The Landscapes of Eco-Noir

Reimagining Norwegian eco-exceptionalism in Occupied

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Abstract

This article examines the Norwegian climate fiction television series *Okkupert* [*Occupied*] (2015–), focusing on the ways in which it reveals the complicity of Nordic subjects in an ecological dystopia. I argue that in illuminating this complicity, the series reimagines the Norwegian national self-conception rooted in a discourse of Norway’s exceptionalist relation to nature. I show how Norway’s green (self-)image is expressed through what I call “white ecology” – an aesthetics of whiteness encoded in neoromantic mountainous winter landscapes widely associated with the North, but also in the figure of the Norwegian white male polar explorer. I argue in this article that *Occupied* challenges this white-ecological masculine discourse through “dark ecology” (Morton, 2007), embodied by Russia and expressed by the avoidance of spectacular landscape aesthetics as well as by the strategy of “enmeshment”, facilitated by the medium of televisual long-form storytelling and the eco-noir aesthetics.

Keywords: dark ecology, whiteness, Nordic exceptionalism, TV series, climate fiction

Introduction

Environmental concerns and the relationship between human beings and nature are central to Nordic film cultures (see, e.g., Kääpä, 2014). In a number of recent television series, including the Norwegian *Frikjent* [*Acquitted*] (2015–), Icelandic *Hamarinn* [*The Cliff*] (2009), Swedish *Jordskott* (2015–), Swedish-French *Midnattssol* [*Midnight Sun*] (2016), Swedish-Danish *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (2011–), Danish *Bedrag* [*Follow the Money*] (2016–), and Finnish *Karppi* [*Deadwind*] (2018–), environmental anxieties have found their way into Nordic small-screen fiction.

With limited exceptions, such as Finland’s dependence on nuclear power and Norway’s oil-driven economic growth, the Nordic countries are associated with (both from within and from outside) a high level of environmental consciousness. This green (self-) image (Leyda, 2018), or what can be called an eco-exceptionalist (self-)perception, is both expressed and questioned in a number of high-end television series (as distinguished from the notion of “quality TV”, see Engelstad, 2016) produced in and for the region. Often labelled “Nordic Noir”, such series are frequently described as a socially critical and politically conscious genre (Forshaw, 2012). Environmental concerns tend to be

combined with critical evaluations of the national self, reflecting the fact that nature has played a vital role in the construction of Nordic national self-conceptions. Television series addressing environmental issues, labelled here “eco-noir”, can be seen as a variant of a social orientation distinguishing small-screen dramas from the North. This article explores one such eco-noir high-end television drama: *Occupied* (TV2, Norway). Outside of Scandinavia, television series falling beyond any meaningful borders of the Nordic Noir genre are marketed and consumed under this label, the Danish *Borgen* (2010–2013) – and *Occupied* – being good examples of this phenomenon (see, e.g., Arrow Films, n.d.). Although rich in noir-related elements, *Occupied* is not a crime story (as are the core of Nordic Noir shows), but a fusion of the political thriller and cli-fi (climate fiction) genres (see Leyda, 2018).

Occupied is reportedly the most expensive Norwegian television series produced to date and has high commercial appeal due to utilising a number of collective narratives (such as the heroic Norwegian resistance movement during World War II, the global climate crisis, and Russia as an expansive superpower). It is also highly appealing because it is based on an original idea by the internationally famous crime fiction writer Jo Nesbø, was developed by the renowned director Erik Skjoldbjærg, and casts well-known Norwegian actors (see Engelstad, 2016). The series has been a huge success among viewers both in Norway and internationally, and it has been distributed to numerous European countries and made available via Netflix in the US, as well.

A distinctive feature of many Nordic television series is their ambitious treatment of places, and especially landscapes. Aesthetically engaging, these locations function as more than mere settings or as a means of creating an atmosphere or conveying emotional and psychological content. Rather, places are catalysts for conflicts and events, and can be considered actors in their own right. What distinguishes this approach to place is the fact that “the stories can be said to *have grown out of the landscapes* [emphasis added]” (Roberts, 2016: 374). This can justifiably be claimed about *Occupied*. Visual representations of nature in the series are not as rich as in the majority of those mentioned above, but they are relevant and complex. As I aim to show in this article, the treatment of nature and landscapes in *Occupied* not only encodes but also reimagines the Norwegian national narrative and its eco-exceptionalist inclinations.

Occupied imagines Norwegian eco-exceptionalism in a near future affected by an energy crisis, and contrasts this exceptionalism with Norway’s neighbour to the east, Russia. The plot’s anchoring in nature is especially strong due to the environmental issues raised by the series. Environmental catastrophe is the force driving the plot forward. In the first episode, following a hurricane labelled “Maria” in reference to a storm that swept the Norwegian coast in 2005, the Norwegian Green Party, led by Jesper Berg (Henrik Mestad), wins elections. Berg introduces radical pro-environmental policies, which include halting state-controlled fossil fuel production. In response, the Russians, supported by the European Union, kidnap Prime Minister Berg using a state-owned helicopter and demand that Norway resume its supply of oil and gas under Russian supervision. Wishing to avoid armed conflict, Berg agrees, after which Russia takes control of Norwegian oil platforms and begins a “soft” (i.e., bloodless) occupation of Norway.

The landscape in *Occupied* is thus “placed in the frame” (Roberts, 2016: 379), and brought to the foreground in terms of both subject and causation. On a deeper cultural level, the series treats the exploitation of natural resources as Norway’s ecological sin,

triggering a crisis of consciousness. In a broader sense, including economic and global contexts, this involves what Ellen Rees (2016) calls Norway's "petro-guilt" and a related "discourse of innocence" that functions to rebuff this guilt. In addition, landscapes in *Occupied* encode multiple references to Norway's history, primarily World War II, not least by cinematically evoking the Norwegian occupation dramas, a genre dealing with the country's occupation by Nazi Germany, in which nature and landscapes function as conveyors of national and ideological contents (cf. Henlin-Stromme, 2012; Iversen, 2012; Sørenssen, 2012; see also Leyda, 2018). Another layer of historical and geopolitical references encoded in landscapes (and beyond) involves the Cold War, as well as current tensions between Russia and Europe or what it is often deemed in the media as the "New Cold War".

The story's roots in the local environment is strongly suggested on an extra-diegetic level as well: the title sequences include rapidly changing landscape shots of a rough sea and a mountaintop unleashing an avalanche, as well as authentic footage from 2005 showing people imperilled by the hurricane. While these scenes depict the devastating effects of global warming on the environment, each episode in the series corresponds to a particular month, which implies the (non-changeable) order of seasons as the structure underlying the plot. This duality – global warming signalling uncontrolled and threatening climate change on the one hand, and the inevitable and predictable change of seasons on the other – signals an ambiguity in the way nature is represented in *Occupied*.

The series largely avoids the landscape aesthetics that has been labelled neoromantic in relation to some Nordic television series (Hansen & Waade, 2017). Instead, it renders landscapes in a conspicuously unspectacular manner. Rather than stunning sunlit panoramas enhanced by smooth drone shots (an eye-catching strategy used in *Acquitted* and *Midnight Sun*), landscapes in *Occupied* are registered with a relatively static camera in long or medium shots, characterised by chromatic uniformity and non-luminous, at times gloomy, aesthetics. This lack of spectacular landscape shots – with a few telling exceptions discussed below – is an important aspect in the overarching strategy of the series, that is, of critically rethinking the Nordic eco-exceptionalism.

My aim is to show how the Norwegian eco-exceptionalist discourse, which I call "white ecology", is subverted in the series. White ecology combines the green-ecological approach – in *Occupied* embodied by Berg and his party – with the Norwegian national discourse of nature, reaching back to romanticism, and expressed through the aesthetics of whiteness. I will argue that by juxtaposing the Norwegian white ecological approach with the Russian "Other", or stranger, *Occupied* manages to challenge a number of elements in the national eco-exceptionalist self-conception. An important part of my argument is that Russia in *Occupied* can be seen as representing what theorist Timothy Morton defines as "dark ecology" (2007, 2010, 2016), and that the relation between Norway and Russia is imagined as one of "enmeshment" (Morton, 2007) rather than black-and-white opposition.

The aesthetics of whiteness in the Norwegian national discourse include mountainous winter landscapes usually associated with the North, but they can also be understood in racial and gendered terms. As Sabine Henlin-Stromme states, the Norwegian "dominant white discourse equates white nature with white masculinity" (2015: 188). This discourse has long been present in Norwegian cinema, most importantly because film camera was used by Roald Amundsen during his Antarctic expedition in 1911–1912, which initiated the genre of travel film (Sørenssen, 2012). This cinematic discourse became intensi-

fied via Norwegian occupation dramas, a good example being *Kampen om tungtvannet* [*Operation Swallow: The Battle for Heavy Water*] (directed by Titus Vibe-Müller & Jean Dréville, 1948). According to Gunnar Iversen, the Norwegian occupation drama “includes symbolic stories of heroism, combat, resistance, *male subjectivity*, ethnicity and identity, staged in *highly symbolic national landscapes*, often barren mountains [emphasis added]” (2012: 239). The recent miniseries *Kampen om tungtvannet* [*The Heavy Water War/The Saboteurs*] (NRK, 2015), drawing on the 1948 film, shows Norwegian resistance fighters in a similarly heroic way, linking white landscape with white masculinity. The white camouflage suits the saboteurs wear during their resistance action ascribe, on a symbolic level, positive connotations to whiteness and link men, whiteness, and snowy mountains to the heroic Norwegian resistance movement (see also Sørenssen, 2012). Moreover, in Western cultures, but also within a specifically Nordic framework, whiteness connotes innocence. Rees observes that the Norwegian “discourse of innocence” is also closely bound to the Norwegian oil industry. She argues:

The discovery of petroleum resources has contributed to a larger discourse of Norwegian exceptionalism; Norway is not only richer than other European welfare states, but it is also perceived as more ethical and democratic than other wealthy oil-producing nations, such as Qatar or Kuwait [...]. Norway is somehow inherently ethically superior. (Rees, 2016: 45)

Thus, the notion of eco-exceptionalism will here signify Norway’s unique relation to nature in the Norwegian national self-conception and its modern variant involving ecological concerns, as well as how the discourse of innocence and moral superiority provides a cover for both petro-guilt and the anthropocentric construction of the human-nature relationship in the Norwegian national discourse.

In terms of structure, I will first discuss neoromanticism in relation to Nordic Noir in order to frame the use of landscapes in *Occupied*, then examine its white ecological discourse, and finally, show how a dark ecological awareness involving Russia serves to challenge the Norwegian white-ecological, eco-exceptionalist masculine self.

Neoromanticism in *Occupied*:

Non-spectacular landscapes and oil as the spectre of the nonhuman

In Norway, nature is at the centre of “a unified national identity” (Henlin-Stromme, 2012: 49), with strong roots in romanticism, a movement that, as in many other places in Europe, was connected directly to questions of national identity. However, as Gudleiv Bø (1998) argues, compared to other European nations the Norwegian national self-conception relied on nature to an exceptionally high degree. One of the reasons for this was the strong wish to differentiate itself from Denmark after 1814, when Norway became an independent nation (although still in a union with Sweden). According to Bø, early modern theories of identity, such as those espoused by Giambattista Vico, Montesquieu, and J. G. von Herder, helped in this respect. According to these theories, climate and environment influence peoples’ character. Consequently, Bø states:

Norwegians and Danes must be different just like Norwegian nature is different from Danish nature. Thus, because Denmark is horizontal, Norway must be ver-

tical. Therefore, mountains and fjords, rather than lowlands, became the typical Norwegian landscape – not to mention the cities [translated]. (1998: 114)

While the romantic national discourse that came to incarnate Norwegian national identity created a certain ideal of Norwegian nature, modern Norwegian national discourse has been largely shaped in relation to environmental threats. As argued by Henlin-Stromme (2012: 54), in recent decades, protection of the environment has grown to become “a key concern at the center of *Norwegianness* [emphasis original]”.

Although *Occupied* distances itself from the national discourse encapsulated in romantic landscapes, not least because its settings are “relentlessly urban” (Haverty Rugg, 2017: 599), there are nevertheless neoromantic elements in the series worthy of consideration here. Taken together, they prompt me to argue that *Occupied* is neither pro- nor anti-environmentalist, but rather expresses a dark ecological awareness that undermines the official eco-exceptionalist national self-conception. The plot oscillates between Norwegians opposing and cooperating with Russia. While the “opposing Russia” front can be seen as nationally-oriented and thereby pro-environmentalist, the “cooperation with Russia” front accepts anti-environmentalist compromises. These divisions are not always simple; for example, accepting military solutions (at end of season 1) and fighting for national sovereignty in a more traditional border-defence way means leaving environmental concerns aside.

The concept of dark ecology, developed by Morton (2007, 2010, 2016), is critical towards the romanticist idea of nature. Morton’s theory offers a means to elaborate on an ambiguity in relation to nature as presented in *Occupied*, which itself can be tied to the ambiguous conception of nature found in Norwegian romanticism. Several scholars have written about the neoromantic tendencies expressed in Nordic Noir. Kerstin Bergman has identified such a trend in Swedish crime fiction of the new millennium, manifested in the use of idealised rural settings and a related relapse in social and political criticism, as the depicted universe is “never unsettled by the effects of globalization and increased immigration, or by developments in communication technology” (2011: 42). Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade have noted a neoromantic tendency in recent Nordic Noir television series, especially in their Norwegian and Icelandic variants. Hansen and Waade call this use of nature “romanticism *light*” or “sublimity *light*” [emphasis original] (2017: 262), which in its almost exaggerated use of mountainous fjord landscapes manifests romantic influences, recalling paintings by the Norwegian artists Johan Christian Dahl and Peder Balke and the German painter Caspar David Friedrich. The “sublime”, according to these scholars, is “light” in the television series they discuss (such as *Acquitted*), because the primary purpose of such landscape depictions is not to provide viewers with a deep contemplative experience or to incite an emotional mixture of terror and aesthetic delight, but rather to serve as a tourist brochure and a form of effective place-branding.¹

The neoromanticism in *Occupied* is quite different from the understandings mentioned above: it is neither devoid of national, geopolitical, and global awareness – rather the opposite – nor is it reduced to a visual surface of quasi romantic provenance, serving as a form of commercial place-branding. In fact, the majority of landscape shots in *Occupied* are not particularly enticing in terms of how they highlight Norway as a tourist attraction. At the same time, there are important analogies to the romanticist idea of na-

ture. One of these concerns the fact that whereas in romanticism “the acknowledgement of the industrial spoilage of nature, gave rise to a form of longing and desire to return to unspoiled nature” (Henlin-Stromme, 2012: 29), today’s global warming and threats of environmental catastrophes evoke a similar nostalgic desire for unspoiled nature and a harmonious coexistence between nature and people, or what can be called “green discourse”. In *Occupied*, this neoromantic desire is expressed through a discourse staging Norway as the “green Samaritan” whose mission is to save the planet (Henlin-Stromme, 2012), embodied by Berg and represented by his party. This desire is scrutinised as an expression of national narcissism and self-complacency.

Morton criticises green discourse with his concept of dark ecology. Green ecology renders nature in positive terms as harmonious and beautiful, overlooking what is ugly, toxic, unpredictable and destructive in nature. Green ecological discourse is described by Morton (2016) as a “normative concept of Nature, telling you what’s ‘in’ and what is ‘out’” (56), based on the imagination of “a pleasingly harmonious periodic cycling embodied in the cycle of seasons, enabling regular anxiety-free prediction of the future” (58). This construction of “Nature”, originating in Western romanticism, implies that humans are separated from and can rule over the natural world, taking responsibility for its growth and well-being, demanding one “appreciate how benign and wonderful nature is, which is a hallmark of Romantic self-deception” (Bøgh Thomsen, 2018: 124). Dark ecology, on the other hand, rejects this cultural and aesthetic construction, and refers to aspects of nature overlooked within the romanticising green discourse. It encompasses the sick and dangerous forces in nature – often resulting from human activity – which come to the surface and threaten the lives of human beings.

However, it should be mentioned that in the Norwegian folklore tradition – present long before romanticism landed on the shores of Norway – there existed a strong imagination of nature as hostile. As Henlin-Stromme observes, the aim of Norwegian romantic artists and poets was to create national identity by identifying Norwegianness with a specific type of landscape (high mountains, fjords, winter landscapes); yet, from the medieval period up to the mid-nineteenth century, an “antagonistic” view of nature prevailed (Høystad, 1997: 58). In the folkloric imagination, nature was populated by hostile, threatening, and evil creatures, most notably the mountain-dwelling race of trolls. As literary scholar Ole M. Høystad (1997: 59) has observed, this placement of danger “confirms how central the mountains are in the view of nature in the traditional culture. But the antagonistic view of the mountains in the tradition is expressed figuratively by the numerous negative attributes that the trolls are equipped with”. Høystad argues that the negative image of nature present in folkloric ballads and the positive romantic view of nature created by poets and painters were reconciled in the aesthetic concept of the sublime:

[The sublime] gave nature a new dimension in relation to the folkloric and *popular* concept of nature, namely the aesthetic one. Though wild and overwhelming, beyond man’s measures and control, this sublime nature has an effect on human beings that stimulates the intelligible imagination and the sense of beauty [emphasis original]. (Høystad, 1997: 62)²

In other words, by means of the sublime, the dark ecological awareness (to use Morton’s term) expressed in the oral folklore tradition was absorbed into and curbed by

the romantic construction of nature. The threatening mountains “gradually constituted the new image of a beautiful nature” (Høystad, 1997: 62). As Henlin-Stromme (2012: 34) comments, “Høystad [...] shows that Romanticism is not the only Norwegian way to understand and imagine nature. Most importantly, the negative and positive natures existed concurrently”.

In relation to Nordic Noir, the terror inherent in the concept of the sublime can be understood as existential fear generated in the characters (and viewers) by the not-yet-resolved – and frequently unsolvable – crime mystery, expressed through landscapes depicted as beautiful yet hostile towards humans (see also Saunders and Souch, in this issue). In *Occupied*, idealising and antagonistic conceptions of nature coexist rather than being reconciled through some neoromantic, sublime aesthetics.³ The antagonistic elements, here primarily embodied by oil, serve instead to challenge the green construction of nature.

The series emphasises antagonistic forces in nature by rejecting neoromantic aesthetics while at the same time focusing on the effects of the oil industry on Norwegian society. Making amends for petro-guilt by replacing the oil industry with sustainable energy production is shown to be far from uncomplicated (cf. Leyda, 2018). Oil in *Occupied* can be seen as a nonhuman, antagonistic element that sticks to human bodies and insists on an uncanny coexistence. Oil embodies “the spectre of nonhumans [...] showing up all the time, their ghosts leaking into ‘our’ world” (Morton, 2016: 112).

Central to Morton’s concept of dark ecology is what he calls the “strange strangeness” of the human and the nonhuman, and the “queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world” (2007: 185). The idea of the dying world “touches upon both the inherent dark predation of the world as well as our existence within and through that violence” (Bøgh Thomsen, 2018: 125). In *Occupied*, oil and its exploitation represent such violence. According to Morton, as observed by Torsten Bøgh Thomsen (2018), the roles of predator and prey may shift; the exploitation of oil reflects the violence inflicted on the nonhuman by humans, which now comes back to us in the form of global warming and ecosystemic degradation, side effects of the fossil fuel industry.

Figure 1. French DVD box cover for *Occupied* (season 1)

Source: Courtesy of Gudny Hummelvoll, Hummelfilm

As an example, the French co-producer's DVD box cover for season one of *Occupied* (see Figure 1) neatly encapsulates these central aspects of the series, not least because it challenges the specifically Norwegian exceptionalism by visually embedding it in a transnational intertextual play, with a more metaphorical design than the Norwegian DVD box cover and providing a non-Norwegian perspective. On the French cover, oil not only sticks to the depicted human body, but also connotes human blood, thus referring to crimes committed against both human beings (implied by a gun, dripping with oil, held by Berg's bodyguard) and nature (oil leaking into the sea). Importantly, it is not oil as such, but its exploitation by humans that is responsible for ecosystemic degradation, as suggested by the oil platform visible in the background. At the same time, the image challenges the human-nonhuman dualism: the body of Djupvik is partly made of oil. This grasps accurately, in my opinion, the gist of the Norwegian petro-guilt discussed in this article. However, it could also be said to illustrate a human-nonhuman interconnectedness – or “mesh” to use Morton's (2010) term – which humans (may) become aware of when facing environmental catastrophe. This image can in fact be seen as expressing dark ecological thought: it does not edit out the side effects of industrialism (the oil platform in the background) or the mentioned “inherent dark predation of the world” (Bøgh Thomsen, 2018: 125), here embodied by Djupvik depicted as a “predator”. The French DVD cover seems to allude to iconic romantic paintings of solitary men contemplating overwhelmingly vast landscapes, closely associated with C. D. Friedrich (another version of the French cover has a female character who does not face the landscape but instead turns towards the viewer, resulting in a much less direct allusion to Friedrich's painting, if at all). While implicitly evoking the desire for “romantic” nature, the image irrevocably displaces the sublime, as its traditional proportions – a small man shown against a huge landscape – are reversed: The man here overshadows the landscape. At the same time, because the image recalls a work by a German painter (and appears on a French DVD cover), the ecological guilt it invokes is not just Norwegian, but transnational or Western, alluding to oil as an element interconnecting everyone beyond geographical and political borders.

Yet another analogy to romanticism is discernible in *Occupied*. As Høystad emphasises, romantic representations of nature transformed it into a metaphor for the human mind and emotions: “In nature man does not meet nature or supernatural beings, but himself. The metaphors of nature [...] express something human” (1997: 64). This narcissistic attitude, the appropriation of nature by national (or other human) discourses, is indeed present in *Occupied*, where anthropocentric green discourse is exposed as serving to promote the exceptionalism of Norwegian identity. This attitude underlies white ecology.

White ecology in *Occupied*

As used here, white ecology combines the green-ecological idealisation of nature based on a human-nonhuman dualism with the Norwegian national discourse originating in the romantic perception of (a specific type of) nature as something exceptionally Norwegian. In numerous Norwegian films, this discourse is coded in shots displaying majestic, sunlit winter landscapes with high-peaked mountains, fjords, and the sea, potentially providing the viewer with a (quasi-)sublime spectacle. An iconic example in Norwegian cinema is the Cold War action drama and political thriller *Orions belte* [*Orion's Belt*] (1985),

directed by Ola Solum (see Mrozewicz, 2018: 39ff). Norwegian occupation drama provides plentiful examples of a similar treatment of nature.

Figure 2. A view of the thorium power plant in *Occupied*

Source: Courtesy of Gudny Hummelvoll, Hummelfilm

Such white-ecological discourse is neatly expressed in an airborne landscape shot in episode one of *Occupied* (see Figure 2). Jesper Berg is flying in his helicopter to launch the newly-erected thorium power reactor, meant to replace the Norwegian fossil fuel industry with large-scale sustainable energy production. In a spectacular, almost static (and thereby almost painting-like), ten-second-long high-angle panoramic shot, viewers face a landscape with snow-clad mountaintops surrounding a green forested valley. Down in the valley, the power plant leans against the slope. This scenic shot expresses an idealising green discourse, detaching the human subject from nature, which is objectified as a landscape. Indeed, the point of view here hovers somewhere above the earth, distant from what is being seen. The natural beauty of the landscape – or what is imagined as natural beauty from an anthropocentric and romanticising perspective, and which in this image overlaps with a specifically “Norwegian” type of nature – is to be rescued and preserved by the new government via its thorium power plant, which illustrates this green approach. As a “melting-pot” of romantic aesthetics and tourist brochure imagery (Hansen & Waade, 2017: 263), this shot can be said to express sublimity *light*.

Because the romantic construction of “Norwegian nature” was based on aesthetics, they provide a crucial layer through which to challenge this discourse. This is how the near-absence of spectacular landscape shots in *Occupied* can be explained. In fact, even in this white-ecological (neoromantic) landscape shot, certain breaches are noticeable on the aesthetic level: the lighting and colour palette do not fully correspond with idealised images expected from an official self-representation or a tourist brochure. The sky is clouded, the colour green appears greyish rather than juicy, and the palette is moderate, restricted to shades of green, grey, and white. This rather sombre atmosphere is strengthened by melancholic music and the prime minister’s black helicopter entering the frame, “causing” a subtle yet disquieting shaking of the camera.

Although the oil industry is an implicit point of reference, the antagonistic view of nature is not directly present in this image. Rather, the shot encodes an anthropocentric appropriation of nature by white-ecological discourse, which suppresses antagonistic elements in nature. This is reinforced by Berg's opening speech, in which he announces the end of the fossil fuel era: "Norway will be the first to flourish anew". This sentence appropriates nature by combining a national exceptionalist discourse ("Norway will be the first") with a nature metaphor ("flourish"). As one of the few landscapes in the series with a close affinity to neoromanticism, this shot appears both before and after the opening ceremony at the thorium power plant, shortly before Berg's kidnapping. Other depictions of nature in this episode, in contrast, are quite non-spectacular, including the greyish snow-clad forest where Berg is found by Djupvik after being released by the Russians. It is significant that the two shots of the neoromantic landscape bracket a scene in which the official position of the Norwegian government (Berg's speech) is being streamed by Norwegian and other European media. In contrast, the much less spectacular (unofficial) vistas in the forest are shown after the release of Berg, whose kidnapping remains a secret and never becomes public information. Rather than connoting innocence and purity, the unspectacular snowy landscapes in *Occupied* function as a white canvas on which the traces of misdeeds (such as blood, connoting both transgression and guilt) are made visible – but which can also be quickly covered by a new layer of white.

The association between nature and Berg (his surname meaning "mountain" in Norwegian) should not be neglected. As mentioned, in Norwegian culture, the dominant national discourse represented by a white frozen landscape can be linked to the image of young men struggling against and eventually mastering extreme natural conditions. As Bjørn Sørenssen (2012: 248) notes, thanks to national romanticism in the arts, but also the tourist industry and organised winter sports:

The unique Norwegian qualities linked to survival in harsh geographical conditions were again clearly connected to the masculine [...] and historical examples were drawn to underline a tradition of rugged male conquest over nature in sport and real life.

This discourse is encapsulated in the figure of the white male polar explorer. As Henlin-Stømme (2015: 187) observes:

In the early twentieth century, the near canonisation of the polar explorers Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen confirmed this dominant cultural and historical construction. The trope of whiteness – as in snow, ice and white men conquering remote regions in harsh conditions – furthermore generated particular assumptions of a masculinist Norwegian Arctic.

Although these national heroes achieved fame in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – that is, well after romanticism was over in Norway – their exploits, "partook in giving Norway its pride as a nation [...]. Like Nansen, Amundsen symbolized the fight against the forces of nature, (*tapperhet* or bravery and *utholdenhet* or endurance) in the name of the nation [emphasis original]" (Henlin-Stømme, 2012: 50). As mentioned earlier, the image of a lone male figure confronting a vast landscape is inherently rooted in romanticism. At the same time, the figure of a solitary man fighting with and

overcoming harsh natural conditions, such as a heavy blizzard, is “a common trope in written crime fiction and fiction in general” (Hansen & Waade, 2017: 255).

According to Hansen and Waade, in the context of Nordic Noir, this trope “indicates a widespread banal, perhaps unconscious, influence from romanticist depictions of nature in an attempt to reach for sublimity in the evocative landscapes of the dramas” (2017: 255). In *Occupied*, this influence seems conscious, although it does not serve to achieve sublimity, but rather to dissect it. Gender, race, and Russia all participate in this process.

Sublimity dissected – white masculinity challenged

The French DVD cover for season one of *Occupied*, mentioned earlier, ironically recalls the romanticist trope of a lonely man facing an infinite landscape. The sublime here is distorted by elements added to the landscape: an oil platform and a black helicopter hovering over the sea. This disruption of sublimity is paired with a deconstruction of victorious masculinity: the man depicted, Djupvik, is seemingly shown as a hostile force, ready to use violence. He is not admiring the landscape; instead, he is looking over his shoulder, as if to check if someone or something threatens him from behind. Just as the landscapes are unspectacular in *Occupied* (with the few exceptions mentioned earlier), the male characters are similarly non-heroic – failing in their aims or achieving victory through violence and deception.

Figure 3. Blood on the snow as Berg is released from captivity in *Occupied*

Source: Courtesy of Gudny Hummelvoll, Hummelfilm

The narrative of *Occupied* opens in April – a month associated with the occupation of Norway (and Denmark) by Nazi Germany in 1940. There is still snow in the woods where Berg has been released from the helicopter. In the ominous anticipative opening shots, juxtaposing Berg’s face with traces of blood on the snow (signalling crime), Berg is shown walking on a snow-covered lane in the forest, without outerwear and clearly in a state of shock (see Figure 3). The link between Norwegian masculinity and the winter landscape seems both evoked and challenged already in this initial scene. Berg’s identification with nature can be seen as an ironic reference to the trope in Norwegian

national discourse of a heroic male figure mastering nature. Indeed, as the plot unfolds, his “green policy” is exposed as thoroughly anthropocentric and driven by his thirst for power. In the forest where Berg is released, the bloody trail in the snow leads to the body of an elderly male eyewitness to the kidnapping, killed by the Russians. Later in the series, an independent journalist investigating the Russians and trying to warn the public about the dangers of climate change is found murdered (with Berg’s complicity) close to the snow-covered Russian-Norwegian border in Finnmark. In an interesting explication by Leyda (2018: 96), the journalist is a “Cassandra” figure – typical of the cli-fi genre – who tries in vain to warn ignorant or corrupt politicians and the public about the dangers of climate change. The white male body lying dead in the snow signals that, rather than victorious, white masculinity is fallen, defeated, and corrupted.

Other references to the connection between landscape and men attempting (unsuccessfully) to master this landscape appear in season two, during an interrogation by the Norwegian Police Security Service of Harald Vold (Stig Amdam Ryste), the leader of the resistance movement Fritt Norge [Free Norway], who is instructed to contact a fellow rebel soldier, Stefan Christensen (Sondre Larsen). He communicates a coded message to his colleague: “Do you remember our walk through the mountains, when the fog came?” Explicitly symbolic, this sentence evokes the image of a blurred and unclear landscape, shrouded in fog, thus suggesting that national security is threatened by antagonistic natural phenomena. Interestingly, in some of the Norwegian occupation dramas, representations of nature as antagonistic – negative and alienating – expressed cultural memories and dilemmas that undermined the hegemonic narrative of the nation’s heroic resistance movement, represented by more normative depictions of nature (see Iversen, 2012). Here, Vold and Christensen represent opposition to the pro-Russian government, now led by Anita Rygh (Janne Heltberg). Their fight can be seen as one to regain control of the Norwegian national “landscape” from which they have been displaced. Significantly, “vold” means both violence and power in Norwegian, but it also denotes ramparts built for military defence. At the same time, it can refer to a lawn or meadow (or more generally, a grassy open area). Given this etymology, and considering that Vold is the leader of Free Norway (season 1) and subsequently the Liberation Party (season 2) known for using violent means (most extremely when they assassinate Prime Minister Rygh), the character of Vold can be seen as representing the violence inflicted on nature, as well as on people, in the name of the nation. Again, this violence is embodied by a male.

We must not forget, however, that the first leader of Free Norway as a unified resistance movement is a woman. Notably, in both seasons, women take power from men, appropriating the discourse attached to white masculinity. In season one, the female chief of the Norwegian Police Security Service, Wenche Arnesen (Ragnhild Gudbrandsen), consolidates the resistance movement against Jesper Berg’s pro-Russian policy, while in season two, Anita Rygh, Berg’s former political advisor and lover, becomes prime minister, thus incapacitating Berg’s attempts to re-establish himself in the post (until the final episode of season 2). Regarding whiteness in racial terms, white masculinity as an oppressive force is highlighted early in the series through a (non-white) Chechen refugee in Norway being perpetuated by the Russians with silent consent from Berg. This white dominance is challenged by some crucial characters. In season two, a female judge of east African origin, Djupvik’s wife Hilde (Selome Emnetu), who supports Rygh’s ef-

forts to cooperate with the Russians, and a Norwegian male nationalist soldier of similar origins fighting in Vold's anti-Russian Liberation Party, exert considerable influence on the course of Norway's domestic and foreign policies. These characters are not merely supporting figures, but instead trigger substantial events, thereby challenging – from different political standpoints – the dominance of the white man.

Finally, Russia is embodied by the Russian ambassador to Norway, Irina Sidorova (Ingeborga Dapkūnaitė), who seems stronger and more “masculine” than Berg. The fact that she is a woman should not be neglected: white masculinity and its long-standing monopoly on narrating and constructing nature in this case is challenged by a woman. The fact that Berg and Sidorova are of different sexes can be seen as an incarnation of the border, both in terms of gender and national boundaries and because they are each other's ecological Other, at least on the official level. However, does being pro-Russian mean being anti-environmentalist? Similarly, is being anti-Russian equal to being patriotic and thus an expression of one's love of nature and the planet? The lines of division seem less simple than some explications of *Occupied* suggest (e.g., Leyda, 2018: 90).

Russia and dark ecology – enmeshing the Norwegian eco-exceptionalist self

Occupied draws on a number of cultural, historical, and geopolitical discourses, as well as on cultural memories and stereotypes. One of the central narratives evoked, reaching back in the Norwegian context to the early twentieth century (see Aas & Vestgården, 2014), is that of neighbouring Russia as a threatening Other (see Mrozewicz, 2018). This fear taps into the current geopolitical situation, especially the tensions between Russia and its neighbours. In the present context, it should be mentioned that, as Leyda (2018) points out, recent Russian invasions of territories in Georgia and Ukraine⁴ are not unrelated to the petroleum industry, as Russia has benefited from these invasions in this respect.

Representing ecological threats within the Nordic-Russian transnational frame may seem to reinforce the Nordic exceptionalist discourse, according to which a country or region is seen by its own society as more advanced and thus entitled to teach others (Browning, 2007). The conviction of Norway's political, cultural, and moral superiority is expressed in *Occupied* through the superiority of Norway's environmental consciousness and policies over those of Russia, or of “North” over “East”. Also, as argued by Linda Haverty Rugg in her article on Scandinavian eco-crime fiction, the fact that *Occupied* depicts Norway as not being allowed by Russia and international forces to implement alternative nuclear energy sources – and thus potentially rescue the planet – can be interpreted as an assuagement of “the guilty conscience of a ‘green’ nation addicted to fossil fuel” (2017: 608). In the following, I will try to nuance, as well as partly counter, this argument by showing that – although the petro-guilt is indeed transnationalised in *Occupied* – Russia functions to expose rather than disperse Norway's deep complicity in the ecological dystopia.

It is worth recalling that pollution, ecological disasters, and the resulting weak health of the population are integral constituents of both informed and stereotypical narratives about Russia, stimulated by a common knowledge of the heavy industrial projects launched over the decades in the Soviet Union (revived in 2019 by the widely debated

American-British miniseries *Chernobyl* created for HBO). In accordance with these narratives, Russia in *Occupied* is opposed to Nordic white ecology. Using Morton's term, Russia can be seen as representing dark ecology, mainly because Russians take over the Norwegian oil industry and subvert Norway's attempts to fight the effects of global warming. Russia is a place where the sick and dangerous powers of nature – as a result of belief in the progress that industrialisation can bring – come to the surface and threaten the lives of human beings.

However, I argue that Russia represents dark ecology not simply because Russians are responsible for ecosystemic degradation, but first of all because they do not deny this responsibility. Unlike Norwegians, Russians in *Occupied* do not suffer from the “beautiful soul syndrome” (Morton, 2007: 183). Although motivated by cynicism, their behaviour suggests that instead of “shut[ting] off the terrible trauma of the current ecological crisis, we simply stay with it” (Morton, 2007: 185). Interestingly, Morton travelled with a group of artists and scholars inspired by his thoughts on dark ecology to Nikel, a town located in Murmansk Oblast in Russia, just seven kilometres from the Norwegian–Russian border (population 12,756). Founded in the 1930s, the settlement became a central part of the Soviet nickel smelting industry. For Morton, Nikel is an incarnation of dark ecology and the human-nonhuman interconnectedness: in this town the nickel ore industry has dominated the town and lives of the inhabitants, not the least by producing various side effects, most notably slag, a byproduct of the nickel-ore smelting. As one of the participants explained:

The pressure from the artificial and natural environment gave this material [slag] many shapes and forms: it became a building material, an agent of damage, it is also present as a component of the natural ecosystem. It has penetrated into the surfaces of the buildings and accumulated in cracks and dark corners. (Gorbachewskaja, 2015: para. 8)

In a similar manner, the oil in *Occupied* functions as an “agent of damage”, but also “a component of the natural ecosystem”, while Russians are the ones who bring this human-nonhuman coexistence to the surface.

By juxtaposing Russia and Norway on screen, *Occupied* implements the awareness of what Morton defines as the “mesh” (2010: 28), a concept central to his theory of dark ecology. The mesh stands for our – sometimes highly uncomfortable – awareness of coexistence with strangers. The nexus of Berg-Sidorova and Norway-Russia can be seen as epitomising the strange strangeness, the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans, and of all living and nonliving things (Morton, 2007, 2010), without the strangers becoming naïvely and idealistically familiar towards each other. The awareness of this coexistence – which may bring anxiety and depression – reveals what life means in the shadow of ecological catastrophe.

Morton speaks about the poetics of enmeshment, arguing that dark ecology has an aesthetic form. In Morton's words, this form manifests itself, among other things, “in noir stories that establish that the narrator or protagonist is radically involved in his or her world, and thus responsible for it” (2007: 187). The noir elements in *Occupied* are embodied not just by unspectacular landscapes disrupting the Norwegian white ecology, but also by the protagonist Jesper Berg. His confrontation with Russia reveals that he is like the noir detective:

[He] finds that he is caught in a story that has crept up on him or her from behind his or her back, like history or like nature. Ecological politics has a *noir* form. We start by thinking that we can “save” something called “the world” “over there,” but end up realizing that we ourselves are implicated. (Morton, 2007: 187)

Thus, enmeshment means entanglement and interdependence: “an open system without centre or edge” (Morton, 2010: 39). I would argue that television aesthetics, and more specifically the aesthetics of television series which I define here as eco-noir, lend themselves aptly for imagining this kind of enmeshment. Images integrated into larger popular commercial narratives, such as television series, may create strong affective and ethical responses in the viewer. In other words, they “might have a productive didactic potential” (Bruhn, 2018: 66). Scholars have noted the increasing potential of contemporary serialised drama for “‘remaking of worlds’ and ‘reworking the poetics and politics of vision’ on an international scale” (Elwood and Hawkins, 2017, quoted in Saunders, 2019: 692) as well as for influencing “quotidian geopolitical understanding(s) and geographical imagination(s), arguably more so than any time since the advent of the medium” (Saunders, 2019: 693). By imagining enmeshment, eco-noir television series may similarly influence quotidian understandings of ecology and global warming, not least by producing in the viewer the awareness that we all are implicated in the ecological destruction.⁵

The poetics of enmeshment is embodied by the opening sequence of *Occupied*, which by means of quick editing interweaves documentary footage from the rescue action during Hurricane Maria in Norway with fictional images, such as Henrik Mestad, the actor playing Berg, carrying a child in a flooded street (thus reminding us at the same time that any typical rescue action following natural catastrophes is mediated in television). Because of the fast tempo of changing images enhanced by equally fast and disturbing music, the viewer is dragged into the narrative of the opening sequence without being able (and not given time) to distinguish clearly between documentary and fiction. Because of the “real world” dimension, and due to the aesthetics typical of extreme weather representations on television, the opening sequence has a powerful affective impact on the viewer – whether Norwegian (who might recognise images from the 2005 rescue action) or transnational. These images are at the same time familiar and threatening. With Morton’s words, they envisage “the threatening intimacy [of interconnectedness, the mesh,] that we too often push to the backs of our minds” (2010: 41).

A similar effect of enmeshment is achieved by the fact that the plot is located in the near future. Morton states: “Ecology isn’t only about vast space but also about vast time” (2010: 42). The showrunner of *Occupied*, Erik Skjoldbjærg, has underlined the importance of the temporal dimension and its orientation towards both the past (World War II and the pre-oil era in Norwegian history) and the future (see Saunders, in this issue). However, perhaps the only “futuristic” element in the series is the thorium power plant, whereas otherwise the mise-en-scène as well as the characters and the lives they live remind us unmistakably of our present. Unlike Skjoldbjærg’s film *Pionér* [*Pioneer*] (2010) about the dark beginnings of the Norwegian oil industry and the hazards experienced by divers working in the Nordic sea in the early 1980s, using retro-aesthetics in terms of colour palette, depiction of material culture, and makeup, viewers of *Occupied* are unable to create a comfortable temporal distance towards the onscreen world. Rather, one becomes entangled in it, while at the

same time our “near future” is imagined as lurking in our here and now. In this context, it is important that scholars emphasise the unique capability of long-form storytelling to create fictional worlds “informed by, extended toward, and imbricated with the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) of audiences” (Tischleder, 2017: 121) – in other words, their ability to create interconnectedness between our world and the onscreen world.

The mesh is also imagined through the relation between Norway and Russia, as well as through the mentioned transnationalisation (interconnectivity) of petro-guilt. According to Morton, the poetics of enmeshment avoid clear distinctions between right and wrong, as well as dichotomies typical of the green ecological approach, such as human-as-criminal and nature-as-victim (see Haverty Rugg, 2017). Morton suggests that instead of “trying endlessly to get rid of the subject-object dualism, dark ecology dances with the subject-object duality” (2007: 185). Play with dualisms, rather than an effort to eliminate them, is indeed present in *Occupied*. This is most effectively achieved by disrupting the white-dark (Norway-Russia) duality. Although Russia at first represents a threat, not least towards the Norwegian environmentalist policy aimed at rescuing the planet, the threat associated with the Russians also critically challenges Norway’s self-perception as the earth’s saviour. Norwegians’ environmental concerns are depicted as having global aspirations that they believe Europe and the whole world should embrace. The series exposes this discourse as riddled with self-complacency. Norway’s universalising approach embodies a type of exceptionalism which, to quote Ebbe Volquardsen (2014: 40), is “resting on a notion of ethical and moral superiority”, justifying “well-intentioned Nordic intervention in the crisis areas”.

These aspirations are not merely disabled by the Russians; Russia also ridicules Western, and specifically Nordic, discourses and patterns of behaviour (see Mrozewicz, 2018). Imitating Nordic exceptionalism, Russia forces Norway into a position in which usually only remote, crisis-ridden, poverty-stricken countries are depicted – it is Norway which, according to the more influential and resourceful Russians, needs intervention. Russians think that the Norwegians should be rescued from their own environmentalist government; therefore, Norway is offered “generous help”, as Sidorova puts it. Mimicking Nordic exceptionalist discourses and “helping” Norway in the interest of gaining global political and economic influence, Russia mocks the righteousness to which these Nordic discourses normally make claims. One such discourse related to this exceptionalism is that of innocence and Norway’s moral superiority. This discourse entails blindness towards the privileged economic position of the Norwegian subject, combined with making oneself “innocent, altruistically helping non-Westerners to modernize without any ulterior economic motives” (Rees, 2016: 52).

Most importantly, by the ways in which it juxtaposes Norway with Russia, *Occupied* indicates that the ecological threat and therefore the threat to Norwegianness – that is, fossil fuel – has been generated by the Norwegians themselves and not by some external forces. In other words, Norway is not as white as its own dominant narrative has it seem. Oil leaves a stain on their ecological conscience (Henlin-Stromme, 2012), oozing out as the dark ecology they seek to suppress by implementing green policies and employing majestic white landscapes in official self-depictions. The implication that the ecological sin is located at the very centre of power is reinforced by the cunning choice of the producers to locate the fictitious Norwegian parliament in the real-world headquarters building of Statoil (see Figure 4), an internationally recognised Norwegian energy com-

Figure 4. Equinor [former Statoil] headquarters as the Norwegian Parliament in Occupied

Source: Courtesy of Gudny Hummelvoll, Hummelfilm

pany. As Rees (2016) emphasises, Statoil (which in 2018 changed its name to Equinor) stands for corporate global expansion and evokes postcolonial contexts. In *Occupied*, such contexts are implied through the reversed relation between a non-Western country (Russia) and Norway, which functions as a weaker state being occupied or colonised by Russian “saviours”.

Another Norwegian sin the entanglement with the Russian “strange stranger” (using Morton’s term, see Morton, 2010) exposes is the appropriation of nature by national discourses for the purpose of branding one’s own (“exceptional”) identity internationally and globally, rather than truly prioritising nature. This sin is also embodied by Berg; in season two, he sails back to Norway on a Polish ship after the European Court of Human Rights grants him the right to return to his home country. As Henlin-Stromme observes, “from the Viking era to the present day [Norway] has defined itself through its exceptional seafarers. Today, the sea remains an important aspect of the Norwegian identity” (2012: 133). As with the mountainous winter landscapes, here also the solitary male sailor encodes the exceptionalist relation between Norway and nature, as well as the anthropocentric appropriation of nature. Moreover, the fact that Berg joins forces with Poland, a country nowadays perceived as highly nationalistic and anti-environmentalist, further undermines Norway’s green self-image. Last but not least, Berg’s righteous appeals to Europe – encapsulating the discourse of innocence (about solidarity, democracy, and national independence, symbolised by the ship) – are undermined by the highly controversial fact that, with the help of a young information technology specialist, Berg hacks the Russian missile system and orders a Finnish fighter jet shot down in order to inflame anti-Russian sentiment, and in this way, secure his own victory. This act represents crossing the line towards “the heart of darkness”; Berg uses methods earlier

ascribed to Russians, and in so doing, has blood on his hands. In view of these events, Norway can no longer claim to be ethically and morally superior to other nations, not to mention being innocent or exceptional.

Thus, the image of dark Russia as a source of evil ricochets back on Norway: Russia only takes control of a threat that has already emerged from the centre of the Norwegian political and ecological self, signalled in the initial juxtaposition of Berg's face with traces of blood. The confrontation, or rather enmeshment, with the ecological Other perforates the exceptionalist Norwegian national discourse. By functioning as a catalyst for the dark ecology coming to the surface, Russia reveals what is suppressed in the romanticising discourse, while at the same time exposing its normativity. This demonstrates that the eco-utopian ideal of living in harmony with nature (as advocated by Berg's Green Party), while at the same time mastering nature, is an illusion.

At the end of season two, Berg finds himself "on top of the mountain" once again, with the final shots showing him behind the prime minister's desk. The link between masculinity and nature seems to have been restored. However, Berg's return to power through lies, betrayal, and murder exposes the national white-ecological discourse as much less meritorious than the official narrative would have it seem.

Conclusion: From an exceptionalist national discourse to global interconnectedness

Occupied adheres to the self-critical approaches to Nordic exceptionalism found in recent Nordic literature and film, as discussed, for example, by Volquardsen (2014). However, compared to film or literature, the medium of television – as already implied in my discussion of the potential of eco-noir television series – "provides a substantively different platform for engaging and interrogating world affairs and negotiating geopolitical realities" (Saunders, 2019: 691).

Indeed, although *Occupied* is deeply embedded in Nordic historical and cultural contexts involving questions of Norwegian national identity, its content is likewise highly transnational. By recycling not only national, but also transnational memories of past and recent events, the series makes our common future in the shadow of ecological catastrophe imaginable, while the geopolitical effects of global warming become tangible through references to recognisable scenarios. Although Norwegian petro-guilt becomes transnationalised – and thus claimed to be dispersed and assuaged (Haverty Rugg, 2017) – it is still dreadful, especially when measured against the Norwegian eco-exceptionalist self-conception. By depicting Norway as morally corrupted as other nations, and not any better than its "savage" and "strange" neighbour Russia (also when it comes to questions of ecology) the Norwegian eco-exceptionalism, based on what I defined here as white ecological discourse, is effectively overthrown.

The avoidance of spectacular snowy landscapes associated with the North plays an important part in this approach. Saunders (in press) states:

Situated at the edge of the Arctic Basin, the countries of Norden are particularly well-placed to observe and report on frontline changes in the pristine ecosystem of the northern polar regions, and in doing so present those of us in other locales with what we might call an "advanced warning system".

When the snow melts, what was invisible comes to the surface – what seemed pure appears dirty. Displacing the myth of the white, homogeneous, and unchangeable North, and replacing virgin winter landscapes with drastically changing eco-noir landscapes (as in the title sequences), *Occupied* avoids detaching the viewer from what is seen through an exoticising and distancing tourist gaze. Instead, oil – our nonhuman stranger – is brought to the foreground, making us acutely aware of its interconnecting power across the globe and how we all are implicated by it.

The fact that the Norwegian creative industries, including public and private broadcasters such as NRK and TV2, are partly funded by Norwegian petroleum-based economy, only confirms this complicity and makes us, the viewers of *Occupied*, realise that leaving the vicious cycle is not easy. Rather, we realise that things are like the self-swallowing snake or ouroboros, to use the image evoked by Morton from Norse mythology, illustrating what he calls the dark-ecological loop. In his words, “The Norse myth is pertinent: when Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, stops sucking its own tail this is the beginning of Ragnarok, the apocalyptic battle” (Morton, 2015: section XII, para. 2). *Occupied* imagines this battle, with “us” as both perpetrators and victims (see Haverty Rugg, 2017), as a disturbingly plausible scenario unfolding in our “near-present”.

Notes

1. Perhaps we could also speak of “nationalism light” if we consider contemporary television series as a form of nation branding beyond the borders of national audiences. Namely, because neoromantic landscapes resemble images from a tourist brochure, they evoke not just a local or national, but also a global gaze (see Hansen & Waade, 2017). Nevertheless, the landscape can still function as a layer for critically rethinking Nordic national discourses, as in the case of *Occupied*.
2. As Hélène Ibata emphasises, Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime, explicated in his *Philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful* (1757), posed a challenge to painters because Burke claimed that painting, constrained by mimetic limitations, was unable to communicate the unimaginable aspect of the sublime experience. According to Ibata (2018), Burke’s antipictorialism was “one of the sources of the shift towards a Romantic sensibility in British art” (6), stimulating “intense experiments with visual form [...] beyond the bounds of mimetic representation” (11).
3. In the context of the above note, one could ask what such sublime aesthetics mean in relation to the medium of Nordic Noir television series. The Icelandic *Trapped* provides examples of such aesthetics in form of highly blurred vision due to darkness and blizzards, effectively displacing “the object represented” (see Ibata, 2018: 15).
4. In 2014, Crimea was annexed by Russia from Ukraine. In 2008, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were both recognised as independent and sovereign states by Russia. The vast majority of the international community considers both events a violation by Russia of international law, and respectively of Ukraine’s and Georgia’s territorial integrity.
5. However, we should not forget that television aesthetics are guided by the need to adapt to broader popular taste. Compared with art house films, the televisual eco-noir aesthetics of enmeshment may seem less sophisticated. An example of cinematic eco-noir aesthetics is Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist* (2009), which is, according to Torsten Bøgh Thomsen, “a primary and genre-defining artwork of dark ecology” (2018: 125).

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