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# Journeys into Seeing: Amateur Film-making and Tourist Encounters in Soviet Russia, c. 1932

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## Abstract

This article examines in detail amateur film imagery of Soviet-era Russia held in the North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University. It discusses footage made and shown during the early 1930s by an early regional cine enthusiast, and places the material within the context of contemporary developments of amateur film aesthetics, of meta-narratives of international relations, and most significantly of local inflections in the Manchester area of cultural exchange between the United Kingdom and the USSR. The article explores issues of East-West relations, identities and visual memory-making within broader considerations of amateur film practice, travel narration and tourism history.

This article considers images of Soviet Russia filmed predominantly by an amateur British film-maker who travelled from the Manchester region in 1932.<sup>1</sup> Unique though this material from Britain's largest regional film archive, the North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University, undoubtedly is, visual equivalents may exist in some of the numerous Russian film archives that are now available online (Russian State Documentary Film & Photo Archive at Krasnogorsk [no date]), thanks to a variety of private and international funding initiatives during the past decade or so (Kirchner 1995). Contemporary images of Soviet Russia shot by outsiders also readily exist from Pathé (British Paté Limited [no date]) and other newsreel sources online. Nonetheless, this material provides fascinating personal, unofficial and more whimsical perspectives on familiar aspects and visual tropes of Russia under Stalin.

This 1932 film forms part of a longer study of footage made by different film-makers in the North West during visits with family, friends and work colleagues to Soviet Russia in the middle decades of the last century. The larger project explores how these filmic records of connections—both formal and informal—between Manchester and the former Soviet Union offer a regional rather than metropolitan glimpse of international relationships. The archive footage is a reminder of

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<sup>1</sup>This article is part of a longer study of amateur filmmaking and Cold War tourism (work in progress). Many thanks are owed to staff at the North West Film Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University, and are also due to reviewers and editorial staff for their constructive comments. Inspiration for this work I owe to Katya and Vikka Nicholson.

the complex attitudes towards Russia during these decades. Like the filmmaker considered here, all the cine enthusiasts invested personal time and money on traveling in the USSR when politics, reputation and infrastructure made it an unlikely seemingly tourist destination. None of the amateur filmmakers, evidenced by travel footage surviving in Manchester, had Communist sympathies nor were they profoundly unusual, in class terms, for expressing some interest in seeking to understand more about the Soviet system. Their privileged backgrounds enabled them to indulge extensively in relatively expensive hobbies, travel and cine photography. These films thus do not derive from Left-wing interests, even though parallel strong filmmaking traditions among trade union groups in the North West certainly existed and Manchester, itself, was host to a number of venues and initiatives that were significant in the intellectual reappraisal of Socialism in the early postwar years (Hogenkamp 1986; Garner 1999: 21–22). Rather, the films collectively acknowledge more liberal and less partisan mid century interests that tie in with prevailing aspects of mid century internationalism. Specifically in this discussion, the detectable ambivalences found within the 1932 material may be pointers to later regional links and middle class patterns of involvement in travel and activities that were broadly concerned with cultural and educational exchange, civic association and local societies.

Links between tourism, cultural consumption and contrasting levels of material well-being recur through the travel footage considered here. While some recent commentators have focused on the rising numbers of Russians able to afford holidays in destinations beyond Russia and the former Communist-bloc, in the words of Mervyn Matthews ([no date]), as “a return to a tradition of world travel in pre-soviet times”, others are uncovering a detailed picture of varied internal tourism practices within Russia during tsarist and Communist eras (Gorsuch and Koenker 2006). Analysis of the material from Manchester contributes to this broadening of interests in Russian historiography into cultural contexts although the footage derives from outsider participation within state-sanctioned tourism rather than Soviet tourists *per se*. Arguably, this imagery helps to reposition East-West travel relations within a wider understanding of cultural relations (Watanabe 2006) and twentieth century tourism history (Shaw 1991). The 1932 footage is also a reminder that, despite policies of strictly controlled departures and closed frontiers after the Revolution, as well as internal travel restrictions for its own citizens, the government actively promoted organized visits from the West for potential ideological and financial gain even if the tourist infrastructure did not match provision in the West (Shaw 1991: 123.)

### **The Rise of Amateur Film-making and Post-revolutionary Travel**

In Britain, amateur interest in having a cine camera may be traced to the mid 1920s (Norris Nicholson 2002, 2004, 2009b). It was mainly a middle class and upper middle class hobby that did not become more widely available until the 1950s and 1960s. There is a parallel interest in amateur film making that may be traced

through trade union cine clubs (Hogenkampf 1986: 28–72) but that is not considered here. Personal ownership of a cine camera during the first twenty-five years or so of amateur cinema was generally limited to more affluent people including professionals and, particularly in the North West of England, members of the new industrial and entrepreneurial middle classes. Although the early press enthusiastically addressed both men and women, amateur filmmaking gradually became a predominantly male activity—although important exceptions exist—and, in particular, after the Second World War (Norris Nicholson 2010).

The earliest new hobbyists—or cinematographers as they called themselves—filmed enthusiastically predominantly on 9.5mm, 16mm and later 8mm film and in black and white. The use of colour did not become widespread until the 1950s although some wealthy and determined practitioners managed to obtain colour film-stock in the later 1930s and, occasionally, in the late 1940s. Film stock was rationed during wartime and imported cine equipment became difficult to obtain. Wherever amateurs took their cameras, they found ready subject matter. While some enthusiasts took their cameras overseas to record their experiences specifically as missionaries, doctors, government and relief workers, others used their cameras at home and abroad to capture, relive and share aspects of family life and local events. Some experimented with making their own local newsreels, recording local events in their home area; some explored the possibilities of fiction and still others attempted documentary-style reportage.

Cine films of holidays and travel were a very popular aspect of amateur cinema and readily link with wider leisure trends and patterns of cultural consumption during the middle decades of the twentieth century (Norris Nicholson 2009b). Foreign travel was mainly by train or boat, or occasionally by car, although occasionally cine enthusiasts documented flying clubs excursions and private flights in the later 1930s. Commercial pleasure flights to Western and Southern Europe started to operate in the late forties using wartime airfields and decommissioned aircraft and were precursors to the rise of mass air travel during the next two decades. Two and three week long cruises holidays in the eastern or western Mediterranean, along Norway's fiord coastline or around the Baltic gained considerable popularity somewhat earlier as European-based shipping companies sought to convert their fleets from regular intercontinental passenger routes to recreational services in response to merchant fleet losses, wartime reparations and changing migration flows (Norris Nicholson 2003, 2009a). Camera-wielding passengers routinely documented sailing from port to port, onshore excursions and shipboard activities. They added inter-titles or captions, and subsequently combined numerous short reels of black and white footage into film shows for family, friends and wider audiences that they would accompany with a scripted or improvised spoken commentary.

Organised opportunities to visit Russia from Britain developed gradually during the 1920s, fuelled by a combination of tourist curiosity and ideological fervour (Shaw 1991: 137). Richard Gott (2001) writes of how his father's Russian phrase book, published in Moscow in 1931, had described how modern Western traveling to the Soviet Union had first begun on a large scale in 1930: "Tourists had access

to what is doubtless the most interesting country on earth, where at the present moment the greatest upheaval in the history of the world is taking place”, enthused Gott senior. His son reasons that this generation of visitors went to see for themselves the huge Soviet experiment of modernization based on urbanization, rapid industrialization and restructuring agriculture (Gott 2001; see also Ward 1993, Fitzpatrick 1999). His father, like many other architects, was attracted by the ambitious projects in iron, steel and concrete to provide modernist offices, apartment blocks, workers’ clubs, workshops and factories. An uncle, high up in the Indian Civil Service, also visited shortly later to study the centralized system of Soviet planning. Professionals and middle-class intellectuals, along with groups from trade unions and labour organizations who went “to catch a glimpse of the new and different society” (Gott 2001; see also Stummer 2007, Morgan 2006: 122–124, 137).

Peter Le Neve Foster, who co-founded the UK’s first amateur cine society at Cambridge University (Cambridge University Kinema Club) in 1923 (Anon. 1949: 849), and Manchester Film Society in 1927—one of the earliest civic amateur film societies outside London—went on his own fact-finding mission to Moscow in 1933. His week-long stay included visiting film studios in Moscow and having dinner with the director Victor Pudokin (Le Neve Foster 1934), whose exhortation, “Amateurs organize yourselves” had provided a rallying call at the first National Convention of Amateur Cinematograph Societies of Great Britain and Ireland in 1929 (Amateur Cinematograph Association 1929). Not all of these visitors were political pilgrims—Communists and other ‘fellow travellers’—buoyed up by the Webbs’ evocation of Stalinist Russia as the embryo of a new world order (Gray 2002; Morgan 2006: 107, 214–217). The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) was founded in 1925<sup>2</sup> mainly to stimulate outsiders’ intellectual interest and after 1929, the official state agency, *Intourist*, also facilitated Westerners’ visits to Russia (Shaw 1991: 137; Morgan 2006: 165). Shaw (1991: 23) suggests that in the pre-war period, the USSR was visited by c. 100,000 tourists, many of them Communists, trade union or workers’ groups whose visits were organized for political purposes. The launch of *Progressive Tours*, by Frank Allaum and Victor Gollancz, as a combined offshoot from the former’s leadership of visits to Russia whilst working for the Workers’ Educational Association and the latter’s successful setting up of Left Book Club made easier ideologically-motivated travel to Soviet Russia during the 1930s (Working Class Movement Library [no date]; see also Laity 2001). Post-war visits resumed after Stalin’s death, rising rapidly to 486,000 in 1956 and 711,000 in 1960 (Shaw 1991: 150). The Manchester material indicates the importance of officially approved travel itineraries that provided antecedents for more idiosyncratic postwar holiday encounters and represent a distinctive strand of provincial Cold War tourism (Haworth 1979). Against this background, attention now turns to consider a filmmaker who visited Russia with his cine camera in 1932.

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<sup>2</sup>*The Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR* (1924) was recognized, according to Watanabe (2006), as a British counterpart of the *Soviet Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries* (VOKS). See also Morgan (2006: 165–168).

### ***Tour in the USSR***

*Tour in the USSR* was made in black and white on silent 16mm film by H. W. Taylor, a doctor from Bolton in Lancashire who traveled by boat to Leningrad from London with a number of other people also from the Manchester region. His hand-written notes comprise lengthy entries about the journey, detail presentations given to local societies and organizations, following his return, and include a few inserted reports and photographs from the local and national press. The guided tour, organised by *InTourist*, featured visits to theatres, prisons, courts, clinics and hospitals, construction sites and factories as well as more routine sight-seeing opportunities. Taylor's notes provide a detailed commentary to his visual reportage and capture both the tenor of the guide's version of State ideology as well as his own observations and frank responses to difficult travelling conditions. Poor quality in some places may be due to filming covertly and most institutions are only filmed from outside, although contemporary Western travelers, including Le Neve Foster, often comment on the official expectation to visit "creches, maternity homes and their Park(s) of Rest and Culture" (Le Neve Foster 1934).

Taylor's blurred and often unsophisticated footage provides compelling visual evidence of prevailing Soviet conditions in 1932. Nothing suggests that Taylor was in any way trying to emulate Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and any similarities in subject matter are outweighed by totally different treatment. It is possible nonetheless that Taylor might have seen the Soviet film and known of the film-maker's own early medical training. However, Taylor noticed more than some of his Western contemporaries who have been criticized by later historians for their selective tourist gaze (Gott 2001; Gray 2002; see also Morgan 2006: 217–218). His observations broadly correspond with historians' descriptions of the frantic pace of industrialization during Stalin's first five year plan and the gigantic scale of construction projects whether factories, housing, industry, canal building or engineering. Taylor's scenes evoke the speed of Stalin's urbanization programme, during which cities and towns expanded on average by about 50,000 inhabitants a week between 1928/29 and 1932 (Ward 1993: 47; see also Fitzpatrick 1999). He pans across partially built residential districts and entire new settlements taking shape amidst the chaos and confusion of vast numbers of people on the move. His crowded streets, pavements, building sites, railway stations and quaysides evoke Lewin's description of how collectivization, frantic industrialization, famine and urbanization helped to generate "a quicksand society" (Lewin 1985: 221). This impromptu visual record discloses the interplay of different influences past and present that were shaping daily realities for thousands of people in the early 1930s. Shots along streets where people live amidst tumble down and ruined buildings, are reminders too about the desperate shortage of homes brought about by the widespread destruction of housing stock between 1914 and 1920 and lack of subsequent repair work.

The scale of human movement is striking. Taylor's crowded station platforms, boat decks, trains and trams highlight the practical consequences when millions of

dispossessed and disorientated villagers left the countryside in search of an alternative urban life. Although Taylor and his companions journey in relative comfort, often filming from window seats, the waiting numbers of traveling people highlight the colossal pressure upon transport systems. The railways, even more than the crowded boat scenes, reveal an infrastructure quite unable to cope. “It is difficult to get food en route (except hot water)”, Taylor writes, although “dirty wild fruit, goats’ milk and sunflower seeds are available from station stalls” (86). Imagery also attests to the material impoverishment of many people and scarcity of consumer goods under rationing. Notions of consumer choice or attractive shop displays have not yet arrived and Taylor shows small shop frontages with minimal advertising. They typify a highly inefficient supply system that was characterized by queues, hoarding and unequal patterns of access and, in Hessler’s words, a “culture of shortages” (Hessler 2000: 184). Official policy still perceives material goods as signs of bourgeois decadence and a deviance to the aesthetic values of the social revolution. Taylor notes that a travelling companion is “chastised” by the guide for trying to buy something (87). He records street scenes that within a couple of years, at least in larger settlements, began to transform under the rethinking of consumerism as state policy moved from rationing to acceptance of consumption as a public good and the satisfaction of private material interests through personal purchasing power as a reward for good citizenship.

Taylor’s travelling companions occasionally stray into shots that record the group’s transport arrangements and they sometimes pose with personnel on board ship, outside a hospital or at a construction site. Material and stylistic differences between Western and Soviet clothing abound, particularly in street scenes. While in Osakina’s view, position in the official Soviet hierarchy rather than material impoverishment, accounts for much of the visible clothing difference (cited in Hessler 2002: 3; see also Osakina 2001). Taylor’s own perspectives, as a Western tourist, may also influence his considerable ethnographic fascination with outward expressions of class and status. The “picture-making impulse” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003) of many amateur film makers was often prompted by the desire to collect visual tropes of material difference and helps to situate travel-related film footage within a long tradition of producing travel narratives in written and visual form (Norris Nicholson 2006). Moreover, the middle and upper class backgrounds of many early amateur cine enthusiasts meant that they often crossed social and physical distance in search of subjects to film whether at home or abroad.

Everyday life and social issues recur; tombstones being reused for paving, people collecting milk, someone carrying an empty coffin along the street, and the constant mix of horse drawn and motorized transport. Members of the Manchester group are filmed with patients in the grounds of sanatoria in the coastal Black Sea area around Sochi and one group of young children may be filmed at an orphanage. Taylor’s professional interests may motivate some close observations although he films groups rather than posed individuals in close-up. Where people are still in front of the camera it is because they seem to be queuing, waiting, sitting or asleep. Quick sketches, maps and descriptive notes indicate his attention to visual detail even when taking notes, as shown by the “dilapidated” conditions of a

children's health resort (31), the parties of children at art galleries who were "very badly dressed but rare talkers" (32), the "squalid" conditions at a small hospital (92), and the marriage ceremony in "an ordinary house and ordinary room similar to our solicitor's office" (35). One semi abstract sequence of passing feet may have been accidentally filmed but then retained as evidence of Russian footwear or it may have been the only way that Taylor felt able to film in particular settings. Generally, overt manipulation features less than in the travel records of many of his contemporaries who might feign interest or position a companion so as to film local detail. Taylor's presence with a cine camera also seems to attract much little local attention unlike the interest expressed by children and adults that is captured on later holiday films.

Tourism had evolved in response to specific constraints and opportunities during both the pre-revolutionary and Soviet era and perceptions of both purpose and significance differed from tourism in the West (Koenker 2003; Ely 2003). Tourism's educational aims, in particular, determine the itinerary and the detail on offer to Taylor's party. Equally, a tour guide's attitudes could influence the amateur filmmaker's propensity to film and also affect people's responses to the filmmaker. Worsening economic conditions had shattered traditional notions of Russian peasantry as picturesque subjects long before the revolution but their contradictory representation as suffering serf and dignified earthy folk heroes became incompatible with official orthodoxy after 1917 (Ely 2003: 677–678). While state ethnographic collections underwent radical re-labelling and re-interpretation (Hirsch 2003: 683), tour guides had to adopt a modernizing discourse too and, as Taylor notes in his diary, "the tourist guides seemed to be well-versed in their task (32). The visitors heard repeatedly that the outlook of Russia's unorganized and illiterate peasantry must be transformed. Inefficiency in food and industrial production was unacceptable, but while visiting collective farms, Taylor observed inadequate water supplies, poor roads and drainage, and that the "tractors supplied by Ford were too light and not suitable" for the terrain (68–71). Despite the contradictions, the Western visitors were repeatedly exhorted "to go home and speak about Russia as she was (27). Yet, Taylor's films are eloquent testimony to material conditions in 1932 and that a better future for all under Socialism was still a remote reality.

Taylor's material highlights the observer's dilemma of being on the spot, of seeing one thing and hearing another, not often being able to talk directly with local people and being reliant largely upon an official guide for interpretation. Criticism of low productivity was widespread, as illustrated by the guide who points out the cartoon on a factory wall of the woman sleeping by a machine: "If all workers were like her, the superplan would soon be ended. She is always asleep except when flies keep her awake" (88–89). The mismatch between rhetoric and reality is widespread too: two young English-speaking young women at a tractor factory tell Taylor that there is "nothing to do and the other women do nothing but gossip" (71). Diary entries thus expand upon his silent film footage, offering more information than is possible in a brief inter-title. They demonstrate the research value of combining archiving filmic and textual interpretation. "Wireless is everywhere.



In squares, parks, factories, railway stations—used largely for propaganda”, Taylor records from the guide (11). Scribbled entries record fragments of political speeches quoted to the tourist group, statistical indicators of progress during the first five year plan, lectures for students, workers’ suggestions and complaints and news bulletins. As if to reinforce the State’s technical omnipotence, Taylor shows loudspeakers attached to telegraph poles and projecting from buildings, with and without anyone standing near. Jottings hint at how Taylor finds some state goals more acceptable than others: after meeting the assistant director at one wireless station, he approvingly notes: “Her aim is a wireless set for every family (91).

Taylor’s material illustrates the insider-outsider dilemma that requires balancing local knowledge with objectivity (Koenker 2003: 662–663). Unlike the informed, free-wandering, flâneur of Western urban and cinematic historiography, Taylor’s role as spectator is doubly circumscribed by tour leader. His own uncertainties and awareness of filming in ignorance is shown by an entry about “a batch of prisoners at Samara. They were a terrible depraved lot, 200–300 [sic]. I was told they were mostly wealthy Kulaks who would not do as they were told which I did not believe. I think they were prisoners who were sympathetic to the old cause” (23). Like many Western travellers, Taylor and his companions had prior expectations based upon images and opinion about the USSR then circulating in Britain. The visit included many unfamiliar encounters too: women who take part in military drills and work as road builders; guards in court who share a cigarette with their prisoner; girls playing football; and large wooden figures of state enemies displayed for public ridicule in one of Moscow’s parks. Notwithstanding the places off-limits to Taylor’s camera, he still has more scope than in later years, as quoted in an undated *Memorandum for a Foreign Tourist*, published in booklet form by *Intourist* (cited in Kaiser 1976: 28–29).

Tourism along the Volga changed profoundly during the years before Taylor’s visit (Ely 2003: 666–682). His own filmic response does not readily fit with evolving perceptions of the river, although whether it is due to his own personal interests or those of the tour guide is not evident. Romantic and pictorial aesthetics had produced many dismissive nineteenth century responses to the Volga’s lack of rugged terrain and monumental architecture but subsequent re-appraisal of its vast reaches and slow flow through seemingly endless forests and flat steppes helped to establish the Volga as the epitome of Russian nationhood. This new landscape aesthetic fostered a distinctive Russian perception of nature and countryside and ensured that the Volga featured within organised tourism during the 1920s (Koenker 2003: 658–660). Practical rather than aesthetic reasons, however, seem to underlie Taylor’s long riverboat journey between Nizhii-Novgorod and Rostov on Don. The river’s almost total absence both from camerawork and all but one of his later presentations (109) is striking, especially as steamships and cruise ships were praised in the early specialist cine press as ideal vantage points for filming on holiday (Norris Nicholson 2009a, 2010). Instead, Taylor focuses upon contemporary human activities so we only glimpse an occasional rundown Orthodox church or monastery but see a sprawling construction site, as at Khavlink, in successive sweeping shots.

Human interest predominates too in scenes of unloading at Stalingrad and in sequences that record passengers waiting to board, or as they sleep or sit on a lower deck, amidst wrapped cloth-wrapped bundles, an occasional gigantic water melon, fresh fish or small milk-churns. Lone travelers, families and groups of men engrossed in a game or talking seem unaware or indifferent to Taylor's camerawork. The short sequence of young boys, dressed in sailor suits and running towards the camera good-humouredly is one instance of Taylor's attention being briefly turned to more affluent people during his journey. It is also a rare instance of subjects acknowledging the camera. Elsewhere, smartly dressed people crossing urban tramlines or walking along the pavements of newly planted street and parks as at Samara or Saratov or in Kiev, generally seem as indifferent to the presence of Taylor and his camera as the women road builders, passers-by and urban workers dodging along crowded pavements.

Taylor's *Tour in the USSR* sets a distinctive component of British middle class leisure activity and amateur filmmaking against "some of the particularities of Russian culture and [ . . . ] the Soviet socialist experience" (Koenker 2003: 659). Holiday and travel-related films made by Western amateur cine enthusiasts disclose individuals' attempts to give meaning and significance to their recorded experiences. Film permits them to relive and revisit aspects of their journey and also to share their travel encounters with others afterwards. Taylor, sometimes accompanied by one of his travelling companions, Mr R. S. Kearsley, gave a number of talks and film shows following their return, and also contributed their still photographs to national newspapers (Anon. 1932; Anon. 1933; Anon. 1934). Their own freedom to express their views back home contrasts with their dependence upon their group tour leader and translators during their time in the Soviet Union. Taylor's notes for his presentations combine observation and opinion with information imparted by the tour leader about how to interpret his Russian experiences.

Participation in educational travel, like watching public screening of films on travel and other topics had their respective origins in Victorian rational recreation and instructive lantern slide shows. During the interwar years, renewed opportunities for the British to holiday and travel abroad coincided with the new availability of lightweight cine equipment. Inevitably, the ever widening pleasure peripheries, together with the touristic quest for novelty encouraged visits to the Soviet Union. Although travel arranged under the aegis of the British Left and trade unions typified most of the organized group travel to the USSR, study tours for professional and other reasons also occurred. Taylor's tour included visits to an abortion clinic, a re-training centre for prostitutes, children's daycare facilities, hospitals, sanatoria, prisons and courts among more usual elements of soviet travel to factories, farms, theatres, museums, galleries and other cultural institutions. On many occasions, institutional directors addressed the groups at length and sometimes, Taylor seems to have handed his diary over for someone else to take extensive notes, possibly, so that he might film.

Imagery and travel notes suggest the tour's specific orientation, although his subsequent talks, given to a variety of societies across the North West region,

including Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs, one Young Friends Group (Quakers) and Bolton Women Citizens' Association between 1932 and 1934, indicate general interest audiences rather than a targeted occupational group (97–122). Apart from some footage of his own patients in Bolton, Taylor's films of family life, scouting activities and holidays do not suggest that he combined cinematography with professional interests on any other occasion (Taylor 2003). Soviet medicine and psychiatry already aroused considerable interest in the west and specialist tours were organized by the Rockefeller Foundation in New York during the 1920s (Solomon 2003). The influential and prolific critical writer and political advisor on Russian and Soviet affairs, Bernard Pares, gave fulsome praise to social service provision as "one of the very best sides of the Soviet regime" (Pares 1940: 204). Unless more contextual details emerge for Dr Taylor, or his named colleagues about whom so far nothing further has been found, *Tour in the USSR* stands largely alone. While the visual details may offer nothing that is new to historians of Russia under Stalin, the circulation of such amateur footage contributes to a fuller understanding of mediated imagery about the USSR outside leftist circles during the 1930s.

## Conclusion

Since 1991, increasing numbers of Russians have been able to travel beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union and the People's Republics of Eastern Europe, and to participate as tourists within patterns of leisure and cultural consumption long denied to all but a tiny minority of Soviet citizens (Hudman, Essa and Jackson 2002: 299–342; see also Matthews [no date]). Equally, perestroika has led to both state and private sector promotion of Russia as a tourist destination. Growing academic interest in Russian tourism history contextualizes these recent developments and helps to position travel traditions within and beyond Russia amidst broader patterns of mobility, intellectual enquiry, leisure consumption and material well-being that straddle pre-revolutionary and present eras (Fitzpatrick 1999; Gorsuch and Koenker 2006; see also Osakina 2001). While understandably, much attention has focused on the internal characteristics of what tourism meant for Soviet citizens, travel footage from the North West Film Archives provides an opportunity to re-encounter Soviet Russia through Western eyes.

Amateur film footage is a reminder too of the apparent paradoxes that may be found in any state apparatus. *Tour in the USSR*, like the later examples of films that record travels undertaken by people from the North West of England, reveal that state provision for bourgeois Western visitors existed at the height of restricted movement for Soviet citizens. The huge demographic displacement, as documented by Taylor, occurred even as Stalin's new internal passport system further reduced freedom of movement (Shearer 2004). Equally, fears about defection to the West persisted long after an exchange of films took place to mark cultural, civic and cultural aspects of the Manchester-Leningrad friendship initiative during the mid fifties and the launch of Sputnik, an official agency to promote travel

and educational opportunities for younger people, in 1958 (Shaw 1991: 138). Permitting Western tourists to enter Russia offered both financial and ideological advantages, even as rigid visa and frontier controls prohibited foreign travel for all but a tiny minority. Legislative rigidities on movement were substantially only changed from their 1925 model with new laws in May 1991 (Matthews [no date]: 3). Reclaiming Russia tourism histories occurs even as many Russians have yet to discover what being on holiday means.

While splicing camera-touting cine enthusiasts within wider trajectories of leisure consumption and travel, archive footage also evidences how emerging Russian tourism histories do not simply replicate contemporary experiences elsewhere. Many typical elements of the Western tourist's visual diary-making tend to be absent from both pre- and post-war journeys. There is less scope for unrestricted wandering than in many holiday contexts and the films lack some of the concomitant visual *flânerie*. There are fewer scenes too, even in later footage from the 1950s and 1960s, of relaxed poses alongside obliging drivers, even when state guides, groomed in Western tourist conventions, accept being filmed. The visual record of holiday accommodation is also absent and, indeed, Taylor notes the frequent lack of comfort, the long drives, late returns and missed connections, journeys "on bare boards as bedding had been forgotten" ([page number missing]) and sixteen sharing one room! Other visual ingredients usually found in pre and post-war travel footage are absent too: the photographic encounters provided by local markets, street traders and peddlers of tourist curios. The unique characteristics of place, politics and people's circumstances shape the cinematic process and the opportunities for filming.

Amateur cinematography first gained popularity through its commercial promotion as a personal hobby just as governments, political and other organizations were recognizing the persuasive visual and communicative power of cinematic form as a propagandist tool. Within this early cinematic context, the Soviet use of cinema was particularly significant and even offered as an example to Britain's amateur filmmakers as mentioned earlier. The capacity to tell alternative narratives through the medium of personal film occurred even as its illusory unifying power gained political favour. The incidental testimonies and visual cartographies constructed by camera-touting Western tourists are obvious examples. Arguably, that enthusiastic adoption of cinematic technology for both public and more individual personal expression—among those that could afford it—somewhat resembles current interest in digitization which is transforming the significance of visually encoded data.

As an important part of many film collections, long-neglected amateur footage is now attracting much attention. Widening digital access is attracting multi-disciplinary scholarship, and creative re-use or re-working of cine film in experimental, documentary and fictional genres as well as easy application within numerous educational, cultural and public information contexts. Yet even as desk-top access to on-line catalogues and downloadable film clips and stills from archives and other picture repositories all over the world offers exciting research opportu-

nities, online archive imagery also challenges established analytical approaches. Underpinning this abundance of digitized visual histories may be a huge variety of undisclosed decisions, priorities, processes of selection, and other omissions that, arguably, remain hidden even as digitally encoded images escape the potential obscurity of remaining neglected within an archive.

As visual technologies change, different intellectual and practical dilemmas require that suitable interpretative frameworks need to be put in place. For example, issues arise if amateur imagery becomes available without contextual interpretative material. Visual appropriation carries its own risks. 'Orphan' or found footage (Stone and Streible 2003: 125) that lacks detail of provenance poses its own challenges even though its visual details may remain central to subsequent analysis. Alternatively, how far should visual clarity influence the choice of material that becomes available on line? On the basis of visual quality alone, the Russian scenes considered here might not even qualify for digitization in circumstances where cost determines choice of material to make accessible electronically. Yet, relative rarity in particular collections and the accompanying contextual travel notes profoundly enhance a film's interpretative possibilities and clearly, it would be reductive to overlook those details that sometimes accompany a film's journey into an archive. Of course, any subsequent viewing also creates alternative contexts but severing the connection between image and surviving clues as to how it was shot, shown and understood seem to dilute the richness of historical meaning. Ultimately, such treatment could even help to reduce archive repositories into visual databanks and, given that they contribute to more nuanced understandings of twentieth century experience, both at home and abroad, that surely seems worth avoiding? *Tour in the USSR* offers a timely reminder as negotiating a basis for critical responses to archive film enters an increasingly stimulating but risky phase.

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### **Filmography**

- Tour in the USSR, Part 1* (H. W. Taylor, silent, black & white, 16mm, 1932) NWFA Accession no. RR852/34 (9 mins. 49 sec.).
- Tour in the USSR, Part 2* (H. W. Taylor, silent, black & white, 16mm, 1932) NWFA Accession no. RR852/35 (9 mins. 49 sec.).