

A Visual Vignette

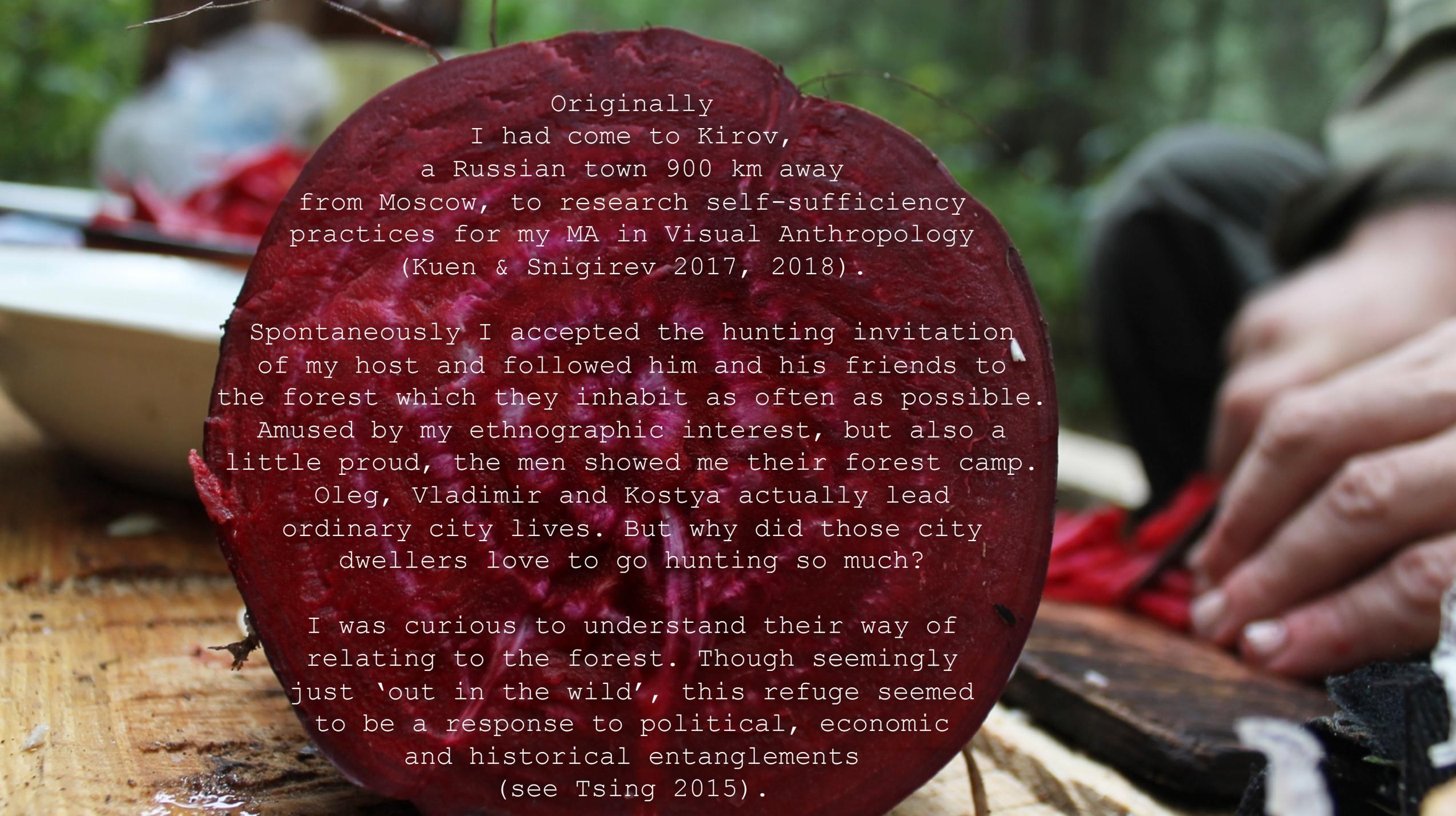
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The  
Freedom  
of the  
Forest

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Originally  
I had come to Kirov,  
a Russian town 900 km away  
from Moscow, to research self-sufficiency  
practices for my MA in Visual Anthropology  
(Kuen & Snigirev 2017, 2018).

Spontaneously I accepted the hunting invitation  
of my host and followed him and his friends to  
the forest which they inhabit as often as possible.  
Amused by my ethnographic interest, but also a  
little proud, the men showed me their forest camp.

Oleg, Vladimir and Kostya actually lead  
ordinary city lives. But why did those city  
dwellers love to go hunting so much?

I was curious to understand their way of  
relating to the forest. Though seemingly  
just 'out in the wild', this refuge seemed  
to be a response to political, economic  
and historical entanglements  
(see Tsing 2015).



Because Oleg grew up in the city  
he did not know much about **kill**ing  
**an animal** in the beginning.

Over time, he absorbed the philosophy  
that one always **eats up** the entire  
animal.

Whenever Oleg hunts a **beaver** now,  
he makes canned meat out of it and also  
caters his friends.

A man with a short haircut, seen from the back and slightly to the side, is standing in a dense forest. He is wearing a dark green vest over a camouflage-patterned shirt. A blue string is tied around his neck. A rifle is visible in the bottom right corner. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and green foliage.

»Today I went stalking  
and attracted a bird.  
I was excited because I  
knew that it would come  
over to me.

We started talking with  
each other.  
I didn't even want to  
kill it.

I just enjoy that I can  
talk to it and that it  
reacts to me.«

Oleg

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding several bright yellow chanterelle mushrooms. The mushrooms have a distinct gilled structure and are piled together in the palm. The background is a soft-focus forest floor with green foliage and brown earth. The lighting is natural, highlighting the vibrant color of the mushrooms.

In fact, the men  
often follow  
animal traces  
rather out of  
curiosity  
than with  
real hunting  
ambition.

They actually  
spend much time  
on picking  
mushrooms.

In conversations  
with the hunters, it  
became clear  
that being out with  
friends, eating  
well, drinking much  
and noticing the  
presence of  
the forest's  
beings is more  
important to them  
than a successful  
hunt.

A photograph of a person in a forest setting. The person is wearing a green jacket and black boots. They are sitting on the ground, and a large tree trunk is visible on the left. The text is overlaid on the image.

»In the forest, money and  
all these documents  
are of no importance.

You have 100 Rubles,  
and I have 10 Rubles  
– we are equals.«

Vladimir

A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground, a large, rectangular structure is built from a dense pile of pine branches and needles, partially obscuring the view. In the middle ground, two men are sitting on a log bench, facing each other. A fire is burning in a metal pot on the ground in front of them. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

In the following years I accompanied Oleg,  
Vladimir and Kostya another three times.

It seems that  
beyond the reach of the  
state the forest fosters a sense of  
distance and security  
for them

- a personal space of freedom  
disentangled from political or economic  
disruptions.

A person wearing a dark cap and a green jacket is seen from behind, looking out over a body of water. The water is blue with ripples, and there are reeds and grasses in the foreground and background. The scene is outdoors, likely near a river or lake.

## References

Kuen, Laura and Yury Snigirev. 2017. *Our Freedom*. 52 min.  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQVq8ppNjgo&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQVq8ppNjgo&feature=youtu.be)

Kuen, Laura and Yury Snigirev 2018. "Our Freedom":  
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Tsing, Anna. 2015. *The Mushroom at the end of the world:  
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