, if it wouldn’t be better to stop driving cars in general, and if the car would be able to drive the whole distance without falling apart. Or I was asked if the Nenets can use the car, and if there are roads to drive it

on. Also, I received questions that focused on the act of gift-giving. For example, I was asked under which conditions the gift would be given, if I would get or ask something in return, if it is an appropriate act, if it could probably create some misbalance, and so forth. This focus on the act of gift-giving is linked to my initial concern, which was inspired through Courbet’s painting *La Rencontre*, and is described in depth in *Map 1*. As this concern entails the need to explore how we approach a ‘them’ within an us-and-them dichotomy, I found these responses meaningful and inspiring. While working with the film footage, including these recorded responses, I further explored the gift-giving theme for possible answers from literature and personal memories.

### **Pitfalls of charity**

It would be a wrong approach to perform my act of gift-giving as charity. This would enlarge the us-and-them dichotomy, as I, as an individual form of 'us', would become the privileged one who is able to give to others, while those others, as 'them', would become the peripheral ones who are in need to receive. Through charity, the imbalance between predominant groups and groups in the periphery can be stressed. The revolutionary theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) suggested that donations to charity are a display of power and an expression of pity. He asserted that the will for power inevitably dominates the will to do good, while self-interest is fulfilled in a collective good to subscribe to a 'utopian illusion' (Little 1993, p. 171). As described by Langdon B. Gilkey in the introduction of Niebuhr's reprint of Moral Man and Immoral Society (2013/1932), "it is thus that people who individually may be 'good', (...) unconsciously yet also consciously sin through the pride and cruelty of their group (xxiii)." As an example, Niebuhr illustrated how schools for black children in 1930s in the USA were conducted under the auspices of white philanthropy. These powerful individuals were more inclined to be generous than to deal with the roots of the problem: the social injustices. In this case, charity was used to patch up the effects of fundamental injustices that were built into the structure and values of a society. It made this injustice acceptable and tried to mitigate its consequences.

I do not recognize similar power relations behind my wish to support the Nenets. In relation to social injustices I would rather prefer a scenario in which the Nenets are given control and rights over their pastures, even if that would make it more expensive for my group of people to drive cars.<sup>17</sup> That preference points out two things: on the one hand it shows I'm an ideological rebel within my own group, on the other it shows how preservative I am towards the indigenous reindeer herding culture. My 'utopian illusion' perhaps comes in another form or shape, but in essence it might be more similar than I like to admit. Thus, it seems to be important to acknowledge that it is an illusion to think that I can know all tendencies and impacts of my own individual will to do good. Although I don't think I have much greed for power, it is probably hard to completely overview in which shapes power and power relations can grow.

Charity can do more harm than good. For example, orphanages in South-East Asia give charity a bad name.

UNICEF said that nearly three-quarters of the 12,000 children in Cambodia's orphanages are not orphans. These children are 'helped' by tourists and volunteers that unintentionally fund a system that separate children from their families for jobs and money (Carmichael 2001). Not only in Cambodia, but in many southern countries vulnerable children are commodified and local economies are damaged under the umbrella of 'giving help'. The Matador Network is an online community of travel writers, editors, photographers, and filmmakers that warns against voluntourism. In several articles they explain that even the NGO's that aren't fraudulent can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about the so-called 'third world', while promoting neo-colonial attitudes (Ferguson 2016). On their website, images of white youngsters exposing themselves on Facebook while 'doing good' in Africa embarrass me. Also, a list of seven aid projects ranks the worst attempts at helping others since colonialism. For example, buy-one-give-one campaigns and the donation of T-shirts are not supportive acts to approach poverty. They pretend to do something against poverty, while they actually build the exploitative global structure that produces economic inequality (Stupart 2012). From these examples it becomes clear why charity can leave a nasty taste, even if the hearts were in the right place. Is it then perhaps better not to give, not to volunteer, or not to 'do good' at all? Richard Stupart suggests we should, but only if we do our homework and are aware of the complexity of the questions we need to ask ourselves. He says, "You may find yourself surprised at how quickly the most straightforward school-building project can become an exercise in self-analysis. It's uncomfortable, but it's also absolutely necessary" (Stupart 2011).

### **Self-reflection on the premise**

Besides Stupart, some participants of the Picnic-Quizzes motivated me to self-analyse my intentions. For example, Claudia asked me during the Picnic-Quiz at Suomenlinna why I initially thought it would be a good idea to give away the car. My answer included the confirmation of Yasavey that acknowledged the benefit of the car, and my troubled relationship with the car that motivated me to search for a new destination. But reviewing this recorded conversation, I witnessed how I was beating around the bush. Unconsciously, or maybe just too distracted by all levels of attention, I ignored my primary motive: to create a better feeling than I would have when I would sell the car for a disappointing low price. The wish to drive one last long journey,

particularly excluding an unattractive return trip, was partly motivated by the perspective of personal pleasure. Uncomfortably indeed, I discovered selfishness within my intention to do good for others.

Turner's (1973) focus on the 'love thy neighbour' theme within universal religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism and Hinduism, motivates me to wonder if my Protestant upbringing had any influence on the premise.<sup>18</sup> The dichotomy between right and wrong, good and bad, was often stressed at home, within the bible, at my Christian school, in church, and during Catechesis. We were all motivated to be good in the eyes of God, and help people in need. Turner explains how universal religions extended our individual responsibility from the domain of immediate kin and neighbourhood relations towards all who share our system of beliefs. "The 'other' becomes a 'brother'", he says, as the localized normative systems of the generic 'brother' and 'neighbour', whom one should love, might be anyone in the wide world (p. 207). But while Protestantism stimulated my love for others, it also taught me hypocrisy and arrogance. For example, our religion was the only 'good' and 'real' one, which motivated us to exclude those who shared different systems of belief, or to view upon these belief systems as 'wrong' or even 'evil'. Moreover, the practice of our religion enabled us to choose among all those metaphorical neighbours whom we would love. Our real neighbours, for example, were more foe than friend, which later escalated into multiple court cases. Recalling my Protestant youth makes me realize that my premise derives from yet another intrinsic, possibly selfish, motivation: my choice to 'love' the Nenets.

Choosing the Nenets as the final destination of my road trip clearly comes from my own personal interest. But why do I love them? Without doubt, my appreciation and admiration for indigenous reindeer herding cultures has a romantic surface. Their close connection to nature and their roots in nomadic herding or hunter-gathering cultures, like most indigenous peoples have, attracts me greatly. If I try to probe for underlying motivations that feed my wish to support them, I encounter aspects of conservatism. Although I usually underline the necessary freedom of indigenous peoples to decide for themselves if, and how far, they wish to change their cultural traditions, I can't deny that I hope the Nenets will preserve their reindeer herding livelihood.

This preservation would be in my favour, as I feel attracted to cultures that remain more or less archaic. Probing deeper on that attraction I feel grief for what modernity had 'lost'. There I encounter a painful truth: my wish to support the Nenets derives from self-interest, from what I lack. In my most humble and honest feelings, I presume that peoples like the Nenets possess something that I painfully miss: the practice of a worldview or belief system that I consider more 'good' or 'true' than the one I grew up with. My preservative view upon the Nenets reindeer herding culture, from which I hope it will sustain these times of climate change and modernization, is therefore coloured by an intrinsic need. Although external motivation is given by human-interest organizations that underline the need of indigenous peoples worldwide to sustain their cultures, I believe this intrinsic motive founded my premise most. This psychoanalytical gaze uncovers a lack in myself that is projected onto others. Projection can be exploitative if one projects negativity to others to establish oneself, for example when the poverty of others is emphasized to justify the 'goodness' of helping them. Niebuhr's reflections on conducted schools for black children (see *pitfalls of charity*) illustrate this possibility. The dramatic and misleading title of the recent photography book by Jimmy Nelson, 'Before They Pass Away', is another example of exploitative projection. Nelson portrayed 30 indigenous communities worldwide, resulting in a series of 402 colour photographs that most people find majestic. However, some indigenous communities are aggravated by his approach, some have complained the misrepresentation of their lives, and some have even called his pictures 'fake' (Davies 2014). But the title of the book is debated the most as it projects the idea that these peoples are 'vanishing', as if they are about to die out, in order to establish more attention to the work. Elissa Washuta, a member of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, said that "while these words have a romantic resonance, Nelson's mission is built on a horrifying assumption: that these indigenous peoples are on the brink of destruction. He couldn't be more wrong" (2013). Similar to the Yamal Nenets, and other indigenous groups that were portrayed by Jimmy Nelson, the Nenets in the Naryar Mar region will not 'vanish'. As a people, they will remain Nenets even if the reindeer herding culture would no longer be sustainable. They do struggle, but portraying them as a dying race will not support them. My own projection on their reindeer herding culture rather emphasizes the negativity in myself to create the positive in the other.



Illustration 17. *Lea Kantonen at the Picnic-Quiz on Suomenlinna, Helsinki.*

But does that do justice to them? In the foreword of the same reprint of Niebuhr (2013/1932), Cornel West poetically states that “justice is what love looks like in public” (xiii), when he explains how the Christian demand to love thy neighbour is not reducible to a quest for justice. And he highlights Niebuhr’s viewpoint on justice: “the most perfect justice cannot be established if the moral imagination of the individual does not seek to comprehend the needs and interests of his fellows” (p. 257). Self-reflection is needed to unravel and comprehend the projections and underlying needs that influence one’s love and fight for justice. But, as reminded by Niebuhr, we also need to seek comprehension of the needs and interests of the ones we seek justice for.

#### **Indigenous reciprocity**

As Turner (1973) explained, universal religions were motivated by the growth of communities and thus broadened human care from the level of kinship towards care for all who share the system of belief. In result, this declined the reciprocal connectedness on a

local scale. Universal religions, however, were motivated to expand. For example, evangelistic missions illustrate how religion can embed the motivation to ‘turn’ other worldviews or cultures to their own. For example, both the Catholic and the Anglican Church have been sending missionaries to the Inuit in order to ‘help’ God in ‘helping’ them overcoming heathenism.<sup>19</sup> When people who give to others have the idée fixe that they are ‘doing good’, they encounter the pitfall of feeling ‘better’ than other people. This can lead to superiority over the people whom they initially wanted to help. Also, the people who are approached by ‘superior givers’ can develop feelings of inferiority. In the contemporary western culture, this imbalance is intertwined with distinctions between rich-poor, developed-undeveloped, educated-uneducated, primal-periphery, and last but not least: us-them. Because of these dichotomies, giving becomes an act of power instead of an act of love or care. Expansionism, with or without religious motivation, builds upon dichotomies and power relations and suppresses kinship.



Among indigenous peoples, in general, kinship ties and reciprocal connectedness have been strong and often survived colonialism. During the Picnic-Quiz at Suomenlinna, an interesting conversation about indigenous reciprocity took place. Lea Kantonen, a Finnish artist who worked with several indigenous cultures, introduced *láhi* to me, the Sami version of reciprocal connectedness:

*"Láhi is a Sami concept for gift-giving. It is something that indigenous cultures have all over. That is something that Western people and indigenous peoples could share. We as Western academic people can learn from gift-giving from indigenous cultures, instead of bringing our so-called more developed way of seeing things. This reciprocity is important for indigenous cultures. You give and receive; you give something and receive something else. But it is not measuring things."*

Rauna Kuokkanen (2005) explains that the *láhi* concept derives from the Sami gift-centred worldview and serves as a crucial reminder of the necessary relationships with the land and the community (p. 22). Kuokkanen suggests that the concept "reflects the Sami worldview that recognizes the abundance of the land as gifts that, in turn, are actively acknowledged and reciprocated by various ceremonies and rituals. *Láhi*, then, is an expression of the relationships that the Sami have traditionally had with the natural environment" (p. 24). She explains a second concept for gift-giving within Sami language, *attáldat*, that defines giftedness in a philosophy of sharing personal skills with others. Reading Kuokkanen, I understand why Lea Kantonen advised Western academic people to learn from this indigenous reciprocity practice. Indigenous gift philosophies such as the Sami philosophy of *láhi* and

*attáldat* can criticize the dominant global economy's predication on exploitation and the problematic nature of hyper-individualism that characterises much of contemporary mainstream society. Kuokkanen says, "The concepts of *láhi* and *attáldat* teach us the knowledge of the surrounding natural environment, of taking care of the relationship with the land, of our ancestors and relations in the spiritual realm, and of our responsibilities toward others. *Láhi* teaches us about the need to recognise the gifts of the land and reciprocate rather than take the abundance for granted and exploit it for profit, while *attáldat* teaches us to share our skills for the benefit of our communities" (p. 28). If we indeed want to learn from these concepts, we need to understand that gift-giving is not about measuring things. For example, in giving and receiving there is no need for the gifts to be of equal value.

In response to Lea Kantonen's explanation of *láhi*, Claudia, a Mexican scholar who worked with the Rarámuri, introduced another indigenous gift-giving concept, *korima*, during the same Picnic-Quiz:

*"I guess you are also familiar then with the concept of korima from the Rarámuri in Mexico? It means basically 'giving' or 'sharing'. It is more seen as the natural cycle of life. Sometimes you have, sometimes you don't have. They don't even have to thank when they are given something. (...) If you have, you give, if you don't have, someone else will give you. It is a natural cycle."*

Her definition of gift-giving as a natural cycle of life can be found among many other indigenous cultures. In *The Gift; the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (2006/1950), Marcel Mauss explains how in different indigenous communities worldwide, gifts and reciprocity are part of a more complex institution of 'total services'. His analysis focuses on the way relationships are built through the exchange of objects. Where Kuokkanen merely highlights the environmental relationships, which includes spiritual aspects, Mauss directs the relationships between human, primarily groups. He finds that exchanging gifts is part of, and interwoven with, a social system that includes many kinds of obligations.

Awareness of indigenous reciprocity can prevent a premise of giving from trapping into pitfalls of charity or destructive power relations. For example, a better understanding of a culture you meet can enlarge empathy. If you know gift-giving is probably part of a local social system, being bound and restricted by local rules and relationships, it becomes easier to be sensitive for possible impacts of your gift. This is the case when gifts are offered to you too.

#### Pitfalls of (not) receiving

Within the compared archaic gift-giving systems, Mauss elaborates on the obligation to exchange. The overall obligation to reciprocate supposes two just as important obligations: "on the one hand, to give presents, and on the other, to receive them" (pp. 16-17). Although this might seem to describe the act of reciprocity itself, it is meaningful to focus on these acts solely as they all have their own characteristics and agency.

Being able to accept presents, for example in the shape of food, a sleeping place, or other kinds of hospitality, is not a self-evident feature of all travellers. During several conversations with people who visited foreign cultures, moments in which local food is shared were described as difficult. Although I am a finicky eater myself (unfortunately!), it shocks me how often people are unwilling to try overcome their resistance when food is offered.<sup>20</sup> Indeed some local food habits can be too exotic to appreciate, and different attitudes towards hygiene can influence the willingness to give it a try.<sup>21</sup> But are we Westerners not sometimes too quickly turning offers down, responding only on our disgust while ignoring the fact that this might insult our host?<sup>22</sup>

According to Mauss, the refusal of gifts can be hostile behaviour. In relation to the Maori, he notes that "to refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (p. 17). A refusal is nowadays maybe not as strong as a declaration of war, but it will without doubt not be beneficial to the aimed feeling of togetherness. Those occasions that I felt obliged to refuse food, for example because of my lactose intolerance, I indeed felt less related. Not to participate in commensality, equals not being part of the group. Sometimes a refusal seemed more or less ignored, and sometimes people made fun of me. For example, in Greenland, I once became the joke of the dinner table as my host purposely offered me fancy food to laugh about my facial expressions. In their opinion, I was too skinny, and amusingly weird. But in this particular case, while my position as an outsider was stressed, I still felt welcome. This Greenlandic family was so hospitable, that I felt accepted for whom I am.

Probably without the knowledge of any of my hosts, the need to try out Arctic foods is one of the biggest gifts I received up north. It challenged not only my taste, but also my vision upon food and food sources. While witnessing how one can live 'from the land', in a close relationship with the animals one hunts or herds, my understanding and respect for the hunting and herding cultures grew deeper. As a result, I have adapted my own diet and food habits, for which I feel grateful.

#### Pitfall of Arrogance

From all possible pitfalls on the bumpy road of gift-giving, the pitfall of arrogance is perhaps the most challenging for people from western cultures. Growing up in a culture that is strong in making progress through sophisticated solutions, advanced inventions and glorified triumphs, has left its mark on our perception of the world. Unconscious feelings of superiority or a blind trust in our worldview can lead to arrogant perceptions on, for example, poverty. As Westerners can have a hard time in regarding the pain of others,<sup>23</sup> poverty is approached with the implication and the moral imperative that something should be done about it. Western societies perceive poverty as an unacceptable hardship, while "the extent and depth of that hardship, and the suffering it entails, represent a damning indictment of governments and non-poor citizens who

elect them in far too many affluent societies" (Lister 2004, p. 187). The arrogance of the Western approach towards poverty becomes painfully visible within Renzo Martens' film 'Episode III' or 'Enjoy Poverty'.<sup>24</sup> Although his collaboration with local communities is questioned and criticized earlier in this thesis (see *Map 1*, p. 14), his movie does motivate the debate to approach poverty

differently. In Martens' portrait of the Congolese interior, poverty is presented as the highest export product. Martens documents his emancipation program that encourages local communities to monetize their poverty, and deliberately goes 'over the top' in his portrayal.

In the documentary 'Cultuurbarbaren' from Alexander Oey (2016), Martens explains how he overacts his role in order to shape parody:

*"I want to show in full how terrible this inequality is, just because people like me are in charge. You can see it: I walk around here in my black suit, but make it so sharp that the hierarchy can easily be turned upside down. And in making it such a fundamental project, naming and discussing it, turning those hierarchies, I make things different. We have to play a kind of double game, reproducing the status quo, in order to analyse it."*

Martens' overacted arrogance can make us aware of power relations within poverty. From feeling ashamed on his behalf, the audience of his movie can become more aware of the arrogance within their worldview and world order. His movie, however, does not give space for inclusion. Among the people who criticize Martens' approach, Dan Fox (2009) states that his portrayal of Congolese plantation workers has a fascination with an exotic 'other': it performs the same reductive stereotyping that his film supposedly criticizes, including the pleasure of watching people in dire circumstances, as he left out any aspects of their lives other than those necessary to advance his thesis. His approach towards the communities he worked in, or with who participated in his movie, was not one of an equal ground, nor was it deriving from a clearly exposed and equal goal.

Ruth Lister (2004) motivates us to move the poverty debate forward from income poverty into the analysis of deprivation, capability, and social exclusion. The affluent societies and non-poor citizens she writes about, can be found within the art scene too. A recent gift by Jeff Koons illustrates how power relations within the arts can be just as arrogant. In 2016, the American artist donated the concept of a sculpture called 'Bouquet of Tulips' to the City of Paris, to commemorate victims of recent terrorist attacks.



Illustration 18. Jeff Koons and his gift. Getty Images 2016.

In an interview for NY Times, Koons said about his gift: "I hope the work is life-changing to people. I hope that the 'Bouquet of Tulips' can communicate a sense of future, of optimism, the joy of offering, to find something greater outside the self" (Donadio 2016). Many French artists and cultural figures, however, demanded the City of Paris to refuse Koons' gift. They not only dispute its chosen location, or the 3.5 million euros that were needed for the production and installation of the piece but were not included in the gift; they considered the gift to be product placement for Mr. Koons himself. "We appreciate gifts," they wrote in a letter that was published in the French newspaper Libération, but ones that are "free, unconditional and without ulterior motives" (Codrea-Rado 2018). I find the resemblance between Koons and the overacting role of Martens in his movie striking, when I see a photo of the big famous artist posing in front of a depiction of his gift during a press conference. To me, Koons' well-tailored suit, his feign smile and his clownish gesture expresses more arrogance than Courbet in *La Rencontre* (see Map 1).



Even if a gift comes unconditional and without ulterior motives, our perception can be misleading. No matter in which culture you grow up or strive, perception is always limited. When we had driven the Lada Niva towards Copenhagen, Cunera Buijs shared a striking anecdote that amusingly illustrates how our idea of the living conditions of 'others' can be misled by our perception. As a result from her long-term fieldwork in East-Greenland she was 'adopted' by a Greenlandic family. Cunera's Greenlandic grandmother and her biological one in the Netherlands both had a great hart, but limited perception of the daily circumstances of her other family abroad.

Remembering the resemblances within her grandmothers' expressions, Cunera quoted them saying:

*"Geez, how sad for those people in Greenland that they have it so cold. That is horrible, how pitiful! All that snow and ice... let them all come here!"  
And in Greenland, when I told about the dikes and the high water, and how we all live huddled together with so many people, she (the other grandmother) said: 'Oh, how sad for those Dutch people... Let them all come here!'"*

Only if we stay open towards the possibility of coloured viewpoints and blind spots within our perception of the reality of others, and only if we listen to the opinion and need of the people we wish to help, we can prevent from falling in the diverse pitfalls on the bumpy road of gift-giving.

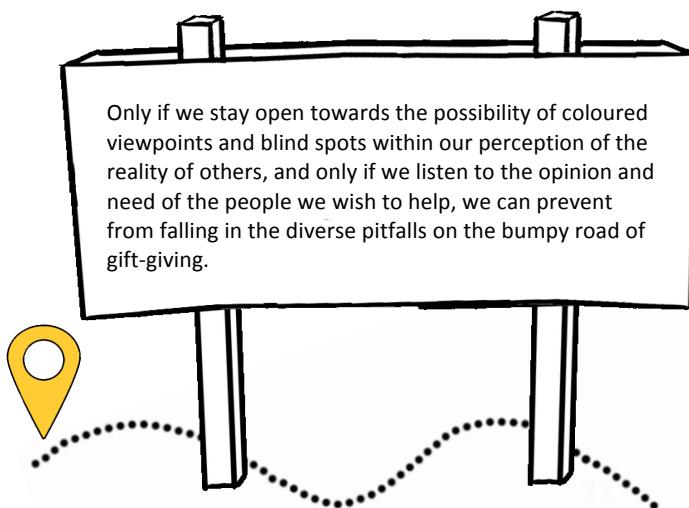




Illustration 19. Screenshot of a picnic at the Jönköping Lake.

During a picnic at the Jönköping Lake in Sweden, Greenlandic philosophy student Kulunnguaq (Kulu) Petersen shared some interesting thoughts about gift-giving:

*"I think the way to finding out how we can help them is asking how they want to be helped. What they need and what they want. (...) Because I think as people we have a tendency to think that we know what's best. How is the best way to live, what are the most realistic ways to do things? Maybe some people think that the Nenets way of living aren't realistic anymore. I think this is a trying way to finding out how can the modern society keep evolving and how can the Nenets keep what they want to keep, and keep their lifestyles. And I think the car somehow also symbolizes that, because you are giving the car to people who need them. But the car is in their hands, they can do with it whatever they want to and need to do with it. Instead of telling them to do something, you're giving them something that can make use of themselves."*

Kulu's response contains two sharp findings. On the one hand, she describes how the Lada Niva, as a gift, can contribute in the search for the continuation Nenets lifestyles while modern society evolves because it is given in their hands. While the car is given to the Nenets, it is up to them what they will do with it. If we look at this through ANT, we see how gift-giving makes the car jump different networks. Previous perceptions of the car, for example its relation to Soviet times, do

not have to be part of the new network when the ownership of the car switches. As receivers of the gift, the Nenets are not bound to the acted network in which the object was initially perceived. This is only possible if the gift is unbiased, with no proverbial strings attached. Only then are the Nenets able to decide for themselves what they will do with it, or not. On the other hand, Kulu underlines the importance to ask the Nenets how we can help them.

Kulu's words encouraged me to ask exactly this question when I had the chance to visit two reindeer herding families on the Yugorsky Tundra. With the help of an interpreter I approached the oldest man asking how we, Western Europeans, can help him to continue his livelihood. His response touched my heart. While he looked around at the vast plain surrounding his chum (Nenets tent), he said: "We have everything we need. As long as the tundra remains available for us and for the reindeer, we do not need anything else."

The honesty of the reindeer herder caught me as he gestured the opposite of pretension. He was clearly a proud man and not in need, but he acted modest. Without refusing support, he clearly outlined the sufficiency of his existence. In one spontaneous response, he circumvented the pitfall of (not) receiving and the pitfall of arrogance. Strikingly, his words touched the sore spot of my existence. A few moments later, when I distanced myself a bit to observe the circumstances, I noticed an aching need of my own. Witnessing this man's connection to the herd and to the tundra, I suddenly felt how disconnected my culture is towards nature. The premise of helping the Nenets turned round to show its true meaning: I was here to help myself.



The *Niva to Nenets* road-movie has six storylines:

#### Issues

- The yellow storyline focuses on the issues that we discuss. During the picnics, but also inside the car, many conversations are somehow related to my wish to help the Nenets. For example, the us-and-them dichotomy, possible aspects of gift-giving, the situation for Greenland, and the challenges of the Sami in Sweden are discussed. As a collection of spoken issues, this storyline shows inspiring views on hierachic positions within a post-colonial context.

#### Music

- The purple storyline focuses on the music that we have been listening. This music was chosen because of its origin or its lyrics. This collection of musical scenes shows the journey's mood.

#### Nenets

- The green storyline focuses on the Nenets. The Nenets are an indigenous Samoyedic people of the Russian Arctic. As the continuation of their traditional livelihood is threatened by oil- and gas industry, climate change, and globalization, I want to support them.

#### Niva

- The blue storyline focuses on the Lada Niva. Many characteristics and connotations make this Russian terrain vehicle so much more than only the transportation device in which we made this journey. By breaking down a couple of times, she forces us to step back. She obviously does not want to enter Russia on a Monday, while Russia probably does not want her back at all. This makes it very difficult to bring her to the Nenets as a gift.

#### Rosanne

- The red storyline focuses on my personal experience of this journey. My intention to give the Niva to the Nenets is accompanied by an insecure handling of the Russian bureaucracy. Gradually a need for self-reflection occurs. What exactly motivates my wish to support the Nenets, and what do I need myself? The selection of scenes in this storyline forms a personal portrait and a search for the right approach.



## INTERACTIVE TRAILS

After my return from the road-trip towards the Nenets in 2013, I worked for several years with the enormous amount of film recordings. The result is an interactive documentary road-movie, made for the internet, which I will now discuss. I will reflect upon the recorded conversations and discussions in view of theoretical findings from decolonial theories and actor network theory. But first, I will focus on the road-movie genre.

### Road-movie

According to Danesi's Dictionary of Media and Communication, a road-movie is a film genre in which the main characters leave home to travel from place to place, typically altering the perspective from their everyday lives (2015, p. 256). The protagonist often makes a mental journey as well, and is in search for something or undergoes important life-lessons. Without doubt, the *Niva to Nenets* documentary fits well within this genre. *Niva to Nenets* tells the story of my attempts to handle a decolonizing approach. In order to do so, I need to handle my heritage, which includes a stressful attitude, the wish for things to be perfect, and good but foolish intentions. The long road-trip was an on-going experience that brought many challenges and opportunities to change. My mental journey, including the life-lessons learned, can be followed through the red storyline. Stories of participating co-drivers are integrated in all storylines. Altogether, the different storylines expose the plurality of the experienced reality.

The schedule created an opportunity to spend approximately two days with each participating co-driver, instead of only a fraction of that amount of time that is usually provided for a regular interview. The fact that we were driving together for many hours, moving further away from our homes towards unfamiliar places, influenced us greatly. Although travel distances were sometimes experienced as taking too long, for example in between Copenhagen and Stockholm, I consider the distances beneficial to our conversations. The sun, an appealing landscape or an improvised picnic next to the road brought us in a holiday mood. I do not know if the co-drivers experienced a shift of perspective from their everyday lives, but I did. Typical to the main character arc in most film scripts, but nevertheless true, my new perspective upon decolonization processes unfolded

throughout the long journey. The convincing experiences, viewpoints and concerns shared by the co-drivers were at least as influential as the travelling itself.

Road-movies are often composed of multiple episodes in which the protagonists face certain challenges. In my personal experience of the journey, a new episode started each time other co-drivers joined me. Within the red storyline of the movie, all participants function as antagonists. In case they drove with me in the car, we had an abundance of time in which many unprepared conversations took place. These long, shared moments resemble the anthropological approach combined with the role of facilitator. During Picnic-Quizzes, when time was limited and specific questioned were part of a tight schedule to follow, my approach was more similar to co-sessions during design research in which I played the role of moderator. This split format changed during the Russian part of the journey. Due to the fact that I only speak and understand very basic Russian, and road conditions are more complicated in this part of the world, I hired a local driver to bring my Lada Niva and me to Naryan Mar – the capital of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The last two and a half day we did not drive at all, because shipment on the Pechora River is the only way to reach this remote area by car in summertime. The fact that I was recording a movie opened some otherwise closed doors once I arrived in the capital city, as it gave people the possibility to share and transfer knowledge about their culture. Many times, people participated because they wanted to have their culture exposed to a Western-European audience. With the kind and supportive assistance of Yasavey Manzara, I was invited to take part at several celebrations during the annual Reindeer Herders' Day. Those times, I was the guest who participated in their events.

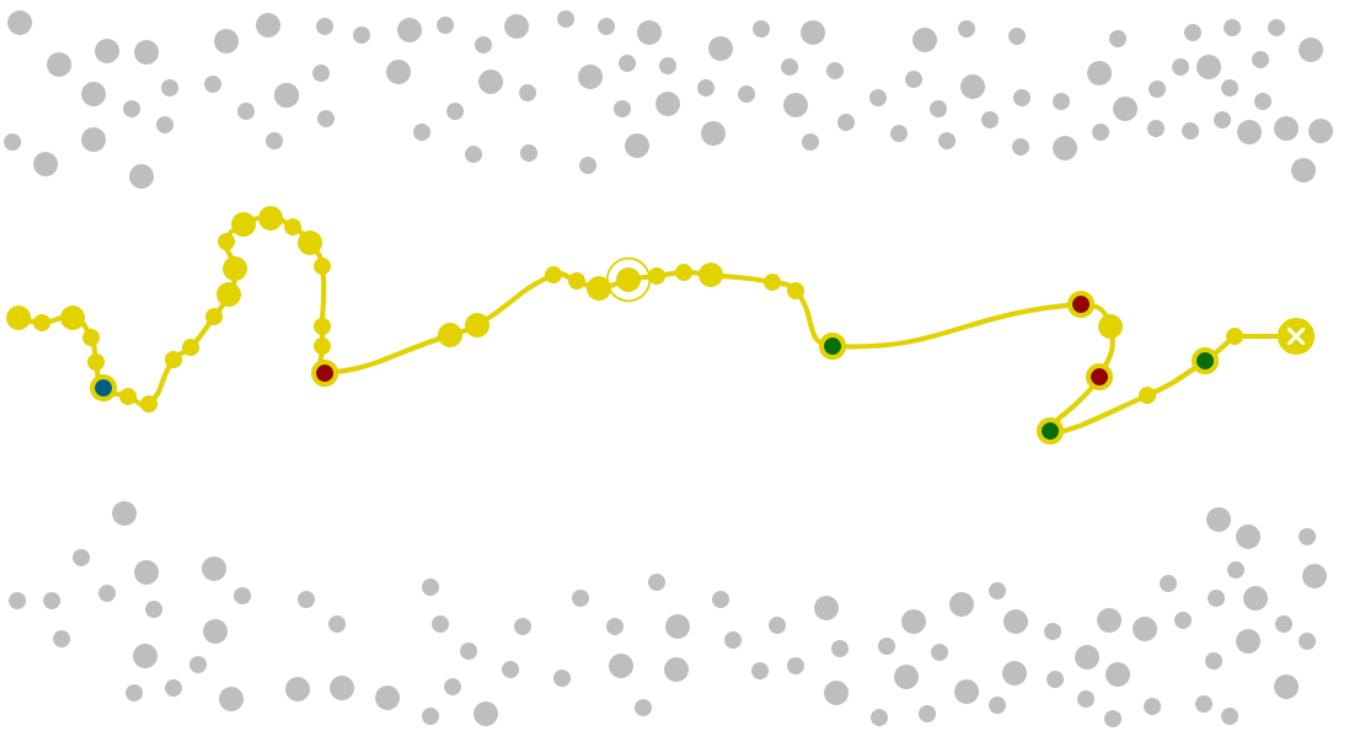


Illustration 20. *Yellow storyline.*

In a road-movie, the travel itself is usually more important than the destination. The goal of the travel, which is often connected to the destination, motivates the protagonist as a leading thread to continue travelling.<sup>25</sup> In *Niva to Nenets*, the premise is my intention to give my car to the Nenets to support them. The goal, however, is to probe for lived knowledge about gift-giving and decolonization processes. The reindeer herding Nenets in the Naryan Mar region are not only the final destination, but also the intended receiver of my gift. As such, their existence at the end of the journey structured and stimulated many probing questions. My motivation to choose the Nenets as destination and possible receiver of my gift is influenced by the wish to focus on an Arctic indigenous people that is challenged by the demands of affluent societies. The Nenets in Russia, both within the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, experience difficulties from expansive gas and oil industry on the tundra's they herd on. The Nenets of Yamal are situated on the other side of the Ural Mountains that form part of the conventional boundary between the continents of Europe and Asia. Besides the fact that a car trip towards their region is too difficult because of a lack of roads, I found it more interesting to visit an indigenous people that technically live in Europe. The Sami do too, as their land overlaps parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. My preferences for Russia derives from the Russian origin of

the Lada Niva, and from the fact that the existence and the situation of indigenous peoples in Russia are lesser known by Western-Europeans. Choosing the Nenets instead of the Russian Sami, made the comparative experiences of the participating Greenlanders and Sami more meaningful.

What I could not have foreseen beforehand, is how Russian bureaucracy turned more complicated and much more expensive over time than earlier information seemed to indicate. As a result of this, I could only drive the car in Russia under tourist conditions. When I reached Naryan Mar, the final destination of this journey, the car was broken again. After some guiding words of advice from my contact person at Yasavey, the Nenets organization I collaborated with, I decided to take the Niva back to Belgium.<sup>26</sup> As one of the most important life-lessons for the protagonist within the road-movie, I share my decision-making in front of my cameras. Instead of giving a car, I wrap some money in a small gift box to give to Yasavey, as they support and protect the reindeer-herding livelihood. It is not much, as the multiple repairs to the car and the return trip almost made me penniless. For them, on top of the agreed payments for their collaboration, it was probably just a tip to express my gratitude. For me, this alternative gift was the result of an exercise in humbleness. Not forcing reality to get (or give) what I want, not proceeding

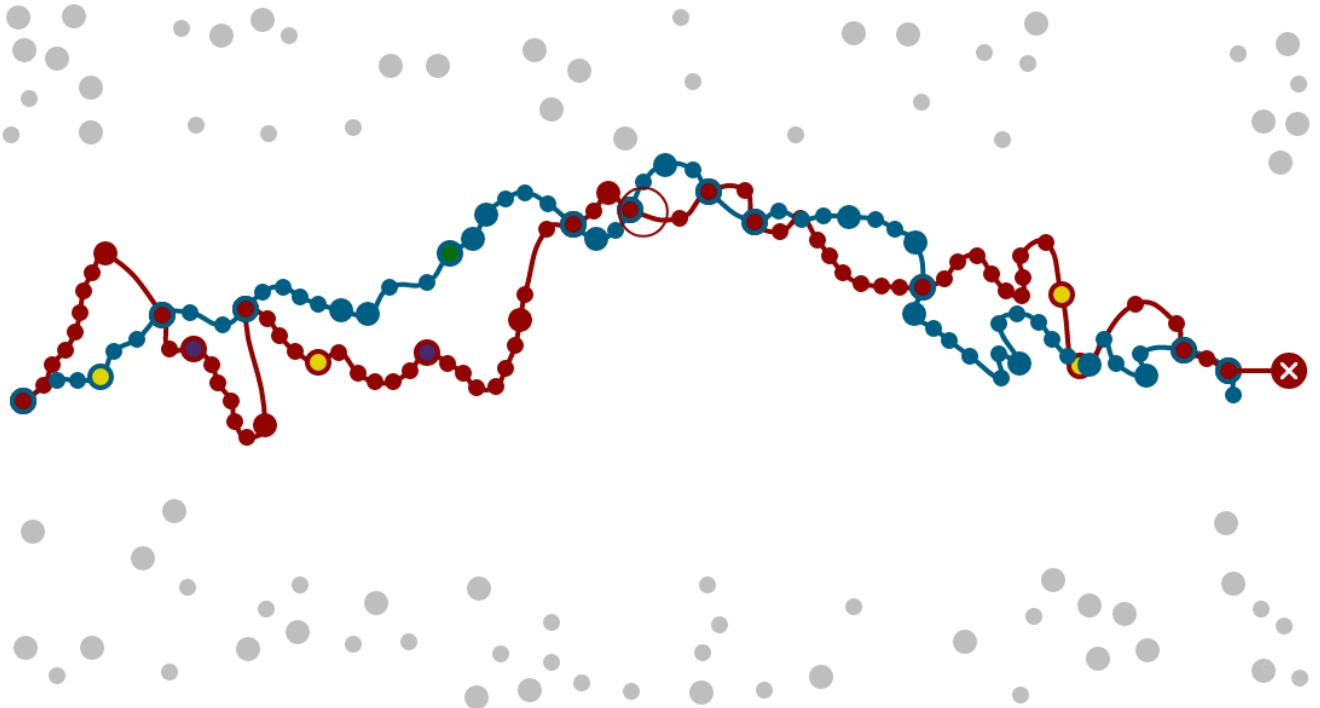


Illustration 21. *Switching from red to blue storyline.*

intentions just because I nailed them, but instead listening to the advice of others, is something I hope to achieve more often. It would be a good attitude for working with participants, in particular while focusing on decolonization processes.

#### String Storytelling

During the road-trip, a lot of interesting situations and conversations are recorded. Many hours of material were watched and evaluated, resulting in an ultimate selection of still more than 200 meaningful scenes. Exploration is one of the main characteristics of the *Niva to Nenets* project, thus I wanted to design a storytelling structure that would make the viewing of these scenes explorative. The sheer volume of selected recordings was deliberately kept extensive because the improbability of watching them all motivates exploration. As a network of related scenes, this extended collection of recordings forms the base of a navigational design that enables viewers to explore the content interactively by following certain storylines or strings throughout a cloud of scenes. During the design of this interface, the sifting through the original material, and the structuring of the possible scenes, I put ANT in practice.

As it is ANT's fundamental aim to objectively explore how networks are built or assembled in order to analyse it empirically (Carroll & Whelan 2012). While analysing

the recordings, attention was not only given to what the people say but also to the expression on their faces and to the agency acted out by every aspect of the recording. Meanings are not the concern of ANT, but among my empirical findings from selecting and mapping scenes I encountered shifts in the meaning of certain scenes in relation to other scenes. For example, after a certain topic was discussed in one scene, another scene would motivate me to think deeper on this same topic, while combinations with other scenes would distract these thoughts.<sup>27</sup> From my earliest sketches on, as I am used to do for other projects too, I represented each scene as a coloured dot. Mapping the scenes by their connections and connotations, a variety of possible trails within the collection of scenes arose. Like beads on a string, I assembled related scenes as coloured dots into five storylines: a blue string tells about the Niva, a yellow string discusses issues related to gift-giving and decolonization processes, a green string tells about the Nenets, a purple string shows the changing landscapes through musical scenes, and a red string focuses on my personal adventure. An orange string is preserved for additional recordings from participatory practices during exhibitions of the project. The juxtaposition of different elements, based on similarity, create new connections that are 'made' into new networks. The strings are thus different graphs that constitute the storytelling.



In an attempt to piece together some empirical findings from my experiences with this case study of interactive storytelling, I would like to highlight that my approach sometimes goes against ANT. Contrary to actor networks, the clusters of actors that create meaning within the storylines of the *Niva to Nenets* project, have fixed positions. In ANT, networks are potentially transient and are constantly made and remade (Latour 2005). But in my movie, I preferred to give viewers enough guidance to keep their explorations meaningful.

One could say that unlike the freely shifting networks within ANT, the storytelling within *Niva to Nenets* partly follows my personal sociology of translation. Similar to

montage, I decided which scenes were part of the storytelling. To guide the viewers a bit more, I indicated a scale too: dots representing the scenes that I find more meaningful are a bit bigger. While the overall collection of selected scenes is represented in the shape of a medley, a cloud with slightly moving coloured dots, the scenes are automatically forming strings as soon as a single dot is selected.<sup>28</sup> As soon as one chooses one dot instead of another, strings or sequences insurmountably leave out others. Within these strings, scenes that are part of two storylines are represented in two colours, and entail the possibility to switch between these two storylines.

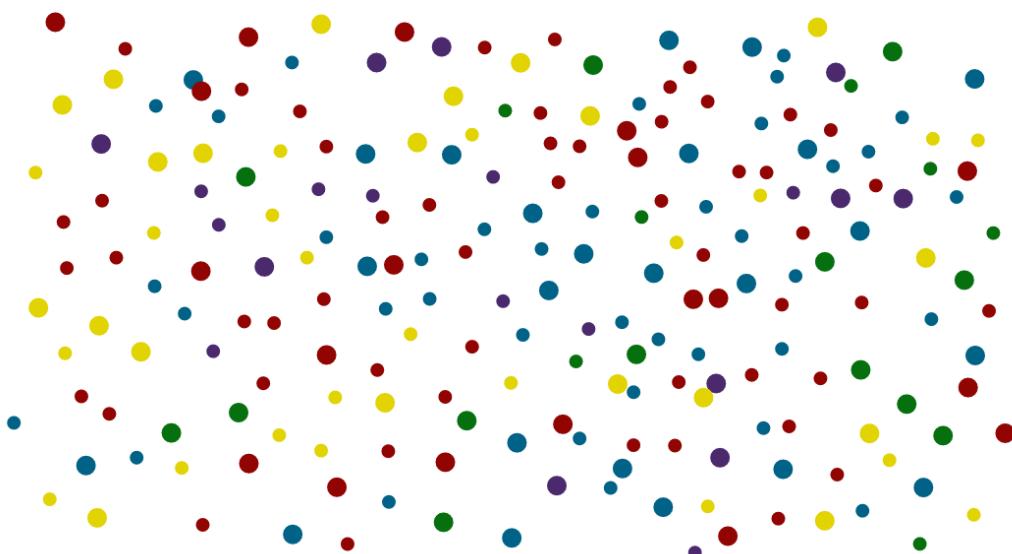


Illustration 22. All scenes of all storylines represented as coloured dots in a cloud.

In interactive storytelling, I believe, one always has to find the right balance between the capacity to explore as freely as possible on the one hand, and the need of enough guidance for an experience of storytelling on the other. The difficulty lies within the fact that one does not design for just one audience: some people prefer more influence of their actions than others. Thus, one should not guide too stringent, but not too loose either. We can jokingly call this my string theory. My string theory keeps the middle between giving direction and offering freedom to explore for oneself. In order to follow your own trails throughout the extended collection of scenes, it is possible to choose a storyline, the scenes within this storyline you want to watch, and in which order. In case the scene was recorded with multiple cameras, you can switch between viewpoints

during playback. The navigation design enables you to activate an informational layer on top of the screening, containing a map of the location of recording, GPS coordinates, the date, time and a length, and a short description of the scene. All this ‘freedom of action’ is consciously crafted to counterbalance the constraints of the necessary guidance to ensure a narrative experience. In an attempt to safeguard enough ‘freedom of opinion’, I have tried to describe rather than to explain. This is true to the constructivist approach of ANT, which builds understanding from combinations and interactions of elements. Instead of proclaiming something to be the truth, or forcing my way of seeing things, I hope this interface allows viewers to define their own translation throughout the moderated networks.<sup>29</sup>



Illustration 23. Scene within the green storyline (Nenets), Yugorsky peninsula.



### Empowering potentials of media use

As a media artist, I have searched for new ways of bringing people together through the shared use of (new) media long before I started this PhD. I often use media in my art to stimulate engagement and debate, in which the communicative aspects of media are usually paramount.<sup>30</sup> My doctoral research motivated me to look deeper into the empowering potentials of media use. Faye Ginsburg (2002) underlines the need to always question the legitimacy of one's presence as an outsider with a camera within a foreign setting, especially when power relations are unequal, even when the insiders have cameras and choose to represent themselves (p. 215). Ginsburg proposes that indigenous media offers a possible means – social, cultural, and political – for reproducing and transforming cultural identity. She says: "indigenous filmmakers, scholars, and policy makers have been advocating indigenous use of visual media as a new opportunity for influence and self-expression. In their view, these technologies offer unique potential for the expansion of community-generated production and for the construction of viewing conditions and audiences shaped by indigenous interests and, ultimately, cultural regeneration. (p. 217)." Srinivasan (2006) underlines the challenge of indigenous communities to "develop new media and information systems that are not just exhibitions or aggregations of content, but also are built around locally and culturally specific representations and paradigms" (p. 505).

The focus on food within the *Food Related* project was partly chosen because of this challenge.

Within the *Niva to Nenets* project, I rather explored how media use can be inclusive to a broad spectrum of opinions and worldviews. David MacDougall (1987) pointed out: "The dominant conflict structure of Western fictional narratives, and the didacticism of much of Western documentary, may be at odds with traditional modes of discourse. The division into fiction and documentary may itself be subversive. Or differences may arise in the convictions of narrative and imagery" (p.58). Both during the road-trip and within the road-movie, I therefore probed for contradicting responses too. And, as described above, the interactive design searched for 'freedom of action' and 'freedom of opinion'.

Media use enabled and affected the participation in all stages of the moviemaking. The making of a road-movie, as a strategy, triggered, shared and transferred knowledge from the participants towards the viewers. Within the road-movie, awareness of the contemporary situation of Arctic indigenous people, including the Nenets, is aimed for as a transfer of knowledge. Where possible, I scheduled meetings between the participating co-drivers. Kulu Petersen, for example, met the Sami couple Anna and Anders Sunna, who participated from Stockholm towards Mariehamn.

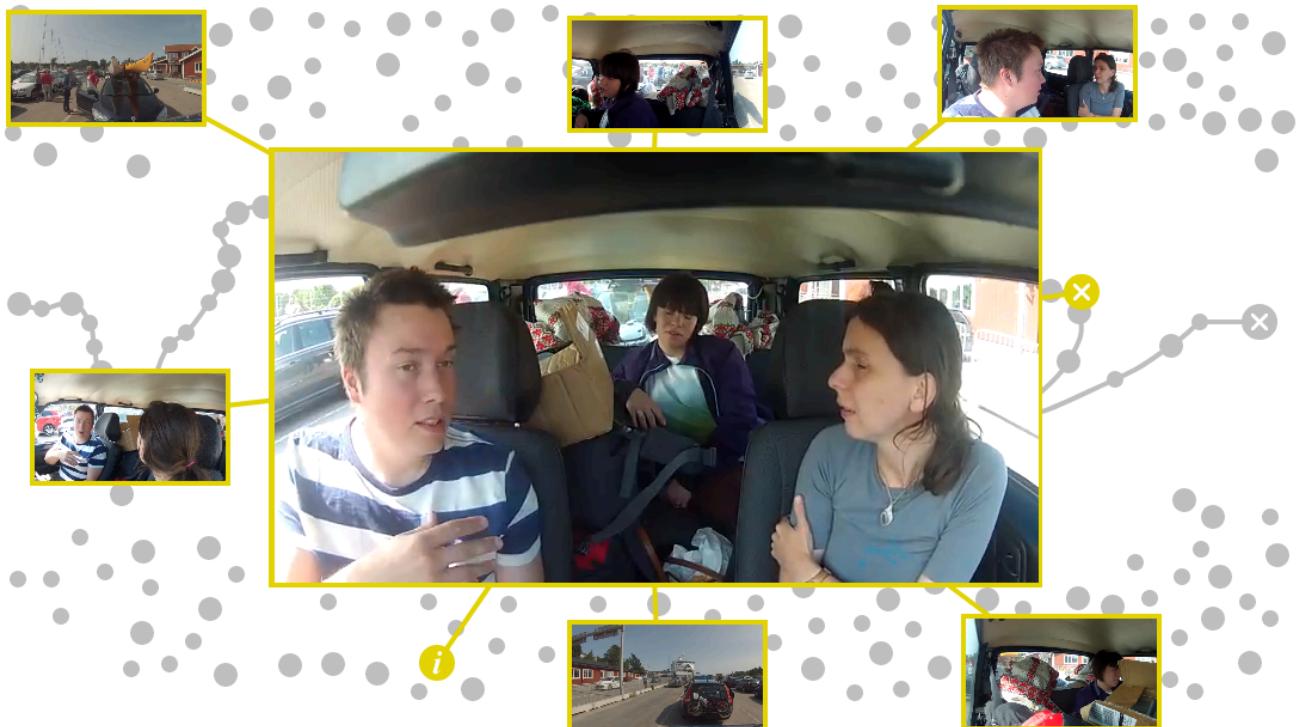


Illustration 24. Scene within the yellow storyline (Issues), Anders Sunna talks about racism.

As a transfer of local knowledge, Anna shared her grief upon the situation for Sami people in Sweden at the Picnic-Quiz in Stockholm:

- “We can’t handle anything, because we have no rights. It’s the government. So we can’t do anything – they do what they want. It doesn’t matter how many people we are, they say ‘no’. (...) The media don’t show us. It’s depressing; it is so depressing. I am so sad of everything. Because everything we do, doesn’t make any result. (...) We are strong. We are gathering ourselves; we are a group. Finally, we are a group. But that doesn’t matter.”

While we were waiting to board the ferry towards the Åland archipelago, Anders told me the reason why he and his wife agreed to participate in the project:

“Maybe we get our voice heard. Because some things are going on in Sweden and it doesn’t get out to the rest of the people. About our problems and stuff like that.”

For the Nenets in Russia too, the presence of a Westerner with recording cameras created the possibility to have their voice heard. I was invited to spend two days with the performance group Ханебцё (snow owl in Nenets language) on the tundra close to Naryan Mar, to record their rehearsals. There was not always an interpreter available, but on some occasions I

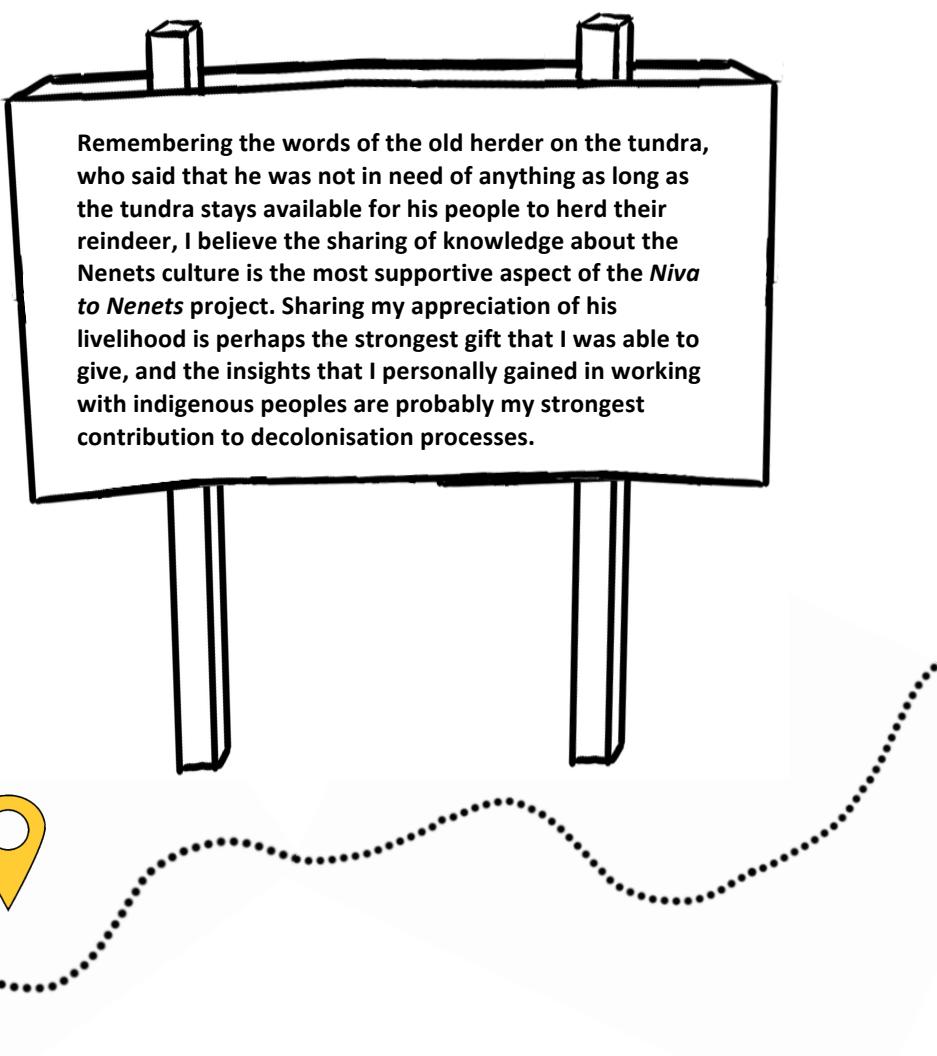
considered this beneficial as it created an even more open canvas for this group of people to explain about their culture, show traditional clothing, sing Nenets songs and perform local stories. With almost no guidance or questioning, people could freely choose what and how they wanted to share their knowledge in front of the cameras.

Ludmilla Boulugina, for example, explained about her group and the use of the Nenets language:

- “Our performance group Ханебцё was founded 22 March 2012. Our group is called Ханебцё, which is a bird of wisdom and long life. This is a bird that never leaves from its original place. With our performances we try to preserve the Nenets language. We teach different types of songs. About our people is one type; about women life is another, or about hard situations. (...) The language is easier to learn through songs, but we also don't know all the words. Today we have our contemporary Nenets language, and some ancient words are forgotten. In these songs there are many historical facts about the old times, including old words that are forgotten. We work a lot on those songs; there are a lot of sentences. (...) We split up the group and the half is learning the language. They learn how to breathe right to be able to pronounce correctly. It is important to transfer the feeling of the song. We already have some people who are masters in breathing the Nenets way. We had them on stage at the end of our performing. They sing very well and the audience sings along”<sup>32</sup>

In a conversation that was not recorded, Ludmilla told through an interpreter that they appreciated the possibility to share their knowledge of Nenets culture. At the Reindeer Herding Day, and during other festivities year-round in the Naryan Mar region, they educate local people about Nenets culture through their performances. Now, through the medium of film, they were pleased to have the possibility to transfer this knowledge to people outside Russia as well. “The more people know about our culture, the better,” she said. Alexander Belugin, director of the Nenets organisation I collaborated with, confirmed that a broader

understanding of the Nenets culture contributes to the availability of the tundra for the reindeer and the herders. Media attention can thus support the continuation of their livelihood and culture. The green storyline within the road-movie therefore focuses entirely on the Nenets. For example, recordings of Ludmilla’s performance group, of the herding livelihood on the tundra, of the Reindeer Herding Day’s festivities, and of an interview with the Nenets NGO Yasavey are grouped together in this storyline. Altogether it forms an introduction of the Nenets culture to people who don’t know this culture yet.



Remembering the words of the old herder on the tundra, who said that he was not in need of anything as long as the tundra stays available for his people to herd their reindeer, I believe the sharing of knowledge about the Nenets culture is the most supportive aspect of the *Niva to Nenets* project. Sharing my appreciation of his livelihood is perhaps the strongest gift that I was able to give, and the insights that I personally gained in working with indigenous peoples are probably my strongest contribution to decolonisation processes.

### Thoughts and comments about the agency of the Lada Niva:



### Thoughts and comments about charity and gift-giving:



### Thoughts and comments about the Niva to Nenets road-movie:

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*Thoughts and comments about my string theory:*

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### **MAP 3**

NIVA TO NENETS

RELATIONAL AGENCY OF THE NIVA  
ANT IN PRACTICE  
BUMPY PATHS OF GIFT-GIVING  
INTERACTIVE TRAILS

11

19

23

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