Images of the North
Histories – Identities – Ideas
Edited by Sverrir Jakobsson
Images of the North
Imagology, the study of cross-national perceptions and images as expressed in literary discourse, has for many decades been one of the more challenging and promising branches of Comparative Literature.

In recent years, the shape both of literary studies and of international relations (in the political as well as the cultural sphere) has taken a turn which makes imagology more topical and urgent than before. Increasingly, the attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices which govern literary activity and international relations are perceived in their full importance; their nature as textual (frequently literary) constructs is more clearly apprehended; and the necessity for a textual and historical analysis of their typology, their discursive expression and dissemination, is being recognized by historians and literary scholars.

The series Studia Imagologica, which will accommodate scholarly monographs in English, French or German, provides a forum for this literary-historical specialism.
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Histories – Identities – Ideas

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Sverrir Jakobsson

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is a part of the INOR (Iceland and Images of the North) project, the aim of which is to analyse various representations of Iceland as part of the North, the function and use of such images in the present and their origins in the past. The project is a cooperative, interdisciplinary and international undertaking on the part of researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

The articles here were among a selection of papers given at the conference “Images of the North. Histories-Identities-Ideas” which was held in Reykjavik, Iceland in February 24-26 2006, at the instigation of the Reykjavik Academy in co-operation with the INOR research project (Iceland and Images of the North). Around 60 scholars gave papers at the conference, but to keep the scope of the volume within reasonable parameters what appears here is only a selection of the most relevant papers. They have been edited for publication in co-operation with the editorial board, which was comprised of the following individuals: Sverrir Jakobsson, Ölof G. Sigfusdóttir, Kristinn Schram, Órvarður Þorvaldsdóttir, and Gylfi Gunnlaugsson, and Sumariði R. Ísleifsson, one of two co-ordinators of the INOR-project. We would like to thank our authors for their co-operation, as well as Esther Roth at Rodopi Publishers. Special thanks are due to the president of Iceland, Mr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, for giving us access to his paper at the conference for publication.

The volume has received the generous support of the Reykjavík Academy, a multi-disciplinary community of independent scholars founded in 1997.
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Foreword

Joep Leerssen

Imagology as the study of the discursive and literary construction, articulation and representation of national characters was developed as a specialism within Comparative Literature—which means that ideally, in the pithy definition of Hugo Dyserinck, a multi-national object-matter should be studied from a supranational perspective (1991, especially 125-133; see also Beller & Leerssen, eds., 2001).¹ This comparatist perspective is what lifts the study of the representation and rhetoric of national character beyond the level of mere thematic inventory. Cultural stereotypes are not merely studied as a mode of representation within a given discursive context, but as an operative force in situating perceived collective identities and explaining perceived cultural differences.

One consequence of this juxtaposition of different individual cases, was the emergence of an invariant pattern: in many European literary traditions, in many different periods, it appeared that a cool, cerebral, frugal and morally-inclined North was contrasted with a warm, sensual, opulent and

¹ It was this methodic basis which vouchsafed the specificity of Dyserinck’s ‘Aachen programme’ in Comparative Literature and its standard-bearer role in the development and consolidation of imagology.
amoral (or immoral) South. This narrative or rhetorical North-South contrast couched moral and characterological ideal-types into the discourse of an ancestry-myth and of a culture-anthropological vision ultimately derived from Tacitus; these oppositions were habitually traced back to a master polarity between the Latinate-Classical traditions of the Roman Empire as opposed to the unlatinized Germanic cultural spaces and traditions of non-Roman Europe, north of the Rhine and the Channel (Leerssen 2008).

By the same token, these temperaments-cum-cultural-profiles were given a geographical situation—a situation rather than a location, since what counted as ‘Northern’ and what as ‘Southern’ was context-dependent and could vary from case to case. (Thus Flanders could be configured as having a ‘Northern’, ‘Germanic’ temperament when placed in juxtaposition with France, or else as having a ‘Southern’, ‘Burgundian’ temperament when juxtaposed with Holland.)

This North-South schematization of temperamental oppositions has been one of the more long-standing matrices imposed on the imaginary of Europe’s cultural landscape (Zacharasiewicz 1977, Arndt 2007, Beller 2007, Arndt et al. 2004, Laureys et al. 1993, Swanson & Törnqvist 1998). We find its traces in discourses as diverse as the Nazi preoccupation with ‘Nordic’ purity of the Germanic race; the Weberian link between northern Europe, Protestantism and a mercantile work ethic; and even, in the New World, in the contrasting images of how North America involves the polar opposites of the Canadian and New England North vs. the Plantation and Hispanic Southern States and Mexico.

In the European imagination, the image of Scandinavia and the Nordic countries has been deeply influenced by this master-polarity (Boele 1996, Fjägesund & Synes 2003). Climate is associatively correlated with landscape, with human habitation patterns, with social and political organization, and in turn rationalized by reference to the inhabitants’ purported ‘character’. To see this insight from Comparatist Imagology applied to a comparative research project in Area Studies is a promising development.
References:


Images of the North: 
Address by the President of Iceland

Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson

It is fitting, at the beginning of a new century, to initiate a broad discussion of the Northern Regions: their future, their nature and the threats they face; the culture and the customs of their peoples in a period of upheaval; the riches of the North, its energy resources, its natural endowments and its value for the future of mankind.

Such a discussion would have been unthinkable a few decades ago. Then, the North was hidden from view for most people. It was virtually a forbidden area, locked in the stranglehold of the Cold War and its armaments race. International attention and concerns, interests and influence, were focused on other regions: the Iron Curtain lay across Europe and world affairs were centred mainly on developments on the mainland.

Now all this has changed. The Cold War is over; energies that were channeled into the arms race are now directed towards attempts to dispose safely of atomic weapons; democracy and economic reforms are now blossoming in countries where, not long ago, tension and suspicion made nations into enemies. The United States and Russia are now linked by stronger bonds of co-operation.

These changes have freed the North from its shackles and created
new opportunities both for governments and ordinary people, who have welcomed the changes and set to work with a will to develop new and exciting patterns of co-operation and contact.

For more than ten years now, the North has been a sort of laboratory where new types of institutions and associations have sprung up. The result has been such that there now exist multiple opportunities to exert influence, to make oneself relevant and to play a part. These channels are open to all: governments and the public, associations and groups of enthusiasts, scholars who come forward with new ideas or interesting findings, the inhabitants of different regions and ethnic minorities.

The institutional networks that have been created in the Northern Regions are very democratic, and differ from the co-operational structures in other regions of the world in a number of ways:

- The Arctic Council is blissfully free of red tape and formality, and gives the member country holding its chairmanship at any given time the chance of advancing new proposals and fresh ideas.
- The Northern Forum brings cities and regions together with an accent on the needs of people who are scattered far and wide across the Northern Regions.
- The University of the Arctic is a co-operative forum uniting about 70 academic institutions and providing a promising framework for the cultivation of skills and knowledge in many fields.
- The Northern Research Forum has become known as a meeting ground for scientists, specialists, elected representatives and leaders in business and cultural life, with an emphasis on giving young scientists an opportunity to devote their energies to Northern subjects.

I could name further examples, but these will serve to illustrate the growth and creative flowering that has characterised recent developments in the North. These new institutional networks have welcomed participants and ideas from all quarters.
This powerful democratic dimension is a valuable asset at a time when the North is constantly growing in importance and a discussion of the situation and trends in the Northern Regions is becoming one of the most urgent topics in international affairs. There are two factors, in particular, that already make the North into a key region regarding the future of mankind, and its importance in this context will grow steadily in the years ahead.

Firstly, there is the spectre of climate change. The North is the most important barometer indicating the real nature of what is happening. This is where the warming of the climate is taking place faster than anywhere else: the glaciers are melting and the ocean currents are changing. And these changes will transform the conditions for life all over the world. Almost every day we see and hear media reports about changes in the natural environment in the North and the difficulties faced by its inhabitants. The North has become the leading symbol for the hazards of climate change – a threat which the whole of mankind has to face.

Secondly, there are the energy resources of the North: oil, gas, hydro-power and geothermal energy. It is estimated that a quarter of the world’s unexploited energy reserves are to be found in the Northern Regions. There are critical issues at stake here, not only as regards the future of the Northern peoples but for the entire world. We have only to consider the status and influence of the Middle East in our own times to understand how important the discussion of the utilisation of the energy resources of the Northern Regions could become in the years ahead.

While these two factors – climate change and energy reserves – place the North in the crux of international issues, there are also many other considerations that give it importance. For example, there is the polar sea route that could link Asia with Europe and America in a new way, transforming world trade in the same way as the Suez Canal did when it was opened. There are also aboriginal issues to be considered – the status of the native peoples in Alaska, Canada and Russia, for example – which involve fundamental questions of law and of the relationship between individuals and the state; these precedents could have wide-ranging repercussions in other parts of the world. The same applies to the preservation of the cultures of various ethnic minorities and the protection of the languages and life-styles that are intimately connected with their cultural heritage. How
the peoples of the Northern Regions respond to international pressures undermining their special values and customs will influence inter-ethnic relations for generations.

In a short time, the North has been drawn from the fringes of international affairs into the center focus of global events. It has become a sort of crossroads where major destinies will be decided, and the way in which these issues will be handled is bound to have wide-ranging consequences.

This historic transformation of the North gives us in Iceland new opportunities to make our voices heard and influence the course of events, to make contributions that others regard as crucial, to come forward with ideas and participate in developing new strategies.

What I have sometimes called “the New North” has opened up for us in Iceland, for the first time in our history, ways to have a say on matters of great value for the entire global community, enabling us to play a decisive role concerning the fortunes and welfare of all mankind.

There are only eight nations in the North: Iceland and the other Nordic countries, the USA, Canada and Russia. Northern issues thus give Iceland a host of new opportunities for collaborating with both the USA and Russia, and can also provide the Nordic countries with new areas of focus for their traditional collaboration.

Experience shows that, more and more, what matters in the international arena is being able to offer something that can be of advantage to others: ideas, innovations, knowledge, technology and experience.

In this, Icelanders have shown that we have much to offer, and our contribution to Northern issues has been greatly appreciated.

Two examples illustrate clearly what can be achieved when the guiding lights are professionalism, imagination and integrity and when no ulterior motives are involved.

Iceland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council two years ago led to the production of reports of fundamental importance on climate change and human development. Based on collaboration between experts from various countries, new goals in co-operation between the nations of the Northern Regions were created. The leadership provided by Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson was significant in this respect and demonstrated convincingly the good results that a talented Icelander can achieve in the new theatre of Northern development.
The Northern Research Forum is based on an Icelandic initiative, and the University of Akureyri has from the outset been the administrative centre of the Forum. The large community of participants from other countries consider that the interests of the NRF are best served by having the headquarters in Iceland; the international administrative committee has always been of the opinion that this arrangement will secure results and make it easy for other parties to be involved on an equal footing.

Iceland’s smallness has proved to be a great advantage in matters concerning the Northern Regions.

In the light of what I have mentioned here this morning, it is a cause for celebration that this conference has been organised to examine and define the challenges that lie ahead in the Northern Regions, how or whether the images reflect the reality of the North.

We are just setting out on this exciting journey, and in our quest towards the New North it is vital that as many people as possible should be able to make their own contribution.

The challenges we face are of various kinds, and in many cases our knowledge is inadequate. Scholars and experts with a wide range of backgrounds are therefore especially critical. Our fundamental concern must be the quest for knowledge; innovation must be our guiding light and the order of the day must be that everyone be welcome to take part in this journey.

The future of the North must cultivate carefully the tradition of democracy that, more than anything else, has been responsible for the successes of recent years.

There is much at stake, not only for the North and its peoples, but for the entire world.
Since classical antiquity, but especially since the early 16th century, there has been an inclination to organize the inherently-limited but ever-increasing knowledge of the world, the diversity of its countries, their fauna and flora, and especially their peoples. Among the few models which served to account for these differences in phenomena, the theory of climate emerged as a very plausible model in the 16th century. Man’s inclination to schematize his observations and impressions counteracted the tremendous impact of breaking the boundaries of the limited circle of the oecumene in the late 15th and the early 16th centuries. The shock sustained by these discoveries—which the literate among the Europeans eagerly read in the numerous travel accounts—was somewhat softened by man’s proclivity to generalize and form certain expectations. Schemata, such as the theory of climate, helped the humanists to integrate new information and also assisted them in reshaping information received to fit in with long-held assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes.

Numerous studies by psychologists have shown that even today human beings tend to carry images in their heads which also influence new experiences in the course of visits to other places and countries, which are thus refashioned. Instead of providing what anthropologists such as Arnold Van Gen-
nep or Victor Turner have called ‘liminoid’ experiences —substantially affecting the world view of an individual and allowing some measure of discovery and personal growth— these encounters of travellers with other locations offer merely ‘liminal’ experiences (cf. Stowe 1994). These impressions do not fundamentally affect the mind, its conceptions and notions, and permit the traveller after his return an easy reintegration into the familiar at home.

That such practice was not only the case in less enlightened days but has continued into the twenty-first century has been demonstrated by students of literature and culture involved in a new branch of comparative literary studies that has developed over the last forty years: Imagology, or ‘image studies’ of a new kind. Imagology deals primarily with the literary representation of groups of people and their countries, and with the depiction of national and ethnic characters in printed texts and in other media. ‘Image’ in this context is not used in a pictorial sense, but denotes a perception, a mental shape, and image studies thus deal with various phenomena which have meanwhile become familiar, especially since World War II: prejudices, stereotypes (generalizations which resist correction through autoptic impressions) and clichés (cf. Leerssen 2000).

Imagologists since Hugo Dyserinck’s pioneering studies (1966) have debated the complex and problematical notion of national characters and have received support in their emphasis on the constructivist aspect of such phenomena from historians of culture and cultural anthropologists, such as Benedict Anderson (1983). He has demonstrated that some collective identities have been constructed through relatively recent processes and that some traditions are of fairly recent origin. Imagologists have benefited from the analyses of relations between groups and peoples made by socio-psychologists and profited from their explication of concepts such as ‘ethnocentrism’. Numerous studies of travel literature—a type of text or genre that has received much more attention than earlier and has moved from the periphery much closer to the centre of current academic discourse—have documented this practice but have also shown a complementary factor in relationships between a collective self and those not belonging to this collectivity, “the other”: Thus imagologists must also consider the potential appeal of the foreign, the exotic, all those features in the ‘other’ which differ from the mundane, humdrum everyday experience (cf. Buzard 1993).

Before offering a sketchy survey of developments in the images of the
North in Anglophone literatures until the late 20th century and the structuring of these images through the model of thought termed the “theory of climate”, a brief glance at two documents which mirror the perennial inclination to practice the prevalent discourse of stereotypes seems in order.

The first example comes from the first half of the 18th century. It is the now fairly well known Völkertafel exhibited in one of the museums in Vienna, a canvas with an extensive tabulation of the “ten leading nations” of Europe, which has been carefully studied (see Stanzel 1999). The various nations of Europe are concisely characterized in a High German dialect in 17 rubrics. The entries start out with the manners, then the character of personality, intellect, the temperament, later the vices and diseases characteristic of these nations. Implied in this brief and at times absurd endeavour to pigeonhole the characteristics of these peoples is a concept that goes back to classical antiquity, at least to Theophrastus, a disciple of Aristotle. He had produced a collection of Characters of Vices, which was adopted as a model for the representation of ethical types in the early modern period. ‘Character’, a word etymologically derived from the verb ‘to scratch’, ‘to engrave’, had come to denote a human type, as for instance, a young man, a vain-glorious man, a soldier, a miser, and Theophrast’s characters were eagerly taken up and imitated (see Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. ‘character’). His pattern of brief description and illustration was then also applied to representatives of the nations of Europe, and brief sketches of national characters were produced. Students of imagology have seen it as their task to contextualize and historicize such constructs, for the term ‘character’ had undergone important changes and had come to denote not only types of behaviour but to describe the inner being, allegedly also the core qualities of representatives of groups and nations.
### Brief Description of peoples to be found in Europe and their different characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Spaniard</th>
<th>Frenchman</th>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Englishman</th>
<th>Swede</th>
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<th>Hungarian</th>
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<td>Malicious</td>
</tr>
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<td>Character</td>
<td>Wondrous</td>
<td>Marvelous</td>
<td>Amiable</td>
<td>Jealous</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>Quite good</td>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>Cruel</td>
<td>More cruel</td>
<td>Host cruel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperament</td>
<td>Manly</td>
<td>Childish</td>
<td>Self-willed</td>
<td>Inimitable</td>
<td>Liable</td>
<td>Undistinguish</td>
<td>Mediocre</td>
<td>Blood-thirsty</td>
<td>Very careless</td>
<td>Tender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Affairs</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Jurisprudence</td>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>Liberal arts</td>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Latin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume</td>
<td>Respectable</td>
<td>Variability</td>
<td>Modest</td>
<td>After French</td>
<td>Made of buff</td>
<td>Long coat</td>
<td>Many-coloured</td>
<td>Furs</td>
<td>Like women</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sins</td>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Decadent</td>
<td>Lecherous</td>
<td>Prodigious</td>
<td>Restless</td>
<td>Superstitious</td>
<td>Braggart</td>
<td>Traitor</td>
<td>More truthful</td>
<td>Even more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>Exquisite</td>
<td>The aristocracy</td>
<td>Rebellion</td>
<td>The knack</td>
<td>Self-love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diseases</td>
<td>Constipation</td>
<td>Misery</td>
<td>Sickness</td>
<td>The plague</td>
<td>Gout</td>
<td>Consuming</td>
<td>Dripping</td>
<td>Dianthusia</td>
<td>Epileptic fits</td>
<td>Whipping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their country</td>
<td>Fertile</td>
<td>Well-cultivated</td>
<td>Delightful</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fertile</td>
<td>Mountainous</td>
<td>Weeded</td>
<td>Fertile &amp; rich</td>
<td>Full of ice</td>
<td>Pleasent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War virtues</td>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>Cunning</td>
<td>Cautious</td>
<td>Invisable</td>
<td>Horsel at Sea</td>
<td>Undaunted</td>
<td>Impetuous</td>
<td>Rebellious</td>
<td>Cumbersome</td>
<td>Lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their master/river</td>
<td>A monarch</td>
<td>A king</td>
<td>A patrician</td>
<td>An emperor</td>
<td>New one, now another</td>
<td>Liberal lord</td>
<td>An elected king</td>
<td>An unpopular master</td>
<td>A liberal</td>
<td>A tyrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superfluity in</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Commodities</td>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>Pastures</td>
<td>Iron-ore mines</td>
<td>Furs</td>
<td>All things</td>
<td>Beehives</td>
<td>Soft things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivities</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td>Cheating</td>
<td>Chatting</td>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>Bickering</td>
<td>Going idle</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>Being sickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison with animal</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Lynx</td>
<td>Lion</td>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>Donkey</td>
<td>Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life ends</td>
<td>In bed</td>
<td>In war</td>
<td>In a monastery</td>
<td>In wine</td>
<td>In water</td>
<td>On the ground</td>
<td>In the stable</td>
<td>Near his sabre</td>
<td>In the snow</td>
<td>In fraud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 2: Steirische Völkertafel. Translation of the 18th-century text in a High German dialect by Franz Karl Stanzel.*
That the features of such groups were standardized in numerous texts is connected with the educational practice in the early modern period: in their training in the ancient languages pupils in (Latin) schools were taught to use dictionaries for their compositions and essays. These thesauri contained lists of adjectives (culled from the classical texts) which were regarded as the appropriate epithets whenever one referred to certain nations. The French humanist Ravisius Textor had thusly provided a very widely used teaching tool in his *Gradus ad Parnassum* and this dictionary was imitated in English, with Joshua Poole’s *English Parnassus* providing a corresponding textbook for pupils in 17th century England from which they could copy the proper adjectives. Textbooks of this kind were widely used in schools creating what one might describe as a ‘horizon of expectations’ concerning representatives of certain nations (cf. Stanzel 1974; Zacharasiewicz 1982).

Epithets from the thesauri based on the usage of ancient writers also found their way into guidebooks for the Grand Tour and figured prominently in the texts accompanying or preceding the maps in atlases produced in Western Europe. They were, naturally, also included in the cosmographies, and helped to consolidate the hetero-stereotypes employed in a diversity of texts.

It is not clear which purpose the *Völkertafel* served, whether it was a guidebook for travellers in abbreviated form, or merely intended to entertain in the way ethnic jokes do today. Two characteristic features attributed to European nations illustrate the origin and wide dissemination of stereotypes adhered to in this tabulation. The most prominent feature of the Spaniard, who appears in the first column, is, of course, his pride, a characteristic which shaped the overall image of this nation. Drunkenness is the dominant vice of the Germans, a weakness inevitably associated with the northern nations and attributed particularly to Germany since the rediscovery of Tacitus’ *Germania* and its inclusion in the academic programmes round about 1500.

The other example, one which prevents a modern reader from resting content in the consciousness of the more enlightened present is again linked to a map of Europe, this time literally so. This map accompanies a very popular book produced by the American foreign correspondent John Gunther, who, for the better part of a decade, had resided in Vienna and reported on the events in Central Europe. He produced a book with the title *Inside Europe*, which was an immediate bestseller, in which he brought
his American readers up to date on developments in Europe, on the rise of Hitler or the doings of Stalin. The revised editions of this book published in 1938 and 1940 respectively contain a map, on whose margins there are concise descriptions and representations of various countries and nations in a fashion reminiscent of the cartographic practices of the 16th to 18th centuries. The entry on Austria runs as follows:

AUSTRIA. Before the German coup in 1938, the pleasantest country in Europe, where Schuschnigg ruled in Dollfuss’s seat, where half a dozen private armies became one public army, where the people were absorbed by serious things like Mozart, walks in the Wienerwald, and beer. (Gunther 1940)

This brief generalization does not do justice to the critical situation in a country which had experienced a civil war while the American correspondent was there. Gunther should have known better than to offer such an abbreviated, clichéd picture of Austrians for the consumption of his American readers.

But the task at hand is to deal not with the contemporary readiness fairly common in popular media to employ hetero-stereotypes and to thrive on them but to consider earlier practice and to focus on the gradual inclusion of the landscapes and the people of the North in Anglophone literature.

Fig. 3: Fold-in map in Gunther, Inside Europe, rev. ed. 1940.
For this it seems necessary to reflect on the factors which fostered the process of making the North a ‘materia poetica’, and which shaped its representation.

One such crucial element in the debate was the theory of climate, a model of thought handed down from antiquity and associated with medical authorities such as Hippocrates and Galen, though almost omnipresent in Greek philosophy, geography and historiography. It was rediscovered and eagerly adopted by early 16th-century thinkers, with ancient writers supporting the application of this model to the new data collected by the discoverers and explorers on their voyages. What Anglophone (i.e. at that time British) authors—poets, essayists and also dramatists—had to say about the diversity of peoples in the world, especially in remote parts of the globe, was to a large extent moulded by the notion of the determining power of the physical environment, the air and the soil of the countries they inhabited, but primarily by their location on the globe.

The concept of distinct zones disseminated by geographers and historians appealed to students of comparative law and early practitioners of political science in the 16th century. They embraced the ancient model found in the books of the great ancient physicians, in Aristotle’s Politics and elsewhere, and postulated three zones in the northern hemisphere, the (broad) northern, middle and southern ‘belts’, if you like.

Greek philosophers, for example Aristotle, gave pride of place to and stressed the advantages of the middle zone, the habitat of the ‘Hellenic race’, and French humanists had no difficulty in adopting this model, applying the notion of the most favoured location to their own country. Drawing suitable inferences from this proposition, they claimed superiority, and even pre-eminence for their country and nation. This conviction found expression in a spate of French books in the 16th century and continued to strengthen the appeal of this model of thought.

Such knowledge was also put into verse, most memorably and most quotably in the religious ‘epics’ of the Huguenot poet Du Bartas in the late 16th century—in which an encyclopedic compendium of current knowledge was provided in the context of a long verse paraphrase of the biblical story, which was offered in two parts: La première semaine (1578) and La seconde semaine (1584). A 1641 translation reads:
O! see how full of wonders strange is Nature:
Sith in each Climat, not alone in stature,
St[re]ngth, hair and colour, that men differ doe,
But in their humours and their maners too.
Whether that, Custome into Nature change:
Whether that, Youth to th’Elds example range:
Or divers Laws of divers Kingdoms, vary-us:
Or th’influence of Heav’ny bodies, carry-us.
(Du Bartas, 1641 transl. as Divine Weeks)

This statement and the following detailed juxtaposition of northerners and southerners are related to the popularization of the theory in charts contained in an early 17th-century book by Pierre Charron, De la Sagesses, which drew on earlier expositions of the theory by the French lawyer and philosopher of history Jean Bodin and was soon readily available in several editions of its English translation.¹

Here is a reproduction from the English translation of Charron’s book:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northerne people are</th>
<th>Middle are</th>
<th>Southerne are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High and great, phlegmaticke, sanguine, white, and yellow, sociable, the voyce strong, the skin soft and haire, great eaten and drinkers, puinant.</td>
<td>Indifferent and temperate in all those things as newers, or partakers a little of those two extremities, &amp; participating most of that region to which they are nearest neighbours.</td>
<td>Little, melancholike, cold, and dry, blase. Solitary, the voyce shrill, the skin hard, with little haire, and curled, abstinent, feeble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In their bodies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Heavy, obtuse, stupid, sottish, facetious, light, inconstant.</td>
<td>Ingenious, wise, subtle, opiniative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Little religious and devout.</td>
<td>Superstitious, contemplative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners</td>
<td>Warriors, valiant, painfull, chaunt, free from jealousie, cruel and inhuman.</td>
<td>No warriors, idle vauchast, jealous, cruel, and inhuman.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ For a more detailed commentary on the sources and adaptations of this venerable model of thought deriving from Classical Antiquity and popularized especially by French thinkers, see Zacharasiewicz, Die Klimatheorie in der englischen Literatur, 1977, pp. 76-104.
The English contemporaries of Jean Bodin and Pierre Charron—Elizabethan and Jacobean writers—were naturally less confident of their ideal position on the globe and had to struggle with the underlying assumptions of the climatic model and the stereotype phrases they had been taught at school.

Yet the theory of climate also applied to more northerly locations on the globe. The English ‘merchant adventurers’ in their search for a passage to China had encountered occasionally very harsh conditions in higher latitudes. The gradual progress of cartography in mapping these subpolar and polar regions is reflected in maps with the usual ornaments—sea monsters serving as substitutes for more substantial information. This is the case, for instance, in a map posthumously published under Willem Barentsz’ name. His memory is evoked in Aritha Van Herk’s narrative of the travails of the sailors in the far north and its life-threatening conditions contained in John Moss’ collection of essays, Echoing Silence (Van Herk in Moss 1997, p. 79-92).

Ancient notions of the dampening effect of a northerly latitude on the intellect and the imagination—prejudices concerning the negative effect of coldness, which ‘freezes the mind and suppresses intellectual agility’—were familiar to English poets, and also of serious concern to them. This is apparent in a passage in John Milton’s Paradise Lost, expressing his anxiety that the location in which he is composing his ambitious epic may frustrate his desire to reach the goal of his endeavours:


\[
\begin{align*}
\text{… higher argument} \\
\text{Remains, sufficient of it self to raise} \\
\text{That name, unless an age too late, or cold} \\
\text{Climate, or years damp my intended wing} \\
\text{Depressed, and much they may, if all be mine,} \\
\text{Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear.} \\
\text{(The Poems of John Milton 1968, p. 856-857)}
\end{align*}
\]

The negative assessment of the consequences of a northerly location on the globe was enhanced by unfavourable associations of the North generally with demons, devils and a threat to God’s people. Several biblical passages in the Prophets contain warnings of demons and enemies coming from the north:
Out of the North an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. (Jeremiah, Ch. 1, v. 14)

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog [...] thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee. (Ezekiel, Ch. 38, v. 14-15)

There was thus a convergence of unpropitious associations and connotations to account for the recurrence of such references in English poems (and other texts) from the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries. It is against this background of negative ‘pre-judices’ that a defensive mechanism came into play in English thought and literature: the socio-psychological truism that one’s own ethnic and cultural group is to be defended against recrimination and hostile assessments. England and Scotland as countries in a relatively northern location seemed at a disadvantage compared with the peoples of the middle zone, where the cradle of advanced culture appeared to lie. As a result writers used various strategies to ease the burden of such a geographic disadvantage, sometimes claiming that England in spite of its relatively high latitude belonged in the middle zone, sometimes shifting the criteria and simply favouring the skills and talents of the ‘northerners’, a strategy from which other nations located farther north benefited.

Such a strategy is already apparent in the colouring of the adjectives and the qualities attributed to the nations of the North in the translation of the paradigmatic formulation in Du Bartas’ La Seconde Semaine, which became very popular in the 17th century. The juxtaposition of the inhabitants of the three zones in the poem by the Huguenot writer does not show neutrality but a clear bias in favour of the northerners, and this aspect is enhanced by Josuah Sylvester’s translation:

L’homme du Nor[d] est beau, celui du Midi laid:
L’vn blanc, l’autre tanné; l’vn fort, l’autre foiblet:
L’vn a le poil menu, l’autre gros, frizé, rude:
L’vn aime le labeur, l’autre cherit l’estude.
L’vn est chaut & humide: & l’autre sec & chaut.
(Du Bartas, “Les Colonnyes” in La Seconde Semaine)
The Theory of Climate and the North in Anglophone Literatures

The northern-man is fair, the southern foul; That's white, this black; that smiles and this doth scowl: Th'one's blithe & frolike, th'other dull & froward; Th'one's full of courage, th'other fearfull coward: Th'one's hair is harsh, big, curled, th'others slender; Th'one loveth labour, th'other books doth tender: Th'one's hot and moist, the other's hot and dry; (Du Bartas, 1641, transl. as *Divine Weeks*)

Sylvester's translation gained so much authority that it was quoted as persuasive evidence even in cosmographies, such as Peter Heylyn's geographical books, settling, as it were, the complex question of the reasons for the differences between peoples and their distinctive cultures.

It seems that other British writers of the 17th century found a precedent in Sylvester's translation for modifying the model inherited from continental philosophers, geographers, ethnographers and physicians by moving the ideal environment away from the Mediterranean regions towards their own more northerly location. Later authors were inspired by the scientific turn of the early Enlightenment promoted by the Royal Society and its experiments and expeditions involving the use of new instruments such as the thermometer. They approached the data they had collected on the world with this pseudo-scientific model in mind and grappled with its problematical implications for their own country, which they tried to resolve in a similar manner as geographic textbooks and travelogues, conduct books and didactic poems.

One result of the application of new instruments, such as the telescope by astronomers, was a dramatic 'widening of the circle', a transformation of the relatively stable and restricted view of the world still shared by the learned. There was a new sense of the sheer illimitability of cosmic space, and also, by transference, a sense of the enormous dimensions of terrestrial space. A new debate was started about the possibility of a plurality of worlds and a sensibility for a new aesthetics developed. British thinkers in the 17th century such as Henry More contributed to the emerging 'Cult of the Sublime' with its interest in the evocation of grandiose and vast vistas, both cosmic and terrestrial. There can be no doubt that the inclusion of
northern landscapes in various literary genres, especially the new hybrid genre of topographical poetry in the second half of the 17th century, was influenced and moulded by the new trend.

This preoccupation originated partly in the study of an aesthetic treatise from antiquity, *Peri Hypsous*, allegedly composed by the ancient rhetorician Longinus, which emphasized the strong emotional effect on the recipient of a text (see Monk, 1935). The fashion for the evocation of such strong effects—especially of terror—was enhanced by a new sense of space connected with astronomical observations. Speculations about outer space, and then also the descriptions of grand terrestrial phenomena, tended to overawe man and elicit strong feelings; in short, the experience of sublime phenomena became a prominent concern in the early 18th century.

This new theme in topographical and ‘cosmic’ poetry was accompanied by a lively intellectual debate over the sources of the sublime conducted, for instance, by Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* essays on the ‘pleasures of the imagination’, and later continued by Edmund Burke in his treatise *On the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, to Immanuel Kant’s *Über das Erhabene*. The related poetic practice, which eventually led to the presentation of the ‘Alpine experience’—the celebration of Mont Blanc or other examples of stupendous mountain scenery by the British Romantics—may be traced back to the earlier inclusion of remote ‘northern’ landscapes in Augustan England.

There were, however, some difficult issues with which the poets in the Augustan Age had to grapple. In tune with the newly-won optimism of orthodox religious thinkers, their desire was to show the perfection of the design of the creation. A significant element in the argument of orthodox Christian thinkers, labelled physico-theologians, was the demonstration that no part of the globe was uninhabited and thus useless. Richard Blackmore’s cosmic poem “The Creation” (1712), for instance, offers ample evidence of the desire to show the *plenitudo rerum* and to demonstrate the perfection of everything in the terrestrial sphere due to the inclination of the ecliptic and its result, the regular sequence of the seasons. Paradoxically in this argument more northerly lands and their alleged imperfections were used to support the “argument from design”. The alternative, the imaginable negative consequences of the absence of the inclination of the ecliptic on the other terrestrial regions, is described as follows in Blackmore’s poem:
“This [region] ne’er would see one kind refreshing ray;
That would be ruin’d, but a different way,
Condemn’d to light, and curs’d with endless day:
A cold Icelandic desert one would grow;
One, like Sicilian furnaces, would glow.”
(Blackmore, 1712, quoted in Anderson 1792-1807, vol. 7, p. 600)

The meteorological disadvantages to the arctic zone are thus graphically described to argue the advantages of the overall ideal status quo. The dilemma of such philosophical meditations including references to the life-denying forces in the polar zone—which undermines the earlier assertion through the admission of negative features and conditions—is fairly obvious. The complexity of the ‘poetic endeavours’ of Blackmore and his contemporaries is also apparent in the passages from ‘cosmic poems’ in which the Scottish poets James Thomson and David Mallet included long vistas and graphic descriptions of stark northern landscapes, clearly with the intention of achieving sublime effects by offering endless panoramas of arctic scenes.

James Thomson, who in his Seasons certainly functioned as a pioneer in the history of taste, also integrated in his poem “Winter” (1726)—later significantly expanded—descriptions of sublime scenes in the polar zone. These additions reflect the ‘Cult of Sublimity’ and stand in an unresolved internal tension with the tenets of the physico-theologians.

[…] to the pole itself,
Where, failing gradual, life at length goes out,
The muse expands her solitary flight;
[…] a bleak expanse,
Shagged o’er with wavy rocks, cheerless, and void
Of every life, that from the dreary months
Flies conscious southward.
(Thomson 1908, p. 218-219)

Similarly the poet and dramatist David Mallet in his creative rendering of a terrestrial flight of the imagination in the first part of his long poem The Excursion included several scenes of arctic desolation. Mallet’s poem on the
grand works of nature is also dominated by the sublimity effect, in which the terrors of the extreme zones depicted are intended to elicit a strong response from his readers. Both Mallet and Thomson evoke a landscape “void of every life”, an inconsistency naturally not rare in poetry, which, after all, does not function as a syllogistic argument. Instead, Mallet zooms in on a scene in Northern Asia which provides the setting for demonic activities, involving ‘a secret hag’ and a sorcerer. (In a sense the supernatural phenomena excluded from materia poëtica in the poetry of the Enlightenment migrate to regions not touched by the strong daylight of reason.) A century later Mary Shelley in Frankenstein similarly evoked the deserts of cold and horrible life-threatening icy sea through which Frankenstein pursues the monster that has killed his family members and several of his friends on sledges pulled by dogs and in vessels which are repeatedly threatened with destruction. In his Excursion Mallet also briefly evokes the dreary, dreadful experience of those who were eager to find the north-east or north-west passage.

Yet Augustan poetry did not only represent the landscape, it also included depictions of selected people(s) of these northern latitudes. Richard Blackmore’s The Nature of Man (1711) provides an exhaustive account of the influence of climate on collective identities. It establishes a direct relation between ethical and intellectual qualities on the one hand, and the nature of the environment on the other, claiming that the location on the globe and the latitude of the environment shape—even determine—the nature of societies. Both excessive heat and severe cold negatively affect human behaviour. Africans are thus presented as incapable of cultivating fine sentiments of humanity, and only a moderate climate can foster the development of truly humane societies, naturally ideally present in Augustan Britain.

Bright humane Nature does no less demand
An Air adapted, and peculiar Land,
In vain you hope illustrious Youth will shine
Beneath th’ Equator, or th’Ecliptic Line;
Where Sun-burnt Nations of a swarthy Skin
Are sully’d o’er with blacker Clouds within.

Nor is the Soil to humane Nature kind
Between the circles and the Poles confin’d. […]
See Nova Zembla’s unfrequented Shores,
Whence Scythia’s Main reverberated roars:
Iseland, a wild inhospitable Place,
Which the North Sea’s circumfluent Waves embrace.
(Blackmore 1711, pp. 3-4, 10-13 & 160)

Blackmore’s verse thus offers a paradigmatic example of ethnocentrism, and shows how the theory of climate could be employed to underscore definite prejudices. The determinism that seems to inform this long poem and owes much to Calvinistic concepts of election and predetermination, suggests a more rigid application of the climatic model of thought than was the case with earlier and later advocates of this theory, which was on the way to becoming a favourite concept of the 18th century.

Many political, anthropological, medical, ethical and aesthetic considerations in that century are based on this model. Abbé Du Bos, John Arbuthnot, Charles de Montesquieu, and William Falconer, for instance, developed ingenious systems of thought in their treatises which profited from a kind of cross-fertilization between British and French thinkers. Even the skeptical philosopher David Hume employed elements of the theory of climate when discussing national character, distinguishing between physical and moral causes of this seemingly incontestable fact.

But there were also phenomena which challenged the deterministic dimension of this theoretical model. Some of Blackmore’s contemporaries noticed significant changes in the political culture of seemingly prototypical countries of the North. One poetic document which reflects both ancient stereotypes and signals a process of transformation is the poem *The Northern Star* (1718) by the poet and dramatist Aaron Hill, who belonged to Alexander Pope’s circle. Relying on ancient historiographers and utilizing the venerable concept of the North as the *vagina gentium*, Hill refers to

The needy North [which] pour’d forth her Gothick Swarms;
Roughly they warr’d, on worth they cou’d not taste,
And blindly laid the Tracts of Learning waste;

but then celebrates the achievement of tsar Peter the Great, who opened up his empire to the influence of culture and managed “to uncurse his clime”: 
From frozen Climes where Nature, stiff with Cold
Nourish’d no Hope, and void of Joy, grew Old;
Warm’d by the Monarch’s Worth, we rising saw
A Spring of Virtue, and a Bloom of Law!
(Hill 1718, quoted in Anderson 1792-1807, vol. 8, pp. 69-70)

Hill graphically describes the awakening of the lethargic peoples of the North:

New blown Ambition fires each Northern Soul,
And thaws the Icy Influence of the Pole;
The shaggy Samoid, shaking off his Snow,
Warms his cold Breast, with new Desire to know.
(ibid.)

Even “the shaggy Samoid” is thus affected by this benignant influence and “the rugged Tartars” assume new natures and “fixt Dwellings own”. The enthusiastic praise of the “reforming tsar” allows also the northerly landscape of his country to enter the poem. Two centuries later Vilhjalmur Stefansson in The Northward Course of Empire (1922) carried this optimism still further, prophesying an endless progress transforming the Far North into an arctic Mediterranean, the centre of an “innovative society”.

James Thomson also departs in his expanded version of “Winter” from the stereotypical presentation of northern tribes, who in other poetic passages are depicted like bears hibernating in the wilderness. He integrated passages which reflect his reading of and his response to graphic reports on expeditions to northerly regions, for instance, to Lapland. The relevant section in “Winter” offers a sensitive description of the brilliance of a nocturnal wintry scene in Lapland where peace-loving, vigorous people enjoy the polar night:

[Reindeer] whirl them swift
O’er hills and dale, heaped into one expanse
Of marbled snow, or, far as eye can sweep,
With a blue crust of ice unbounded glazed.
By dancing meteors then, that ceaseless shake
A waving blaze refracted o’er the heavens
And vivid moons, and stars that keener play
With doubled luster from the radiant waste,
Even in the depth of polar night they find
A wondrous day—enough to light the chase
Or guide their daring steps to Finland fairs.
(Thomson 1908 p. 217)

One may assume that Newton’s *Optics* (1704) with its description of the refracting prism had alerted poets to the play of light and to the colours of the rainbow, and thus enabled Thomson to give expression to the enjoyment of the nocturnal light in these northern latitudes. Clearly the report on an expedition to Lapland by the French mathematician and astronomer Pierre-Lois de Maupertuis found in James Thomson a willing ear and a responsive imagination.

Northern antiquarians, of course, had also done their share in paving the ground for an appreciation and for the implied re-evaluation of northern lands. Their accounts of the existence of love songs even in these northern regions had prepared the readership for very positive descriptions of communities in the sub-polar zone. Johannes Scheffer’s *Lapponia* of 1674 had acted as a catalyst, modulating the image disseminated by the Swedish scholar and clergyman Olaus Magnus and providing detailed descriptions of the landscape and the culture of the Sami, whilst two essays by Richard Steele on the love poetry of the Laplanders published in *The Spectator* had given the lie to the mistaken notion that in cold climes the imagination was, as it were, frozen.

A description of Lapland as an exceptional, appealing place in the north belongs to a period in which the theory of climate also gradually came to account for the diversity of talent and the differences in attitudes, behaviour and culture from a cosmopolitan perspective. This Herderian notion was prepared by earlier thinkers who wrote about the different mentality of the Orientals or described the fruit of the northern genius in allegedly recently discovered poetic texts, as James MacPherson did in his Ossian publications (see MacPherson 1996).

The North also benefited from new concepts disseminated by historiographers, who offered a revaluation of historical processes. This culmi-
nated in the depiction of the Goths and Gothic influence as a very positive element in world history. The reference to the “gothic swarms” in Hill’s *The Northern Star* reminds the reader of this significant complicating factor. As early as the late 17th century, for instance, essays by Sir William Temple—Swift’s first mentor—directed the attention of intellectuals to the heritage of the Teutonic tribes. In his various essays from the 1690s, in which tribute is also paid to the theory of climate, one can identify some kernels of thought which, in the course of the 18th century, gave rise to a reorientation and re-evaluation of traditional historiographic concepts. Anticipated by some ‘archivists’ or ‘antiquarians’, a belief began to gain currency that advances in the political culture of Europe and of Britain—in particular the rejection of despotism and the establishment of democratic or quasi-democratic structures—owed very much to Teutonic nations and tribes from the North.

The traditional attitude towards the classical narrative of the destruction of culture through the ‘great migrations’ by Teutonic tribes (and the Huns) as disseminated by Roman historiographers, was interrogated and a fundamental re-evaluation began. The Teutonic tribes came to be seen as champions of the ‘genius of liberty’, a view which James Thomson presented in his long poem *Liberty* from the 1730s. This attitude also positively affected the view and perception of the environment in which these presumptive torchbearers of liberty had lived and resided. The praise given to the Swiss in *Liberty* and the positive connotations and associations of these people create favourable conditions for the inclusion of their alpine home among the poetic subject matter.

One of the fundamental tenets of the theory of climate concerned the parallels between the mountaineers and northern nations, and so the latter also appeared in a more favourable light. The implicit or explicit praise of northern virtues was to gain special prominence in the 19th century in which this model of thought was further developed. Mme de Staël employed it in her re-evaluation of Germany, and her exposition of the spirit of the north. We can assume that her earlier treatise *De la littérature considérée avec ses rapports avec les institutions sociales [The Influence of Literature Upon Society]* (1800) was widely accepted and, together with her book *De l’Allemagne* (1813), assisted the process through which Northerners gradually were given a place of honour in literature.
Meanwhile, of course, the reorientation of intellectuals in their attitude towards the geographical regions hitherto vaguely described as “north” and “south” became apparent in the works of 19th-century American historians such as George Bancroft, Francis Parkman, and John Lothrop Motley, who, as David Levin has shown in his erudite History As Romantic Art (1959), expressed their unqualified preference for the northern nations and their role in history. They exalted Teutonic peoples, and dismissed Southerners and “anti-progressive” peoples as vanishing races.

That the climate theory also appealed to North American thinkers, who like Thomas Jefferson had encountered this model of thought especially in texts by French thinkers, is not surprising. The confrontation of man with the elements in the north of the North American continent has, of course, also furnished one of the grands récits: Northrop Frye’s memorable formulation at the end of his essay in the 1965 edition of The Literary History of Canada (Klinck 1976-1990).

This grand narrative has helped national critics in Canada to distinguish their literature from that of the United States. Canadians have been inclined to construct their collective identity in response to their harsh physical environment, preferably without negative connotations. Members of the Canada First Movement, who celebrated the marriage of convenience which helped to unite the various parts of British North America within the new Dominion in 1867, established a rallying point by adopting the climatic hypothesis, and supported a collective identity of Canadians with arguments derived from the theory of climate. The relativity of the concept of the North is apparent when one considers the fact that those patriotic Canadians, optimistic about the future and celebrating the northern position of their country and the positive consequences of its invigorating climate, did not think of the rigor(s) of the polar zone and the arctic circle, but of the fertile valley of the St. Laurence and, one might say, of the southern fringe of the new country.

They argued that there were only positive effects of the prevailing coldness of the climate in Canada, and Robert Hali burton, in particular in The

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Waldemar Zacharasiewicz

*Men of the North and Their Place in History* (1869), claimed that the ostensibly cold land would invigorate the free and dominant race now established there. Admittedly, he also drew on racial theory, which had in the meantime been developed by stressing the fact that the settlers of the new country were all descendants of northern races of Europe, whose gene pool would be further improved by the “creative force of the environment”. Haliburton anticipated a bright great future for this country, which should properly be renamed “Norland”, and a few years later the Canadian physician, William H. Hingston, in his *The Climate of Canada and Its Relation to Life and Health* (1884), similarly stressed the favourable results of climatic factors.

These notions and models of thought, no doubt, took root in Canada, and during the last 140 years since Confederation, Canadian society and culture has again and again been construed as typically ‘northern’. In fact, several studies and a number of significant books of fiction have appeared which, while sometimes disagreeing on details, all regard Canadian culture as shaped by and expressive of this fundamental notion. More than any other Anglophone country, Canada has integrated this idea, though it should be observed that since those early nationalist critics in the St. Lawrence Valley spoke of the north, the north has changed dramatically, and has, of course, extended further and further into the polar region.

Early in the 20th century the human geographer Ellsworth Huntington presented his now discredited ideas implying a geographical determinism in *Principles of Human Geography*. But while his ideas may seem to be out of date, the self-perception of Canadians as Northerners has continued. The artistic depiction of their northern landscapes was a major achievement of the first autochthonous group of artists in their country: the Group of Seven. Painters such as Lawren Harris and J. E. H. MacDonald responded fervently to Scandinavian paintings in which stark northern landscapes were presented, and in their own canvases painted in the Algonquin National Park (cf. Tom Thomson, “The Jack Pine”; MacDonald, “Falls Montreal River”) and on Lake Superior (cf. Harris, “North Shore, Lake Superior”), but also later in the Rocky Mountains and then in the Far North, they were inspired to present sometimes haunting pictures of their northern land (cf. Harris, “Mount Lefroy”).

Thus it is no coincidence that the first national Canadian novelist, Hugh MacLennan—in his first published novel, *Barometer Rising*—which takes the
historic catastrophe of a gigantic explosion in Halifax Harbour in 1917 as its subject—envisages and visualizes from the perspective of a veteran “returned from Europe” his own wintry country, making it appear as a truly northern setting:

The sun had rolled on beyond Nova Scotia into the west. Now it was setting over Montréal and sending the shadow of the mountain deep into the valleys of Sherbrooke Street and Peel; […] Now the prairies were endless plains of glittering, blueish snow over which the wind passed in a firm and continuous flux, packing the drifts down hard over the wheat seeds frozen into the alluvial earth. Now in the Rockies the peaks were gleaming obelisks in the mid-afternoon. […] these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question-mark, this future for himself, and for God knew how many millions of mankind! (MacLennan 1969, p. 79)

The North and the harsh northern landscape have continued to appeal to Canadian writers and their preoccupation is mirrored in a sequence of novels which deal with failed expeditions, especially the total loss of John Franklin’s crew in the northern ice.

This widening of the vision, which incontestably enriches Canadian literature, has opened up fields and dimensions which 18th-century poets and travel writers could hardly have imagined. Rudy Wiebe, John Moss, and even Mordecai Richler and others have offered late 20th-century reactions to—and to some extent intimate views of—the peoples of the subarctic and arctic zones, and responses to the Far North. Those locations were much further north than the regions included in the Semaines by the Huguenot poet Du Bartas, or the locations evoked in the interest of sublime effects in topographical and cosmic poems of 18th-century British writers like James Thomson and James Mallet. Images of the North with its vast expanse into the Arctic have meanwhile come to abound in Anglophone literatures, especially in Canada.
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Canada and its Images of North

Sherrill Grace

Imagining North

Judging from The Mistook North (1984), a painting by contemporary Canadian painter Charles Pachter, Canadians’ view of themselves as a northern people mirrored in a northern landscape—Canada as the true North strong and free—should be treated with a degree of irony. If we are to believe Pachter, then what Canadians know about the North is limited to images, indeed to paintings by the Group of Seven (or Tom Thomson), just like that Canuck in his painting who mistakes the image for the real thing. But the title of this piece is integral to the joke. When he calls it The Mistook North, Pachter is recalling a famous formulation of the national identity by artists like Lawren Harris and by art historians who have called it “the mystic north”.¹ But just how much of a mistake is represented by Pachter’s painting? And how mistaken are Canadians who see the country and its North in the images created by our artists?

In fact, ideas and images of North tell Canadians a great deal about being Canadian, regardless of the fact that most of us actually live in the south-

¹ For further information and passages from Harris’s writing, see Lawren Harris and Nasgaard’s The Mystic North and Larney’s Light for a Cold Land. It has not been possible to reproduce paintings discussed in this article. Please see the colour plates in Canada and the Idea of the North (Grace 2001).
ern extremity of the country. Geographically the country stretches into the northern most reaches of North America and a great majority of the physical country lies north of 60°; geopolitically we are one of the circumpolar nations of the world; meteorologically—with the exception of my tiny corner of the nation (Vancouver, British Columbia)—we must live with ice, snow, very cold temperatures, and the flora and fauna of such a climate, for at least six months of the year. Historically, economically, and culturally we have been shaped by our “nordicity,” which is an inescapable fact of life for both indigenous and settler populations. Challenges to our sovereignty have not been restricted to our longest undefended border to the south, but have often occurred well out of sight for the majority of Canadians over the North West Passage, on Baffin Island, in the Yukon—and with global warming melting the arctic ice such challenges are not going away. Indeed, recent sightings of submarines in the Arctic Ocean and current military exercises in Nunavut, specifically, on Baffin Island, where Operation Glacial Gunner and Operation Narwal have taken place, and comments made on CBC television by the American ambassador to Canada, suggest that a Canadian, military presence is required in the North to retain control over this vast territory.²

But my focus is not on any of these issues, or on global warming, which of course intensifies our need to pay attention to the North. My focus is on Canadian art and on how some of our artists have represented the many aspects of our “nordicity” (a term I borrow from one of our preeminent geographers, Louis-Edmond Hamelin) over a considerable period of time. This is not to say that I do not think questions of sovereignty and global warming are important. I do. But I have long believed that it is our artists who have told us the most about why the North matters to us and that it is the arts that have the power to persuade voters and consumers to appreciate the North by recognizing how profoundly it shapes us, even when some Canadians cannot wait to flee south to warmer climes, or when others mistake a painting for the real thing.

²In August 2006, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s television program “The National,” featured the Arctic on nightly news programs hosted by Peter Mansbridge, who traveled with Canadian ice breakers through the Arctic with scientists studying signs of global warming. The political message reiterated in each program was that global warming is freeing up the Northwest Passage and that Canadian sovereignty is threatened unless the general population becomes aware of the problem and acts to assert Canadian authority over the passage itself and the resources under the ocean.
On the following journey, I want to explore four points which have been articulated, represented, reinforced, and created by generations of Canada’s artists: that North is both an old idea and a present force in southern Canada, as well as being a physical place “out there . . . somewhere” and far away; that what Canadians understand as the North has moved, over time, from its earlier location in the south and east of the country to areas further west and much further north; that these ideas have changed over time to include more perspectives than before, and they are still a changing, vibrant part of our culture; and, lastly, that these changing ideas of North are fundamental to an understanding of the Canadian nation, to Canadian unity, and to our sense of being Canadian. I find all these points inscribed in Don Proch’s powerful mask/sculpture Magnetic North Mask (2000). The most important aspect of this mask is its shape and contour as a human face and head, which represents a three-dimensional mapping of a northern landscape while suggesting that it is we who create, and are created by, ideas of North. This is one artist’s image of our northern landscape, using key iconographic northern indices of magnetism, rock face, water, and canoe, as a human face.

Over the past sixty-five years, many other artists have expressed some of these ideas in words. For example, Stephen Leacock, an author and humourist whose sense of irony matches Charlie Pachter’s, has said that for “all of us here, the vast unknown country of the North, reaching away to the polar seas, supplies a peculiar mental background (“I’ll Stay in Canada,” 1936). Thirty years later, Glenn Gould spoke more personally about his dreams of the North in the introduction to his sound documentary The Idea of North:

I’ve been intrigued for a long time . . . by the incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga country . . . . I’ve read about it, written about it occasionally, and even pulled up my parka once and gone there. But like all but a very few Canadians, I guess, I’ve had no direct confrontation with the northern third of our country. I’ve remained of necessity an outsider, and the North has remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tall tales about sometimes, and, in the end, avoid.

R. Murray Schafer, one of our internationally known composers, also chose the North, or what he calls the Canadian myth of the North, for the subject
of his 1973 composition *North/White*, and in his program note to the piece he insisted that “The idea of North is a Canadian myth. Without a myth a nation dies. This piece is dedicated to the splendid and indestructible idea of North.” But I began with painters and it is perhaps our painters who have given us the strongest and most familiar images of ourselves as northerners. In one of his many comments about the significance of the North, Lawren Harris (a founding member of the Canadian Group of Seven) explained that the Canadian artist achieves a universal vision by locating “his roots deep in the soil of the land [with] its life in the pervading and replenishing spirit of the North.” More recently, playwright Wendy Lill’s character Heather Rose tells us that she has “always been attracted to the North . . . Like a firefly to light,” and, finally, Margaret Atwood, herself a touchstone of Canadian identity, has reminded us that “the [N]orth focuses our anxieties. Turning to face north, face the north, we enter our own unconscious. Always, in retrospect, the journey north has the quality of dream.”

Each of these artists has influenced my understanding of Canada and the North, and each provides important insights into what the North has meant to southern Canadians who have little first-hand knowledge of the northern areas of Canada and of indigenous northern peoples. For Leacock, the North was best read about in an armchair before a warm fire, with a glass of scotch, in the comfort of his Montréal home. For Gould, who realized how much of an outsider he was in the “northern third” of Canada, North would become one of our most sophisticated and elaborate constructions, and I will say more about Gould’s North shortly. Schafer, in his program note to the composition, *North/White*, insists that North embodies a nationalist agenda, and Schafer is not as far off the mark as his reference to myth might suggest; ideas of North have invariably been promulgated at times of national crisis in Canada. For Harris, the North was always a place of spiritual purity and artistic inspiration, and I will return to Harris, but my second to last quotation is from a play, *The Occupation of Heather Rose* (1987) that challenges many of southern Canada’s mistaken notions about both North and native northerners. The character speaking the lines I have quoted is a young nurse who has flown into a northern

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3Here and in the following discussion, I am drawing upon material I examined in *Canada and the Idea of North*. For further information and references, see that book and the References for this article.
reserve bringing with her all her southern illusions, not to say dreams, about northern adventure and a Florence Nightingale concept of the white woman’s burden. By the end of the play, which is in fact a monologue reconstruction of her initiation into the realities of her own arrogant ignorance, she will be a different person ... and so will we.

Among the many visual images that have fascinated and influenced me, maps are some of the most powerful because they bear eloquent testimony to ideas of North that have circulated for centuries; they teach us how these ideas have changed and they show us how we shape and are shaped by such images. In Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic, novelist Rudy Wiebe gives us his own idiosyncratic perspective by including an upside down map of the North, in which Canada is seen from the perspective of the north; Wiebe’s map shows us the co-ordinates of a post-modern North, and of Canada, by turning the tables on the South. But in case the very idea of Wiebe’s map is disorienting, we can consult a contemporary Canadian cartographic representation of our physical shape and our shifting, internal boundaries as they were reconstituted after 1 April 1999, when Nunavut became a new territory (see Fig.1). But the facts of quotations and cartography only tell us a small part of the cultural story. Now I invite you to put such facts aside and let your imagination come with me on a short historical and artistic journey.

Some Early Ideas of North

Thus far my images of North have been very contemporary and very southern, but images like these can be traced well back into the 19th century—as in a famous painting from the Hamilton Art Gallery. The canvas is not especially large (151.1 X 191.4 cm), but its power is not a function of size. In the foreground, a hooded figure, with snow shoes strapped to his back, kneels in the snow. All around him, and receding into distant drifts, lies moonlit

Fig. 1: Map of Canada since 1999.
Sherrill Grace

The sky is dark, but if you look closely there are a few stars; however, it is not the stars, the night sky, the pale snow, or even the fallen trapper that holds your attention. Ahead of this man, just beyond his outstretched arm, and clearly discernible against the snow, is a figure walking away into the picture plane and out of the painting. Who or what is this? Another trapper? A ghost? Or, given the resemblance of the fallen trapper to the ghostly presence, is this figure the trapper’s Doppelgänger his very soul, and, thus, the image of his death? This painting is Blair Bruce’s The Phantom Hunter, recently renamed The Phantom of the Snow (see Canada and the Idea of North, colour plate 2). Today it is his most famous painting with a privileged place in the iconography of Canada’s image of itself as a northern nation. Bruce’s inspiration for the painting came from an 1859 poem called “The Walker of Snow,” a simple narrative poem based on legends or folktales about the “Shadow Hunter,” a figure who resembles the Windigo of Ojibwa and Cree mythology. The speaker in the poem tells his listener about an encounter he has had—and possibly survived—with the Shadow Hunter “who walks the midnight snow” (qtd in Grace 2001, p. 108) and kills men who pass through the valley alone on cold winter nights. Even today in a postmodern Canada, where we build towns like Inuvik on the permafrost, take oil from the Beaufort Sea, escape from wind chill temperatures of minus 30° into the West Edmonton Mall, and transport the Canadian Shield to downtown Toronto, it is difficult to dismiss this painting or poem because they remind us that our northern world is still a dangerous one. The poem, like the painting it inspired, reminds us forcibly of things we might like to forget, such as the ice-storm that crippled Montréal in January of 1998 and was captured by Quebec photographer Benoit Aquin in a series of photographs of ice-covered and collapsed hydroelectric transmission towers that carry power from its northern source to southern Canadian cities.

By the early 20th century, Canadian images of the North were becoming popular, familiar, and widely accepted as defining Canadian identity. Because I have discussed many of these in detail in Canada and the Idea of North (2001), I will only note a few of them here so I have space to consider other, very recent, examples. One of the most familiar early 20th-century images of the Canadian North was created by Robert Flaherty in the 1922 film Nanook of the North, which is readily available on video. Nanook was largely filmed at the Revillon Frères fur-trading post at Port Harrison (now
Inukjuak), Ungava; it made Flaherty famous and popularized the image of the “Eskimos” as childlike, fur-clad, smiling people. In the opening sequence of the film, Canada is equated with the North of Hudson Bay and Ungava, and the “Eskimo” subjects of the film are constructed as representative of all Inuit; the actors are not identified by name as actors. Instead, we come to know them as “Nanook,” the “great hunter,” and his family. And I would like you to keep these representations in mind when I turn to more contemporary films about the North because the distance our artists (and we) have covered since Flaherty and Nanook is remarkable.

Eight years after Nanook, the southern Ontario playwright Herman Voaden published Six Canadian Plays (1930), the volume in which he announced his new northern vision for a Canadian theatre. Voaden, who was deeply influenced by the Group of Seven (especially by Lawren Harris), believed that a truly Canadian drama must use Canadian subjects and northern settings. His introduction to the volume was, in fact, a manifesto linking Canadian nationalism, nordin, and the arts. In his own plays, such as Rocks (1932), Voaden used silver-grey-blue lighting on the simplest, abstract sets to evoke a northern atmosphere that would make the “North,” as he put it, “a participant in the action, an unseen actor” (Voaden qtd in Grace, 1989, p. 128). But again, as with the film, I mention Voaden’s work to provide a time frame and a marker of the distance travelled by contemporary playwrights like Wendy Lill, Leonard Linklater and Patti Flather, Sally Clark, and Marie Clements in her new play Burning Vision.

But no consideration of the Canadian North is complete without Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962), arguably Canada’s greatest arctic explorer, the subject of a recent biography and of a recent National Film Board (NFB) documentary film called Arctic Dreamer: The Lonely Quest of Vilhjalmur Stefansson (2003). Stefansson organized three expeditions to the Arctic and wrote several important, popular, non-fiction books about his explorations, about the Inuit, and about arctic history and legend. He was an explorer, an anthropologist, an ardent advocate of the North, and an extremely interesting writer who argued, in his 1921 book The Friendly Arctic, for the friendliness of the Arctic and attempted to dispel a series of what he believed were ill-founded prejudices, errors of fact, and negative as-

4 See Staging the North for the plays by Lill and Linklater and Flather, and for other plays by Inuit groups; see Clements and Clark in the References.
sumptions about the North. Arguably Stefansson did convince some of the country’s politicians about the potential and importance of the North, from Prime Ministers Robert Borden through to John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson. Most recently, former Prime Minister Paul Martin and the former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson both stressed the cultural and strategic importance of the North by going there and speaking about it, as this comment by Clarkson, from an interview entitled “On Being a Northern Country,” indicates:

As Governor General, my going to the North draws attention to the fact that: a) it exists, b) it is extremely important for Canadians to realize that they are a Northern country. Otherwise you pretend that the greater part of your country is not there and you live in denial about your real identity. We are a northern people. I want us to think of how we relate to the countries that share the same latitudes. (Clarkson 2004, p. 6)

It remains to be seen what position on the North our new Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and our new Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, will take.

But let me return to the painters. Lawren Harris always insisted that his “work was founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North, of being permeated with its spirit” (Harris 1969, p. 7), and of all the Harris paintings I might have chosen to consider here, *Winter Comes From the Arctic to the Temperate Zone* (1935-37) captures succinctly many of the ideas of North that are circulating in my examples thus far. The first striking aspect of this canvas is the limited palette: the pure, shimmering blue mountain—or glacier-like—shape rising in the background is balanced, but not displaced, by the creamy-white, snow-clad shapes of tree and shoreline in the foreground. These two massive, vertical forms mirror each other across the smaller, horizontal, deeper blue form of an island. On the dominant vertical axis of the painting, the eye moves from the distinct cold-blue tips of mountain or glacier down to the tree top and down again to the frozen shapes in the foreground, until, at the very bottom of the picture, the eye rests on spots of yellow, the only warm touches in the entire composition. From there the gaze travels back up the painting and off the top of the canvas towards an imagined Pole. In *Winter Comes from the Arctic to the Temperate*
Zone Harris connects the temperate zone of boreal forest, with the barren, ice-surrounded sub-Arctic, and the high Arctic of glaciers, thereby creating an allegory of Canada-as-North.

In the first half of the 20th century, images of the North were synonymous with the Mounties, and they were made popular through radio serials like Sergeant Preston of the Yukon or in hundreds of movies about Canada. Of these movies, Rose-Marie was the most popular, and the 1935 sound version, starring Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddie, is famous. But Sergeant Preston became the Mountie par excellence, reaching and influencing more Canadians than any of his predecessors because he was aired serially on CBC radio during the late forties and early fifties and he starred in 78 episodes on CBC television between 1955 and 1958. Videos of this hugely popular television series are still available today. The stories are fairly predictable: they are set in the Yukon, usually in or around Dawson City at the height of the Klondike Gold Rush (1896-98), and wicked machinations occur in such immoral spots as the Gold Nugget Saloon. The incorruptible Preston, however, always gets his man, despite fierce blizzards, numbing cold, and the dramatic sound-effects of blowing wind, barking dogs, and cries of “Mush!” The forties and fifties (i.e. WWII and the Cold War) continued to be rich in popular images of the Canadian North with such explicitly northern comic book heroes as Dixon of the Mounted, Fleur de Lys, and Nelvana of the Northern Lights, otherwise known as Alana North, secret agent. Nelvana was a white Goddess figure, daughter of the King of the Northern Lights, and very loosely based on Inuit mythology. She was made more “up to date” with long hair and mini skirts and she could travel at the speed of light on the Aurora Borealis, make herself invisible, transform others, and control communications.

Canadian music, popular and classical, provides numerous images of northern identity or of iconic northern figures. Stan Rogers’ ballad about Sir John Franklin, “The Northwest Passage,” is much loved, as is The Tragically Hip’s song about Tom Thomson, and Susan Aglukark is just one of several popular northern singers or groups I might name. Classical composers have also created works inspired by their experiences of northern landscapes and peoples—the most recent being Christos Hatzis’s Footprints in New Snow (2002), a work to which I will return. But one of the earliest and, to my ears, most evocative musical representations of the North, is found in Harry Somers’ North Country (1948), a piece he wrote three years
after the traumatic years he spent with the RCAF during WWII, and after some restorative camping trips in Algonquin Park. *North Country* captures the sentiments of Canadians during the mid-century: patriotism, yes, but also a reverence for the North as home. I like this short orchestral suite because I find it richly evocative of the four seasons in central Canada, and I also detect in it a haunted quality, as if Somers’ memories of the war lie just beneath the surface of this music. For me his vision of the north country is beautifully captured in the language of contrapuntal organization, extended crescendo, dynamic contrast, and in Somers’ “tension-producing appearances . . . of tonal elements within a non-tonal context” (qtd from Brian Cherney, CD liner notes). It is always a challenge to describe music like *North Country* as representing anything beyond itself, although with this piece the title provides my anchor. But I am on firmer ground with my next example by Glenn Gould who claimed that his inspiration for *The Idea of North* came from school maps of the Northwest Territories, reproductions of Group of Seven paintings on school-room walls, aerial photographs and geological surveys. Gould’s unusual composition was commissioned as a centennial project for CBC *Ideas* and first broadcast on 28 December 1967; three months later it aired on CBC’s Northern Service *Tuesday Night*. In 1970 he adapted it for television and since then *The Idea of North* has been recorded on vinyl (in 1971) and on compact disk (1992). Moreover, in his 1993 feature film *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, Francois Girard uses *The Idea of North* as his governing metaphor for Gould himself.9

However, Gould’s *North* is not singular but contrapuntal and multiple: the composition presents the “interaction of [the voices of] five characters” who were carefully chosen by Gould to represent five different responses to the North. Inevitably, each “character” turns to the question of the relationship of the North to the rest of Canada, to the idea of nation, and to the way the North shapes the southern individual who goes there. An extremely

9Girard opens and closes his film with long shots of a figure, dressed all in black as was Gould’s habit, walking towards and then away from the stationary camera. The visual effect is of a man slowly emerging into view almost as if he has come out of the snow-covered landscape and then being absorbed back into the snow as he walks away from us at the end. The only sounds we hear in both shots are of boots crunching the hard-packed snow. Clearly, the visual trope creates Glenn Gould as the spirit or figure—the embodiment, so to speak—of the Canadian North (even though the film was shot just outside of Montréal).
Canada and its Images of North

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Gallery of Ontario, the Vancouver Art Gallery and Montréal’s Musée des beaux arts; a splendidly illustrated catalogue was published simultaneously. The event was a massive and—I would argue—strategic success because of its political timing, its itinerary and venues, and its ideological underpinnings. Prominently displayed on the back dust jacket above a full colour reproduction of Arthur Lismer’s *Pine Tree and Rocks* is this quotation from a controversial 1919 exhibition: “The great purpose of landscape art is to make us at home in our own country.” And the purpose of the 1995-96 bilingual exhibition was to reinforce Canadian faith in “our own country” at a point in history when the country seemed to be coming apart.

From 1996 to 1998 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Klondike Gold Rush, which precipitated the publication of many books and CD-Roms, television coverage, and an increase in tourism to the Yukon. My favourite Klondike centenary event was the publication of Robert Kroetsch’s novel *The Man from the Creeks* (1998)—its title and characters drawn, as many Canadians recognize—from Robert Service’s famous poem “The Shooting of Dan McGrew”:

> Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and two guns blazed in the dark, / And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two men lay stiff and stark. / Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was Dangerous Dan McGrew; / While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the breast of the lady that’s known as Lou.

*The Man from the Creeks* is a complex novel that in a literary context I would call postmodern. It is both an historical fiction about the Klondike and a highly self-conscious, intertextual narrative about the processes of myth-making, of history, identity and storytelling (see Grace 2002). Although I cannot pause to examine it closely here, I single it out because it provides, in the form of an entertaining novel, the serious re-writing back into Canadian history and contemporary consciousness of an event of major significance for Canada. Sally Clark’s play *Wanted* (2004) is set, like Kroetsch’s novel, in the Klondike during the height of the Gold Rush. Like Kroetsch, she makes a woman her central character, which in itself is unusual because most northern adventures feature men and the Gold Rush has always been portrayed as a male story. Clark researched and wrote the play during a period she spent as writer-in-residence in the Pierre Berton House in Dawson City in 2002, and the play...
Zacharias Kunuk’s 2001 award-winning film _Atanarjuat_ is important in any contemporary discussion of North. While it could certainly be thought of as conveying an Inuit view of life to the world at large, I believe that it is doing much more. It is a spectacularly beautiful film that quotes and _revises_ a host of earlier so-called “Eskimo” or “God’s Country” movies, from _Nanook_ forward. I see _Atanarjuat_ as a cinematic “writing-back” to that earlier, non-Inuit tradition. It makes a fascinating conjunction of ancient narrative (of myth) with the latest technology, and by doing this it celebrates human creativity. Finally, it represents the Igloolik Inuit to themselves _as a people living in time_, something Kunuk values above all else.\(^7\)

_Going North Here and Now_

In conclusion, I want to stress the point that, for Canada, North is _not only_ a geological or meteorological matter of tree lines, eskers, permafrost, snow, and temperatures that can dip as low as -81° celsius (the all-time Canadian

\(^7\) Kunuk’s next film, _The Journals of Kaud Rasmussen_, is released in the fall of 2006; see Gayle MacDonald. A documentary film with a similar focus but a much more overt political message is _Journey to Nunavut: The Kreelak Story_ (1999). Narrated by Martin Kreelak on the eve of the official recognition of Nunavut, it tells the story of an Inuit family’s encounters with white southern institutions and their often painful adaptation to white ways at the cost of their traditional life style. We accompany them on a return to their traditional summer fishing camp and we hear many others’ stories in Inuktituk, but the basic message of the film is survival: these Inuit have survived all that civilization can inflict on them and they have taken control of their own destiny by making this film, by running their own television and radio stations, and by creating Nunavut.
low recorded at Snag, in the Yukon, in 1947). North, while it has certainly been naturalized as essential to Quebec in the *pays d’en haut* concept and to Canada as “the true North strong and free,” is a human construct, like Canada itself; it is full of meaning because of its multiple artistic representations. It has become, for Canadians, part of what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “habitus,” and we have learned to accept it as a given, even perhaps to *mistrue* it—as Charles Pachter suggests we do—for a Group of Seven landscape painting. These images and ideas of North have done and continue to do a great deal of ideological and practical work for the country. Moreover, as I have argued at length in *Canada and the Idea of North*, North has accumulated a wide range of fascinating, contradictory associations, a set of familiar, compelling stories, a particular rhetoric and aesthetic, and a constellation of stubborn stereotypes and exclusions. North permeates all aspects of our culture, from paintings to comic strips, from politics to classical music and epic fictions or long poems like *Cantos North* (1982) by Henry Beissel, who tells us that “North is/ where all parallels / converge / to open out . . . / into the mystery surrounding us” (p. 43). North surrounds us in tourist trinkets and advertisements for Mutual Funds or beer (see Fig. 2).

But before I close I want to mention a few very recent artistic images that remind me of more serious issues, even while contributing to our expanding concept of a northern nation. The first of these is the feature film, *The Snow Walker* (2004), which is based on Farley Mowat’s stories from the 1975 collection with that title. The film presents us with a sobering illustration of the North’s power to teach, to kill, and to sustain life and with a celebration of the Inuit who know how to live in an environment instead of fighting and exploiting it. The white man in *The Snow Walker*, a bush pilot who flew bombers in WWII, is an arrogant, dangerous fool, and the consequences of his greed and stupidity are fatal. And yet, through its spectacular cinematography (romantic, lingering pans and long shots of land and sky), the
Canada and its Images of North

film brings the beauty and majesty of the North to southern Canadian audiences and suggests that we can survive in this harsh landscape if we adapt to it. The National Film Board of Canada has been making films about the North and its indigenous peoples almost since its beginnings, but its most recent northern documentaries focus on global warming and at educating Canadians—and others interested in Canada—about the impact of global warming on Canada and on the world. The purpose of this advertising is to remind us that we are part of the ecosystem and, in this era of the Kyoto Accord, we will all lose if we do not change our ways.

My final theatre example of an artist’s creation of new aspects of the North and of being Canadian is Burning Vision (2003) by Dene playwright Marie Clements. Like the films, it insists that southern Canadians must recognize the North as integral to the rest of the country (and to the world) and that, in doing so, they must also acknowledge responsibility for the way the North and its people have been used by southern governments and interests. In this play, the North in question is Dene land around Port Radium on Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories, but the play’s symbolic setting reaches far beyond this actual remote area. The story Clements tells unfolds on several levels and through juxtapositions of different historical moments and physical places. On one level, it enacts the discovery, in 1930, of high grade pitchblende for producing uranium, which, as we know, would be used by the Americans for the Manhattan Project to develop the bombs called “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” that were dropped on Japan in August 1945. This ore was mined and handled by Dene men who, according to Clements, were not provided with protective clothing for a kind of work known to be extremely hazardous. The play develops through a series of powerful images and scenes conjured by a Dene woman who is mourning the death of her husband as she stares into the embers of her fire; these scenes depict the violence of war and the destruction of Japanese civilians, but more importantly they portray the ruthless exploitation of Canada’s North and its people in the interest of what Clements calls “Western civilization building a country” (p. 75). By the play’s end, the audience has borne witness to a burning vision of radium, war, and cancer, but also to a vision of reparation when the survivors among the Dene and the Japanese meet.

Joseph Boyden’s 2005 novel Three Day Road is another example of the expanding significance and shifting coordinates of Canada’s images of North.
It is a novel about the Great War and while there are many fine Canadian novels about both World Wars, this one is different because it is written by a Métis author from northern Ontario and its main characters are an elderly Cree medicine woman and two young northern Cree men who become snipers with the Canadian forces on the battlefields of France. One of these young men will make it home; the other will not. Xavier, who returns, will be abandoned by the country he served (as First Nations veterans were), but welcomed by the old woman who will listen to his stories of war. She takes him by canoe on his “three day road” back to the North, where he can find spiritual purification and, almost certainly, a new life. Finally, in 2005, an indigenous northerner has written a Canadian war novel that writes back to a dominant southern Canadian discourse about WWI by focusing on a northerner’s perceptions and mythology. For decades Canadians have been told that our country came of age during this war, but we have accepted this myth while ignoring or repressing the stories and experiences, the contributions and sacrifices, of northerners to the making of the nation.

But I want to close with a non-representational image from contemporary music and with something less harrowing than the Clements play or the Boyden novel, so I am returning South, but with North very much in mind. The composition I want to recommend to you is called Footprints in New Snow; it is by Toronto-based composer Christos Hatzis and was recorded in CBC’s Glenn Gould Studio in downtown Toronto in 2002. Hatzis had been profoundly moved by Inuit throat-singing while creating his Gould-like documentary called The Idea of Canada, and in his liner notes to the CD he explains his fascination with the North and the inspiration it gave him better than I can:

The material of this CD is the result of my encounter with a culture and a people who have left a lasting impression on me. It has marked me as an artist and as a human being in ways that I could never have predicted beforehand, nor have been able to fully explain since. The magic of the arctic north, its people and particularly their vocal games have become an obsession with me . . . and the works in this CD are the creative testimony to that obsession. I hope the music and its ability to transport and engage the imagination will take you to Canada’s north, the stark, clear
and limitless vistas of the arctic, and let you experience a transformation, one which has managed to strike a balance between the wisdom of the past and a vision for the future. (Hatzis, 2002)

Regrettably, in a written article, I cannot play this music (which I did on the original occasion of the Reykjavik lecture in February 2006) but, as I listened then to Hatzis’s combination of contemporary western sound with Inuit throat singing, I felt a shared sense of transformation, and of transport, with my fellow listeners. Paradoxically, this music does what so many Canadian artists have tried to do over so many years: it brings the North alive in the breath and images of art, it brings the North south (or to other northern places), and it takes anyone one who listens all the way “to Canada’s . . . stark, clear, and limitless,” and yet humanly imagined, North.

References:


Sberrill Grace


Food and the North-Icelandic Identity in 13th century Iceland and Norway

Ármann Jakobsson

The Mouth and the Creation of Identity

It has been widely accepted that food is fraught with anthropological significance after the studies of e.g. Lévi-Strauss (1969). However, the relationship between food and identity has not really been extensively explored by Icelandic scholars and one might even say we are just beginning. I should like to suggest an approach which involves a careful reading of all instances where food seems to play a role in the social construction of identity, taking particular note of the context and avoiding generalizations for the moment.

The 20th century was an age of nation states, with their own national anthems, national flowers—and national dishes. Now food is becoming globalized, but we still recall how food could be used to construct a national identity, with the aid of the institutions of the national state. On the other hand, my aim here is to explore how food was used in 13th-century narrative to construct not the Icelandic identity but an Icelandic identity.

When it comes to the high Middle Ages, there does not seem to be much material at first glance, i.e. cases where food and identity are firmly linked. A well-known exception is the Norwegian (and apparently English as well)
habit of referring to Icelanders as lard-eaters (mörlandi), which was clearly offensive to Icelanders (see e.g. Borgars saga, p. 227; Bogi Th. Melsted 1914, p. 30). And then there is the powerful myth of the mead of poetry, drunk and regurgitated by Óðinn (see the discussion of Clover 1978; Jón Hnèfill Adalsteinsson 2001, pp. 76–77; Ármann Jakobsson 2005, pp. 315–21).

Here I turn my eye towards a 13th-century text called Morkinskiðra, in which an unknown Iceland-historian relates the history of Norwegian kings from 1030 to 1160. This particular historian does not confine his narrative to kings but inserts episodes where the king’s subjects are front stage. That includes Icelandic subjects, since even though Icelanders were still not formally subject to the Norwegian king when Morkinskiðra was composed, their thoughts were already gravitating towards Norwegian king and court. And this particular situation called for a definition of Icelandic identities. The 13th century saw the emergence of a new Europe where Iceland’s role was uncertain, especially its relationship with the Norwegian kingdom. This new situation resulted in a frantic search for an identity that informs this particular narrative (see Ármann Jakobsson 2002).

One narrative within this narrative is called “Sneglu-Halla þáttr” and it has been incorporated into two large texts, Morkinskiðra and Flateyjarbók. The narrative is named for one of its leading characters, an Iceland-historian of humble background called Halli. He comes from the north of Iceland, from Eyjafjörður. His aim is to enter the court of the Norwegian king and become a success. The tale tells how he fared.

Many would consider Halli to be the leading character of the narrative. While I do not object to that view, there is another leading character whose function in the creation of meaning and identity I wish to explore: the mouth. The mouth is instrumental in creating the identity of the Icelanders who feature in “Sneglu-Halla þáttr”, which involves food to a large degree.

The Mouth in “Sneglu-Halla þáttr”
The mouth is always at the centre of things in “Sneglu-Halla þáttr”. It is Halli’s most important asset on his way to fame and fortune, but also his worst enemy. Indeed the mouth almost becomes its master’s executioner at one stage of the narrative (Morkinskiðra, pp. 234–47).
In the *þáttr* there are no less than eleven instances where the mouth has an important function:

1. During the reign of King Haraldr the harsh, Halli arrives in Trond-heim, and is received at court after some verbal sparring with the king.

2. The skald Þjóðólfr, another Icelander, is given the task of composing two skaldic stanzas about a brawl between a tanner and a blacksmith, where he must use mythological metaphors. He succeeds and is praised by all at court. Halli is goaded to do something similar and is the fastest to compose a stanza about the king’s dwarf.

3. After being lauded by the king, Halli quickly falls from grace after running away from the entourage, into a backyard where he is found eating gruel.

4. The king punishes Halli by putting a trough of gruel before him in the evening, and telling him to finish it or die eating.

5. Halli releases himself from this punishment by composing another stanza about the dwarf.

6. Halli asks the king for leave to recite a praise poem about him.

7. Þjóðólfr and Halli have a verbal clash, which results in Halli telling the king how Þjóðólfr ‘ate his father’s killer’.

8. A retainer makes a bet with Halli that he will not be able to get compensation from the bully Einarr fluga. Halli wrests compensation from the bully by threatening him with an insulting ditty.

9. Halli acquires money from a Danish chieftain with another wager, by quieting a tumultuous assembly with his strange words.

10. Halli acquires money from the king of England by taking the king’s words literally and tarring his hair so that more money will stick to it.

11. In *Flateyjarbók* only, there is a further chapter about Halli and King Haraldr, concentrating on Halli’s pornographic stanzas.

In this tale, then, the mouth serves as Halli’s ticket to court. It is used for tricks and vulgar entertainment. It can be dangerous both to Halli himself and others: he can use it to extort money but is also commanded to use it to eat himself to death. Last but not least, it may be used for the lofty purpose of praising the king with the finest art of the day, as well as the coarse task of consuming gruel.

What is especially interesting is what this focus on the mouth reveals about a) the identity of Sneglu-Halli and his rival Þjóðólfr, b) the society depicted in the *þáttr*. c) the narrative itself, and last but not least d) how food
figures in the social construction of an eleventh-century Icelandic identity. And I will endeavour to come up with a kind of answer to all four.

Various Roles of the Month
How can an Icelandic farmhand become an instant success in a hostile world? This is a common preoccupation of sagas and þættir and indeed some of the þættir in Morkinskinna. In this þættir, Sneglu-Halli seems to be without a family or even allies in Norway. And yet he has arrived at the court of the king to gain honour and fortune. At the court of Norway, this can only be done through the king himself. There is no other way to become a success, not for a complete outsider such as an Icelandic lacking noble birth.

The Norwegian court is, like all courts, a society based on inequality. At the top of the pyramid is the king who has the power to move almost everyone else up and down. However, unlike the European court society of the Reformation onwards, rank and status are mobile, and of this we have many examples in Morkinskinna. Even the king himself may face death and dishonour at any moment. At court, every man has to guard his own status jealously, and there clearly exists a notion that one man’s success must be at the expense of others (Ármann Jakobsson 2002, p. 138; cf. Helgi Þorláksson 2001, pp. 17–18). Everyone is constantly on his guard and all fortunes are fickle. As often as not, the Norwegian court as described in Morkinskinna seems a harsh and uncompromising world, partly ruled by bullies (Ármann Jakobsson 2002, pp. 130–47; cf. Elias 1939, pp. 156–68).

But even though Morkinskinna depicts a society that frequently has more than one king and competition between kings, the king is the most powerful person in this world. Although no king has absolute power and the actions of kings may lead to their downfall, if a king does not exceed certain limits, his power is not likely to be questioned. But it is a power of a personal nature. The king is not burdened with all the rules of modern states. His personal tastes and opinion count for more. There is, of course, court etiquette but even that was not as strict as it eventually became.

When Haraldr the Harsh is king, his personality sets the tone for the court customs. King Haraldr is depicted as an extremely wise and strong ruler, liked by his men, but also rash and impatient, and with a mighty temper. He is often cruel and vindictive, and he can be extremely jealous. His
way to the throne has not been an easy one and thus he is constantly on his guard. His wisdom and strength are undermined by his lack of restraint and by his insecurity, having attained power the hard way.

Although the blatant hostility of this new world is clearly daunting for Icelanders, it may be turned to their own advantage. An Icelandic at court has no-one but himself to rely on and thus he is forced to be strong and independent. Sneglu-Halli is able to catch the attention of the king when sailing past Agðanes (on the way to Trondheim). There he meets a stranger on another ship and exchanges words with him. The stranger, the king in disguise, asks if they had not been screwed by the giant Agði in order to pass Agðanes. Halli replies that the giant must have been waiting for a better man: his interlocutor. With this remark, he has taken the first step into the favours of the king. The coarse nature of his reply obviously means that Halli is risking a lot to reach his goal. Who knows how a sensitive king with an enormous temper might react to such an insult?

But fortunately King Haraldr likes poetry and stories and is a poet and a storyteller himself, so wit is an important virtue to him. In addition, he is unusually fond of Icelanders and benevolent towards them. Last but not least, the king likes men who are quick-witted and he likes coarse jokes (*Flateyjarbók*, p. 415). Halli’s retort about the giant Agði might have caused trouble with another king but it strikes the right note with King Haraldr, who accepts him when he wants to join his court, with the reservation that the court is a difficult place for foreigners.

The first function of the mouth in the episode is thus to provide access into society. Were it not for Halli’s wit, the king might not have accepted him. Sneglu-Halli is one in a long line of Icelandic court poets or entertainers. He is, however, a new breed. Halli gets into court by making a joke of a sexual nature about the king and he stays in favour by being a fast verse-maker, rather than an elaborate one. It is also noteworthy that unlike the king’s other court poet, Þjóðólfr, Halli is not too high and mighty to compose a stanza about a dwarf on command. The *Flateyjarbók* chapter elaborates on this. It seems to strongly suggest that the reason Halli is favoured by the king is that he is more vulgar than anyone else and not above making jokes about the king having sex with animals, or to use the word *reðr* (penis) in a stanza. Halli thus plays the role of a coarse Northerner slightly
out of place but still welcome at the court which on the surface is refined but brutal when it comes down to it.

One thing the king seems to like about Halli is his audacity, which the queen, on the other hand, deplores. She thinks Halli is not a suitable courtier and that it is far beneath the king to fraternize with such a character. Is the king standing up to the queen and her idea of refinement by making friends with Halli? Or is he just playing at being a schoolboy? Both interpretations are possible, no less so because the king’s fascination with Halli clearly has its limitations, as is demonstrated when Halli runs away from the retinue of the king to eat gruel with a townswoman.

In the tale, we also have many instances of verbal skirmishes, i.e. words being used as weapons in a verbal duel, somewhat in the distinguished tradition of the *senna* and *mannjófnuhur*. The most important of these is the duel between Halli and Þjóðólfr, which starts indirectly. Halli is taunted by Þjóðólfr’s smith and tanner stanzas, and then Þjóðólfr laughs at Halli’s gruel-eating. But at Christmas, Halli wishes to better himself by reciting a well-fashioned praise poem about the king. Then Þjóðólfr tries to use the opportunity to humiliate Halli, referring to the ‘Bessie Verses’ about the cows Halli tended out in Iceland, a much too trivial subject for a court poet. Then Halli brings up Þjóðólfr’s own ‘Ashcan verses’ which results in Þjóðólfr’s rash words about Halli not having avenged his father’s death. Halli quickly turns these words back on Þjóðólfr like a boomerang, Þjóðólfr in the end being humiliated by the story of how he ate his father’s killer.

Verbal duelling is an example of words at their most potent. The emphasis is on the mouth as the most important weapon of court poets and court jesters. The mouth which helped Halli to get into court, get in favour with the king and which saved him from the consequences of his own foolishness, is put to good use in his duel with Þjóðólfr. Halli may be the more coarse entertainer but he nevertheless has the better of his more sophisticated counterpart.

But meaningful and well-fashioned words are not the only oral weapons in the armoury of Sneglu-Halli. He can also trick a whole assembly in Denmark into silence by an incomprehensible statement. By this he proves that unusual behaviour and words make people pay attention. This may also

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1 See e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 2005.
be a statement about his own role. His behaviour is outrageously fresh and perhaps it is its very boldness which endears him to King Haraldr. The constant noise at the Danish assembly is another reminder of how the mouth can create disturbance and disorder, the dangerous side of orality. Talking is the essence of civilization but talking too much transforms it to exactly the opposite: distracting noise where no word can be discerned.

The dangers of the trickster’s mouth are also exemplified in the episode of Einarr floga. Einarr is a bully who never pays compensation for any wrongdoing, but Halli boldly stakes his head that he will get him to pay. He goes before the king and tells him he cursed Einarr in a dream and still recalls some of the words. Then he walks away muttering something. The king suggests Einarr to pay the compensation he owes rather than allow this insult-verse to circulate and be remembered, since that would be far more harmful to him.

Halli’s demonstration of the power of muttering harmonizes with the way he uses meaningless words to get the Danes to pay attention. In contrast to the clever and refined skaldic verses but also to Halli’s rude sexual jokes, all these are instances of words without meaning. Halli’s muttering is just noise. The same applies to the constant din of the assembly, and his own words to control the noise are equally meaningless.

Halli is remarkably innovative. Þjóðólfr may be able to compose stanzas, but Halli can use muttering and nonsense to his advantage.

**Eating the Father’s Killer**

The harsh competition and verbal duelling at court, the aggressive noise of the Danish assembly, the vulgar sexual jokes and the grotesque figure of the dwarf Túta all come together to create an aura of low comedy. Sneglu-Halli himself is of low birth. And if skaldic praise poetry is an example of a refined use of the mouth, eating and drinking would seem to be more down to earth.

Food is first mentioned in the þáttr when King Haraldr receives Halli and tells him that he will not be stingy with food. Halli’s first moment of triumph in the whole episode is at a feast in the king’s hall. Such occasions often set the scene for dispute in Morkinskinna. The aggressive merriment which goes with drinking is thus juxtaposed with another kind of aggressive behaviour: arguments which lead to fighting and death. Even though not much is said about the drinking, the mouth of the poet is obviously present,
and consuming drink and food. And even though it helps him to ingratiate with the king this time, it quickly makes him fall from grace again.

Halli’s strange and unpredictable behaviour—his big mouth, you might say—soon lands him into trouble. When walking down the street with the king, Halli suddenly runs off to eat some gruel. Why? Perhaps he is behaving outrageously to impress the king, as he has done with success in the past. If that was his motive, he has misjudged the king who takes offense, and may see Halli’s gruel-eating as implying that he has indeed been ‘stingy with food’. It is also possible that the king is revolted by Halli’s unrefined, even grotesque, behaviour. His coarseness seems over the top. The king becomes angry and asks Halli why has left Iceland “to visit great men just to make a spectacle of yourself.” You will note that the king specifically mentions Iceland, thus linking unrefined food and grotesque eating with this far-away northern place, where rules of etiquette do not seem to apply.

The mouth that propelled Halli into favour with the king is now the instrument of his downfall, perhaps even of his death. That evening the king has a trough of gruel set before Halli and tells him to finish it. This he cannot do unless eating himself to death; the organ which caused offense to the king would then be the instrument of his execution. This type of symbolic punishment was the delight of the mediaeval judicial system (see e.g. Foucault 1977, pp. 3–16). The mouth is now instructed to act as a devouring, monstrous organ that must consume the life of its owner (cf. Williams 1996, pp. 141–49).

But the justice of the king also entails giving Halli a way out of certain death: he can salvage himself from such a humiliating end by composing another stanza about the dwarf extremely quickly. Again the mouth comes to the rescue, saving Halli from the consequences of its own follies, and literally from itself, since it was also supposed to be used to kill him. To make the parallels even neater, Halli’s verse about the grotesque figure of the dwarf saves him from the grotesque punishment which his grotesque gruel-eating had brought upon him.²

Halli becomes a figure of fun at court by his gruel-eating. But he turns out

² Hunger is not an issue in this narrative but it is an important theme in Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar who not only uses vomiting as a weapon on two occasions but attempts at one point to starve himself to death (cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2005, pp. 315–21).
to be not the only one who has consumed food in an undignified way. When Þjóðólfr taunts Halli for not having avenged his father, Halli retorts by saying that Þjóðólfr may talk freely about such things because he ate his father’s killer. It turns out that Þjóðólfr’s father was extremely poor and the family was living off charity in Iceland. During a meeting about the paupers of the district, his father received a calf as a gift from a wealthy man but managed somehow to hang himself in the loop at the end of the rope by which he leads the calf. The calf is then eaten by the whole family, including Þjóðólfr.

But why is gruel-eating so offensive? One reason may be the latent implication that Halli is not given enough food; another may be that gruel is undignified food, not up to the standards of the court. If the latter is the case, Halli’s gruel-eating is an indication that he is a misfit at court. Perhaps he doesn’t even like the court food and misses the more simple gruel. Halli is at heart just an Icelandic boy who is acting the part of a court jester. By eating gruel he might be expressing his homesickness and his fondness for simple things. He may have gone out into the big world to conquer it but he has not escaped his roots. You will note that in this binary, the court represents refinement while Iceland represents poverty and simple food.

There may also be a veiled irony in the fact that the king misunderstands the gruel-eating as a comment on his own stinginess. Perhaps the king is not concerned with Halli at all but with himself. King Haraldr is after all a sensitive king, and his insecurity causes him to be closely on his guard. He is also vindictive: the perceived slight demands an immediate and cruel punishment.

But what, then, is so bad about eating a calf that has killed your father? Again the clue lies in Þjóðólfr’s psyche. At the beginning of the episode, we are informed that the skald Þjóðólfr is with the king and is said to be envious toward newcomers at court. We are not told why. Later we learn that he is not pleased with the praise Halli’s dwarf stanza received. He obviously dislikes competition from newcomers at court, perhaps not least if they are Icelandic, as he is himself. He may also object to the grotesque subject of Halli’s stanza: the strange dwarf whom the court retainers use for their fun. But even though he thinks himself a cut above such a subject, perhaps he might really be envious of Halli’s boldness. Halli has acquired a much more versatile role for himself, whereas Þjóðólfr is stuck in his role as a haughty court poet, who takes every suggestion of fun and games as a slight to his dignity.
When Halli has told the story of the calf, Þjóðólfr is so angry that he jumps up and wants to strike him. Again the mouth is to blame, in several ways. Þjóðólfr has eaten his father's killer, which is in itself grotesque behaviour (and even seems a bit incestuous), although it has a natural explanation. More poignantly, the tale recalls Þjóðólfr’s very humble background in Iceland, as well as his father’s foolish behaviour which lead to his undignified death. Although Þjóðólfr is now the most elegant of retainers, the story casts light on the difference between his present status and his humble origins. Furthermore, by focusing on eating, his present position as a court poet that uses his mouth to praise the king with elegant art is juxtaposed against the most menial task of the mouth: eating to survive.

Þjóðólfr’s jealousy toward newcomers at court has its roots in his insecurity, which again has its roots in his humble background. Þjóðólfr is in disguise. His refined appearance belies his true origins as a pauper. It is thus hypocritical of him to constantly slight Halli for being vulgar. By eating the calf, Þjóðólfr has spoken — thus eliminating the crucial difference between speaking and eating. In fact, eating turns out to be a speech act, and there is no way to eat without conveying some meaning. You might even say that to eat is to speak.

With his calf-eating, Þórólfr has revealed a truth about himself, like Halli did by eating gruel. Beyond the thin veil of Þjóðólfr’s aristocratic haughtiness, they are the same: poor farmboys from remote Iceland. This is an identity that the author of Morkinskína does not allow his Icelandic audience to forget.

The mouth may be Halli’s most precious asset but in eating gruel it also betrays him as a clever actor, a simple farmboy who plays the role of an audacious and rude court jester. Þjóðólfr, too, is betrayed by his own mouth, and this proves a point about court society at large. Nobody is as refined as they pretend to be, and they are all playing a role. The same would apply to the author of Morkinskína, whose own work depicts a court society which is at the same time both refined and coarse.

Thus the mouth shapes the identity of 13th-century Icelanders at the Norwegian court in various ways, both in its communicative and its consuming mode. In fact, it turns out that the two modes are virtually indistinguishable. It is socially significant how food is consumed and what is consumed. You speak when you eat.
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People and Place in the Far North:
A Vision of Life, Community and Change

W. Tad Pfeffer

Landscape, People, and the Built Environment

Landscape, by which I mean the physical setting for human activity, shapes culture. The human occupation and alteration of a landscape—the construction of buildings and roads, use of local resources, the importation of non-local resources—shapes the landscape, but people as well are shaped by the experience of adapting themselves to the landscape and its environment. The experience of people is reflected in their built environment, that portion of their environment which they construct. It is formed of people’s intentions and traditions, their resources, their political and economic fortune, the constraints of the environment imposed upon them by nature, and changes in that environment. The built environment also changes, sometimes rapidly. A careful observation of the built environment gives us insight into cultures, into human experience, human values, and tells us also about change. In this paper I make the case that a study of the built environment of the circumpolar Arctic\(^1\) has great potential to improve public understanding of the Arctic and its relation to the rest of the world at a time

\(^1\) Here I use the term Arctic to refer to the entire high-latitude region geographically, economically, and culturally connected to the Arctic and not exclusively to locations located north of the Arctic Circle.
when the Arctic is changing at an unprecedented rate. Such understanding will be required if the necessary actions and resources are to be brought to bear on the problems of ameliorating or adapting to arctic change.

The influence of landscape on culture is most easily seen in the early, sparse stages of occupation—where people live in the landscape and not on it—but also subtly and to a degree which is easy to underestimate in the later stages of occupation, where the built environment covers the landscape and the imprint of people on the landscape becomes dominant (Jackson 1984). As the built environment expands in size and develops in complexity, culture starts to shape landscape; the influence of landscape on culture recedes but does not vanish. In the early historical stages of development, landscape factors dominate decisions made about occupation: people need to live adjacent to workable cropland or other food sources, and near rivers or roads for transportation. At later stages, when population pressures and technology both increase, the demands placed on the landscape are greater and the tools available for creating the built environment more powerful and more numerous: larger roads can be accommodated by altering the natural topography of the landscape; inferior terrain can be improved by geotechnical methods; dams and aqueducts can be built to provide domestic and agricultural water; food can be brought from greater distances, opening up wider choices for land use for residence and commerce. Ultimately, in the case of large cities, the built environment creates its own landscape (or cityscape), and the influence of the natural landscape becomes mostly historical and aesthetic: the geographic topography and the built topography of skyscrapers interact, each providing a context for the other. Countless opportunities exist for this interaction to go awry, of course: early settlers may misjudge the merits of the place they choose to settle, local and regional resources may be mismanaged or access to them change, cities may grow up in places adequate for small-scale habitation but intrinsically unsuited to support large numbers. The economic side-effects of the increasingly complex global system of agriculture (Goodman and Watts 1997) is an example of potential risk created by wide distribution and complex management of resources, while rapid population growth in the arid southwestern U.S. (Anderson and Woolsey 2005) and the damages associated with hurricane Katrina (Burton and Hicks 2005; Fischetti 2001) are striking examples respectively of the
emerging and realized risks of large populations living in areas well-suited only for small populations.

The interaction between landscape and culture is also shaped by whether the occupation is for habitation (people choosing to live and work in a landscape) or purely extractive (a landscape occupied only for purposes of mining, for example). The built environment that accompanies extractive occupation develops without many of the features and decisions that typify habitation (Hayes 2005): locations are chosen on the basis of proximity to the extracted product and transportation, the landscape is altered according to the extractive needs and to some degree according to safety and environmental concerns, and aesthetic considerations are largely absent. The long-term results are frequently environmental and aesthetic failures (e.g., the nickel-mining industry in Sudbury, Ontario or many of the petroleum extraction-based cities in western Siberia). Habitation and extraction are not completely incompatible, however, and successful built environments based on extraction but with rich histories of habitation exist, at least historically and at smaller scales.

Both landscape and culture are altered by environmental change. Ecology and economy are both sensitive to the presently-occurring rise in sea level, increase in mean global temperature and increases in variability of temperature and precipitation (IPCC 2001). These primary changes (themselves forced to a significant degree by a human-caused increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide) trigger further significant changes such as alterations in groundwater hydrology and, at high latitudes, diminution of seasonal sea ice cover and melting of permafrost (ACIA 2004). All of these environmental changes demand a human response if the consequent negative effects on ecology and economy are to be minimized. But the time scales of these changes and their global scope, together with uncertainty as to whether we are able to control these changes (apart from the question of whether we are responsible for them), create a state of indecision which reinforces a natural inertia and tendency to seek minimal and short-term solutions. The present pace of environmental change is most rapid at high latitudes, however, and in the Arctic, where there is a substantial human presence (in comparison to the Antarctic), there is the most urgent need to understand present environmental change, forecast future change, and seek meaningful long-term responses. This need can be met by study and
analysis followed by policy recommendations and action, but this course of action requires broad public support, which in turn requires an accurate understanding of the character of the Arctic and especially its intimate relationship, both environmentally and culturally, to the rest of the world.

The Arctic as a Misunderstood Landscape
The interaction between human occupation and landscape provides one way to examine the identity of the Arctic as a natural setting, as a group of cultures and economies, and as a place perceived by the non-Arctic world. The Arctic is a rapidly changing, sparsely populated landscape, generally known to the public as a place of great natural beauty, but poorly understood in its more complex aspects; it is typically thought of either as being completely devoid of human population, or populated only by a stereotypical ‘Arctic native’ that bears little resemblance to the actual residents of the Arctic. As a consequence, the human, environmental, and economic connections between the Arctic and the rest of the world are widely misunderstood. The Arctic today is connected to the rest of the world by increasingly vital environmental, political, economic, and cultural ties. Rising temperatures, coastal erosion, diminishing sea ice, political and economic transformations in the former Soviet Union, increasing economic globalization, and the ever-shifting search for petroleum resources all draw further attention to the Arctic. The discussion of global policy issues bearing on the Arctic and the resolution of those issues demands an understanding of the complex interactions that exist between the Arctic and the South, and effective public input to that discussion will only be achieved with greater public understanding of the Arctic. The upcoming International Polar Year (2007-2008) will draw further attention to these linkages (National Academy of Sciences 2006).

Despite the growing global importance of the Arctic, the general public—in the United States at least—has a generally poor knowledge of the Arctic. While that public may admire the beauty of the Arctic as presented in the popular media, its basis for appreciating the Arctic as a whole is incomplete. A recent survey of U.S. primary and secondary school teachers indicated misconceptions among students in areas of polar environments and geography, including a lack of ability to distinguish between Arctic and Antarctic fauna, failure to know that Antarctica is a continent, and failure to
know that polar inclination and not Earth-Sun distance controls seasonality (McCaffrey and Lynds 2005). A survey of general geographic knowledge conducted by the National Geographic Society (2002) produced comparably weak results for world geographic knowledge among 18 to 24 year-olds internationally.

The Arctic has been in many cases reduced to a symbol and adapted to many diverse purposes; its landscape has been presented variously as primordial and pristine (for the nature lover), or as a barren waste (in support of arguments for resource extraction), or merely dramatic (as a backdrop for advertising). The popular depiction of life in the Arctic ranges from absent (again in support of resource extraction), to a landscape occupied by ‘charismatic megafauna’, either correctly (e.g. polar bears) or incorrectly (e.g. penguins). The native human presence in the Arctic is often depicted in an idealized form, detached from realities of modern life, or it may be displaced altogether by the image of the non-native visiting adventurer. The human presence associated with the industrial development of Siberia and the Far East is to a large extent neglected altogether. The combined effects of these images produces a warped perception of the Arctic and a sense of detachment—that the Arctic is part of another world, unrelated to our own.

There are, of course, abundant sources of information—literature, images, film—which depict the Arctic much more realistically and comprehensively, but these sources struggle to compete with the power and ubiquity of the popular media, and while accurate, in some cases increase the sense of detachment of the Arctic from the South. Many very popular photographic books are in print which depict the Arctic successfully from a Fine Art point of view. These books often do little, however, to establish a sense of connection between the Arctic and the South, or convey the grittier realities in many parts of the modern Arctic environment and the economic and environmental challenges facing residents of the modern Arctic. An abundance of information on Arctic environmental, social, and economic change also exists (e.g. ACIA 2004; Krupnik 2002; Robards and Alessa 2004), but is to a great degree restricted to the professional literature and is not readily accessible to a general readership. The recent scientific literature on recent changes in climate, hydrology, oceanography, and ecology is especially abundant, but efforts to convey
this knowledge to the public and carry it into policy have been strikingly unsuccessful.

A sense of detachment from the Arctic creates neglect. If the residents of the South perceive the Arctic as disconnected from their own world, they will be less likely to consider ongoing environmental changes in the Arctic as being of concern to themselves or in any significant way connected to their own activities. If the Arctic can be presented to a broad audience realistically and in a way that creates a sense of physical and cultural connection, then the dialog that must take place to understand and respond to global environmental change will be facilitated and an informed public will be better able to participate.

A Personal Perspective

I am a geophysicist by training, specializing in the physics of modern glaciers. I have spent the past 25 years working in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, primarily in Alaska but also in Greenland and the Canadian Arctic. My work has consisted of geophysical measurements on glaciers, photographic documentation of glaciers, and increasingly Fine Art photography of glaciers, Arctic landscapes, and (separately from my Arctic research) photography of architecture and the built environment. My involvement in environmental and climate change research has made me acutely aware of the sensitivity of the Arctic to environmental change and the speed at which those changes are occurring. At the same time my field studies have given me a view of portions of the Arctic and some of its residents, and that experience has created for me a strong sense of connection to the Arctic.

My scientific contributions to the body of knowledge about the Arctic are technical in nature, and are a small part of the very diverse and active international research community working to understand past, present, and future changes in Arctic climate, hydrology, and ecology. The published literature of this broad group is growing rapidly as is understanding of high-latitude environmental processes and the role of the high latitudes in global environmental change. Despite the breadth and depth of this understanding, however, it is apparent that advances in scientific knowledge of the Arctic are not being effectively conveyed to the world at large and to policy makers and participants in public dialog in particular. The scientific
community is in general very effective at disseminating information within the scientific sphere, but markedly less so within the broader public sphere. Several possible remedies for this situation exist. Outreach programs within universities and governmental scientific agencies have been successful in the past and are being developed now with specific Arctic-oriented themes, especially through the coordinated activities of the International Polar Year. These programs include teacher training, direct contact with the public via museum exhibits and public lectures, media coverage of polar science, web-based communication, and print media. Efforts to educate and inform must be accompanied by efforts to motivate learning, however, and for this reason I propose a project to present the Arctic, though photography, in a way intended to create a physical and cultural connection between the Arctic and the South.

A Plan to Represent the Arctic and its Connections to the South
Greater efforts can be made to convey to a broad public audience the modern human aspects of the Arctic, and in particular the size and diversity of its culture and economy and the sensitivity of the Arctic to environmental change. I propose to work toward this goal through photography of the built environment of the circumpolar Arctic and a discussion of the interactions visible there between human activity and environmental change. The final products of this effort are to be a book and traveling exhibit of photography with accompanying commentary intended for a general audience not already familiar with Arctic issues. Its purpose is to create visual and emotional connections between the world of the Arctic and the world to the south where political and economic decisions are made and environmental forcings, which have strong influences on the Arctic, originate. The content is principally photographic, but themes dealing with environmental sciences, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, and history will also strengthen the project. The overall effort is designed to create a detailed but strong vision of the Arctic and Arctic communities as they exist today, and to use this vision to foster a stronger public awareness of the modern Arctic and a sense of connection between the South and the people and environment of the Arctic.

The creation of this connection between two large, physically and culturally diverse parts of the world is a challenging task. The final product—a
book together with related materials—must have simple and clearly defined goals. These goals include the following:

1. Convey to the audience the geographic connections between the Arctic and the South. Visually trace routes leading from population centers in the South to population centers and distinctive locations in the Arctic. This goal acts to dispel the sense that the Arctic is an arbitrarily distant and remote place.

2. Convey the fact that people live in the Arctic, and some sense of the experience of living in the Arctic. This goal acts to dispel the misconceptions of the Arctic as being either uninhabited by people or inhabited only by media-produced stereotypes.

3. Convey the presence of the arctic environment in arctic life. The human presence in the Arctic—buildings and roads, the use of local resources, the importation of non-local resources—shapes the landscape, and its residents alike. The built environment is an integrated response to economic, environmental, and human influences, and carries a powerful implicit message when viewed carefully.

4. Convey arctic change. Changes in the built environment of the Arctic are a physical expression of the human impacts of environmental change, and their presentation in images may be a more compelling demonstration of that change than listings of the quantitative measures of change.

5. Show the Arctic as it is. This project cannot be completed successfully if it is aimed toward a pre-determined outcome, either visually or in terms of what effect the project will ultimately have on the details of the public perception of the Arctic. The ultimate purpose is to inform public awareness and dialog, not to control it.

The plan presented here is ambitious and its execution will be a complex and time consuming effort. Funds will be sought to support the logistical side of the plan, but equally important are the establishment of connections
to particular communities through the Arctic where this study might take place, and the development of relationships to local communities through which information can be shared and permissions sought to carry out the study’s goals. This is an effort among people who are widely scattered geographically and culturally, and who have widely different experiences and perspectives. For this I welcome the participation of interested persons throughout the Arctic, and seek their advice, local knowledge, expertise, and benefit of their commitment to the future of the Arctic and its relation to the world as a whole.

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Of Whales and Men: Images of Iceland and the North Atlantic in Contemporary Whaling Politics¹

Karen Oslund

Images of Timeless, Remote Islands
In the history of foreign images of Iceland, the picture of the island as a remote and strange place has a long tradition (Sumarlíði Ísleifsson 1996). In the ancient Greek texts, such as Ptolemy’s Geography from the 2nd century C.E., the imaginary Thule was often located in Icelandic latitudes, with all the accompanying associations of frost and darkness. In the 18th century, Uno von Troil—a participant on Sir Joseph Banks’ 1772 expedition to Iceland and a student of Linnaeus who later became bishop of Uppsala—wrote of the “new perspectives on nature” as one of the attractions that would bring the explorer to Iceland, nature which he imagined would differ greatly from that of his native Sweden (von Troil 1777, p. 49). Even in modern times, neither the increased speed of technologies of travel nor the modernization and globalization processes have entirely dispelled this

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image of Iceland as a place apart from the modern world. In the 1998 memoir *Summer at Little Lava*, the American writer Charles Fergus goes to Iceland in order to come to terms with the murder of his mother in central Pennsylvania. He writes that he has decided to go to Iceland out of a need to “migrate” to a place “further from the known world, closer to the earth’s conceptual rim, to find a truly fugitive setting. Iceland, to my mind, was itself an outermost house of a Western world” (Fergus 1998, p. 11). The Iceland of Fergus’ mind is remote, an escape from the cares of home—despite the fact that all he would have to do to get there is drive a few hours south to the Baltimore/Washington International Airport and take a direct flight lasting about five hours to Keflavik.

This image of Iceland as a remote and isolated place has historically often been linked to another, related trope: Iceland as a museum or a storehouse of history. This image has also been remarkably durable through the centuries of foreign travel to Iceland and has been used in many different intellectual and cultural circles, including saga scholars, historians, and natural scientists. The other attraction that brings von Troil to Iceland at the end of the 18th century is not the nature outside him, but the past within him: his notion that Iceland would be a place where “many traces of our ancient language still existed” (von Troil 1777, p. 49). 19th-century saga scholars as well frequently regarded Iceland as a place where medieval literature and history had been preserved in a pure and unaltered form, through traditions such as the *kvöldvaka*, when the sagas were read out loud in ordinary households during the winter nights. Sumarlöð Ísleifsson has pointed out the popularity of pictures of the *kvöldvaka* in foreign books on Iceland, even though the details of the 19th-century Icelandic houses pictured were often inaccurate (1996, pp. 193 and 195). The image, however, reiterated and re-emphasized well-known “facts” about 19th-century Iceland: it was a land of simple farmers who revered and treasured their past and traditions, represented by their intimate familiarity with the saga literature.

Historically, these two images have been conceptually intertwined with each other as logically and necessarily related. Because Iceland was remote, processes of change and modernization came only slowly, if at all, and had only limited impact, compared to other parts of the world. Icelandic remoteness determined and conditioned its timelessness. This assumption, I should emphasize, was rarely articulated directly by foreign travelers to
Iceland; nevertheless, it was implicit in the views of those who viewed the island as a type of refuge or escape from the modern world, as Fergus does in the passage quoted above. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that the entanglement of these images is not unique to Iceland; it is a rather common way in which islands have been viewed in the Western imagination. John Gillis has shown that many different islands have been described in Western sources in very similar ways—as remote and timeless—even if these descriptions do not match geographical realities (Gillis 2004, see also Beer 1998). There is, of course, a particularly Icelandic coloring to this image through such details as the sagas, but the outlines of the picture are well-traced for many islands.

These dual images of Iceland—images which are often more perceived than actual—are more than just literary tropes, however. They also function and affect political and cultural discussions concerning Iceland and Iceland’s positioning in global politics. The remoteness and timelessness of Iceland is not only a tourist fantasy (although it is that as well), but also an image that has real currency in political discussions that affect the lives of Icelanders and foreign relationships with Iceland. This paper seeks to demonstrate how the images of Iceland and the North Atlantic as distant and developmentally-static places functions in contemporary Icelandic and North Atlantic whaling politics. Whaling politics, as I define it here, began with protests at the International Whaling Commission’s (IWC) meetings during the 1970s (leading up to the IWC’s ban on commercial whaling in 1985) and have been reignited in recent years with Iceland’s resumption of scientific whaling in August, 2003 and the capture of a fin whale under the reopened commercial whaling program in October, 2006. In order to promote their arguments about environmental ethics and human-animal relationships, both the opponents and the supporters of North Atlantic whaling have drawn on these dual images of Iceland. Not surprisingly, however, they have stressed different aspects and periods of Icelandic and North Atlantic history and geography in doing so.

Blood-Thirsty Vikings or Indigenous Whalers?

In examining the North Atlantic whaling debates from the 1970s to the present, one of the important motifs has been the “Viking” image. In Western culture, the Viking image has historically been used both positively
and negatively. Vikings have been represented as brave and courageous and morally-upright, but also negatively as blood-thirsty, savage, and barbaric (Wawn 2000). To a certain degree, the Viking image has been used in both its positive and negative sense in discussions of North Atlantic whaling; the negative aspects of this image, however, have tended to dominate. For example, the Lonely Planet’s 1997 guide to the North Atlantic (covering Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands) described pilot whales as “victims” of “bloody massacres” in the Faroes, a tradition “carried over from the Viking days” (Swaney 1997, p. 532 and 535). This characterization casts the timelessness of the North Atlantic in a negative light, placing it in contrast to modern people, who are humane and civilized and have no need to kill and eat whales. Although more recent travel guides have tended to avoid such judgmental language, Vikings have become a standard reference in discussions of North Atlantic whaling. The Associated Press report on the October 2006 Icelandic fin whale hunt explained that “Icelanders have been hunting whales since the days of the Vikings” (October 23, 2006), even though most histories of Icelandic whaling do not count the occasional consumption of stranded whales during the Middle Ages as a “hunt.” More conventionally, the history of whaling around Iceland begins with Basque whaling in the late medieval and early modern period and dates “Icelandic whaling” to the establishment of Icelandic companies in 1935 (Einarsson 1987).

Defenders of whaling in the North Atlantic also frequently draw upon images of the past in their rhetoric. In contrast with the image of the “barbaric” past placed in moral contrast with the modern, “civilized” world, the defenders generally argue that the historic traditions of North Atlantic whaling justify its continuance. In this narrative, there is no break between the “traditional past” and the “modern present,” but a continual, timeless tradition. The website of the World Council of Whalers, for example, claims that, “For several thousand years, according to archeological...”

2 This regional guide appears to have been discontinued by Lonely Planet, and is replaced by an Iceland guide, Scandinavian Europe (including Iceland and the Faroes), and Greenland and the Arctic. The most recent Scandinavian Europe (Paul Harding et. al. 2002) gives a more favorable account of the Faroese whale hunt (p. 107), although the Iceland guide (Paul Harding and Joe Bindloss 2004) is quite critical of Iceland’s 2003 hunt. As of this writing (October 2006), it is too early to say how the resumed Icelandic commercial whale hunt will be portrayed in tourist literature.
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Evidence, and into the present, Norway has been a whaling nation, which makes it one of the oldest whaling cultures in the world” (accessed October 2006). By focusing on the distant past, the 19th-century history of Norwegian whaling—including the development of the harpoon gun and the industrialization of whaling, and the effect of these developments on whale populations worldwide (Tønnessen and Johnsen 1982)—is entirely elided. Rather, other “traditional” aspects of North Atlantic whaling are stressed in this presentation, for example the division of pilot whale meat in the Faroe Islands by the community, and the non-commercial nature of Faroese whaling. Thus, the whalers of the North Atlantic are cast in the role of an indigenous people in this rhetoric, as people who actually live in the past (other terms used almost synonymously with “indigenous” in this context include “coastal communities,” “traditional cultures,” “remote communities,” and “artisanal whalers”). Their use of whale meat is therefore ethically acceptable, even for most anti-whaling organizations. Even pro-whaling presentations which show more nuanced attention to historical detail frequently incorporate references to North Atlantic whaling as “traditional.” For example, the Icelandic Ministry of Fisheries, in announcing the Icelandic resumption of what it calls “sustainable whaling,” issued a press release in the format of “questions and answers about whaling.” In answer to the question, “Does Iceland have a long whaling history?,” the Ministry replied:

Utilisation of whale resources has been a traditional part of Iceland’s history, providing an important dietary component

1 There is an anti-whaling reply to this argument, also engaging with the language of modernity and tradition. This formulation usually runs that the Faroe Islanders (for example), are a modern people, who have adopted a modern lifestyle, and therefore relinquished their right to whales when they picked up their cellular phones. If the Faroe Islanders were willing to revert to a traditional life and abandon modernity—usually represented by some symbolic piece of technology or material culture such as housing or clothing—then their consumption of whales would also be ethically defensible. For formulations of this argument, see the letters quoted in Nauerby 1996, pp. 162-163. This position, with specific reference to Makah whaling in the Pacific Northwest, is criticized by Dark 1999, also by Lynge 1992 and Wenzel 1993. For some anti-whaling groups, even whaling by indigenous peoples is ethically unacceptable and should be eliminated (Personal communication of Paul Watson, founder of the Sea Shepherd Conversation Society, with the author, July 2004).
throughout the ages. Long before any international agreements on whale conservation the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi) banned all whaling in 1915, after a period of overexploitation from foreign land-stations in Iceland during the period 1883-1915. (accessed October 17, 2006)

Although the Ministry did not attempt to date Icelandic whaling back to the “Viking days,” or to claim that “sustainable whaling” constitutes an “indigenous practice,” it still situated Icelandic whaling historically as “traditional” and identified the Alþingi as an institution of whale protection.

We can see in these discussions that the various parties in the whaling debates, although they disagree on the ethics of whaling and the scientific evidence about the North Atlantic whale populations, nevertheless share a common image of Iceland and the North Atlantic. Both the pro- and anti-whaling positions use the image of a remote and timeless place to situate whaling as a tradition from the past, and argue that whaling is being practiced there today because the North Atlantic preserves the traditions of the past in the same way that it preserved the literature of the sagas or the ballads of the Faroe Islands. Whaling politics maintains an image of the North Atlantic as a developmentally-static and an a-modern place—although this is meant in the positive sense for the one side and the negative sense for the other. The aspects and historical period invoked by the rhetoric of each side is different: a “Viking” past characterized by a bloody hunt, or a simpler past world of “traditional” peoples who lived in harmony with nature and were careful stewards of natural resources.

This image of Iceland and the North Atlantic as it is used within whaling politics is, like the image of remote and timeless island discussed in the first part of this paper, not unique to the North Atlantic. The terms of contemporary whaling politics worldwide were to some degree set in place by the IWC’s 1985 moratorium on commercial whaling. This included the establishment of the so-called “indigenous rights exemption,” for “aboriginal subsistence whaling,” which was defined as:

whaling for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal, indigenous, or native peoples
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who share strong community, familial, or social, and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and the use of whales (IWC 1981).

The philosophical basis for this regulatory structure—which currently permits whaling by the Greenlanders and the Makah peoples of the Pacific Northwest, among others—grew out of the larger cultural politics of an environmental movement which glamorized the ideal of the “ecological Indian” (Krech 1999) who did not exploit natural resources by over-fishing and hunting. Although the accuracy of this image has often been called into question (ibid.), it has been nevertheless institutionalized in the IWC’s regulations. This structure, in addition to the desire to capture the sympathy of an environmentally-conscious international public, tends to generate an interest on the part of pro-whaling peoples in claiming that their practices are “ecological,” “sustainable,” and “traditional.” In the literature of groups such as the World Council of Whalers, these claims are made on a global scale, and are not simply localized to Iceland and the North Atlantic countries.

New Projections of Old Images

It is not my intention to evaluate the truth of these claims in general or to take a position on Icelandic and North Atlantic whaling. Rather, I simply want to point out the way in which North Atlantic whaling politics has become embedded in a history of images. Clearly many aspects of these images of the North Atlantic past are highly subjective and have the potential to be politically manipulated. Viking imagery, for example, emerges from 19th-century European Romanticism and Gothicism, and the “Ecological Indian” finds its roots in the “noble savage” of the European Enlightenment. Both belong properly to the history of images, and cannot be in themselves ethical justifications for anything. When they are used by the respective sides in 21st-century whaling debates, however, their effect is similar. Both the images “medieval”/“Viking” on the one hand and “traditional”/“indigenous” on the other create a distance between the speaker and the place that is spoken about, a distance both geographical and temporal. North Atlantic whaling politics thus contributes to the image of Iceland and the North Atlantic as being remote and timeless. In fact,
the whaling debates play a dual role within a discourse of images of the North Atlantic. Not only does the whaling debate—albeit in a small way—contribute to the image of a distant North Atlantic, what is perhaps even more significant is that both sides of the whaling debate gain rhetorical power by placing their images of whaling within a context of previously-established images of the North Atlantic. The widely-held idea that North Atlantic whaling is a relic of the Viking Age is believable because the idea of the North Atlantic as a museum where the traditions of a previous time are preserved had already been established. This was part of the “living tradition” of Iceland that attracted so many foreign visitors to the “saga island” in the 19th century. The images and rhetoric of 21st-century whaling politics fits quite well into this 19th-century story about the North Atlantic.

If the whaling debates and their images about the North Atlantic past and present re-enforces one narrative, the story that it tends to hide is, of course, also very significant. The overarching narrative of North Atlantic whaling politics elides, for example, that many citizens of North Atlantic whaling nations have historically opposed whaling themselves and continue to do so, often on the very same grounds that foreigners do. As early as 1979, the Icelandic nature protection group, Skuld, protested against whaling in Reykjavik in that year and the following one (Morgunblaðið 1980, p. 30). Skuld and its sympathizers pointed out itself that killing whales was anti-modern, as well as unnecessary, now that that scientific research had made humans aware of the intelligent and sympathetic nature of whales (Ingvar Agnarsson 1983). Furthermore, throughout the period of these debates a significant minority of Icelanders have consistently opposed Icelandic whaling. The exact figure naturally differs depending on the current mood and events and how the question is asked, but generally tends to be not less than 20% of Icelanders opposing whaling, based on a mixture of philosophical and practical reasons. Recently, much of the latter has centered on the potential for a negative impact from Icelandic whaling on tourism and whale watching tours (Ásbjörn Björgvinsson 2006; see also Walk 2005).

The anthropologist Anne Brydon has argued that support for whaling within Iceland is based on principles of national sovereignty and the defense of local or regional interests against international institutions such as the IWC, rather than deep cultural traditions or economic interests (Brydon
1996, see also the Icelandic Ministry of Fisheries 2006). In so far as this defense is a response to international environmentalist organizations such as Greenpeace and their opposition to whaling during the 1980s, the recent discourse of whaling from both sides has tended to blur the differences between whaling practices in different parts of the North Atlantic. Greenlandic Inuit, northern Norwegians, Icelanders, and Faroe Islanders all have their own separate histories of human-whale relations, including not only hunting the animals, but also folkloric or symbolic relations with them (Oslund 2004). These differences, however, tend to be overlooked in unnuanced discussions that only admit categories such as “indigenous” or “barbaric.” In this respect, the popular discussion of whaling is supported by the current IWC regulations, which regulate and manage not only whales, and the tools/techniques of hunting them, but also the identity of peoples, and whether they are classified as “Western” or “indigenous.” Thus, the larger narrative about a remote and timeless place where whaling is practiced overlooks many specific details of whaling history and practices in the North Atlantic in order to fit the discussion into a global story about “indigenous peoples” and the international regulatory apparatus.

This paper has sought to outline how current debates over North Atlantic whaling have shaped images of Iceland and the other North Atlantic countries, and how they have grown out of historical images of the region. I have tried to briefly illustrate how these contradictory and yet also complementary images of the North Atlantic function in a case study. My larger point, to refer to the question posed by Sumarlöð Íslófsson’s paper at the “Images of the North” conference, is that images do indeed have impact. They are not just a topic of literary studies, or interesting ideas that appear in books read by a few members of the educated elite. These images of Iceland and the North Atlantic have leaked out of the 19th-century texts read by European saga enthusiasts, and now, in the 21st century, they have to do with life and death struggles—at least, with someone’s life and death. Images are worth attending to, and so, too, is the history and the construction of these images, as they have remarkable staying power and can be revitalized to reflect new and changing debates and issues. In this respect the history of Icelandic whaling—however far back one might date actual whale hunting—indeed can be said to go back to the days of distant Thule.
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For some two thousand years, Thule marked the ultimate North, an unknown region where a different kind of people lived. In the early Middle Ages, it became located in Iceland, which was as far north as imagination would allow people to live. For Knud Rasmussen, the Danish polar explorer (1879-1933), Thule was where the legendary Polar Eskimos lived, and the destination of his first expeditions to affirm their existence, embracing them as *Nye Mennesker* ("New People"), as the title of his first book went.

Knud Rasmussen established and named Thule station, thus definitively locating Thule in geography. Locating Thule is not the main interest of this paper, but rather the entanglement of real and mythical mappings of the North, not only in the works of Knud Rasmussen, but also in Polar exploration in general. In the process of incorporating new people into the image of an empty and uninhabitable North, a new arena for scientific and political action was set that relied on both the maps and the metaphors of *Ultima Thule*.

If anthropology in general grew out of early expeditions (see e.g. Fabian 2000), these always had a special flavour in the Arctic, forever marking the ethnographic renderings by the original challenge of stretching the limits of...
the world. In 1911, Fridtjof Nansen, himself a major player in polar exploration (1861–1930), asserted:

[From first to last the history of polar exploration is a single mighty manifestation of the power of the unknown over the mind of man, perhaps greater and more evident than in any other phase of human life. Nowhere else have we won our way more slowly, nowhere else has every new step cost so much trouble, so many privations and sufferings, and certainly nowhere have the resulting discoveries promised fewer material advantages – and nevertheless, new forces have always been found to carry the attack further, to stretch once more the limits of the world. (Nansen 1911, vol. I, p. 4)]

The perceived difficulty in penetrating the frozen North accounts for much of the heroics that sticks to Arctic exploration. The less-than-hospitable seas and shores stopped many explorers in mid-step, as happened to the ill-fated expedition (1845) of “Franklin and his gallant crew”, now a literary image of the Canadian North (Atwood 2004). Nansen fared better, not least on account of his “sportsman’s method” in polar exploration, which not only referred to his skiing but also to the careful selection of a small but well trained group of participants (Huntford 1997, p. 131). Knud Rasmussen continued in Nansen’s tracks also in this respect (Hastrup 2006).

Knud Rasmussen is one of the protagonists in this paper, including his relations to the Polar Eskimos (as he called the Inuit group at Smith Sound) and to mythical Thule. Yet, his story is replete with other people, whose actions and narratives filter into Rasmussen’s own, and his perception of Thule is redolent with both past and contemporary images of this place, north of and beyond the frontiers of the known world. Through my brief investigation of his particular story, I want to draw attention to the role played by previous imaginations in ethno graphic discovery, and to contribute to an understanding of the entanglement of maps and metaphors in the perception of the world—and of its limits.
Ultima Thule: The Poetics of Place

Tracing “Thule” as a concept for the ultimate North means engaging with particular horizons, notably the boundary between known and unknown worlds. People are constantly concerned with both openness and closure in their construction of horizons, which determines what they experience and how it is interpreted (Crapanzano 2004). For Fridtjof Nansen, the ‘call of the unknown’ was essential in human development. When in 1925 he was appointed Lord Rector of St. Andrews University in Scotland, he gave a talk to the students in which he spoke of courage and the spirit of adventure, and he continued:

It is our perpetual yearning to overcome difficulties and dangers, to see hidden things, to penetrate into the regions outside our beaten track—it is the call of the unknown—the longing for the land of Beyond, the divine force deeply rooted in the soul of man which drove the first hunters out into new regions—the mainspring perhaps of our greatest actions—of winged human thought knowing no bounds to its freedom. (Nansen 1927, p. 20)

“The longing for the land of Beyond”: it anything, Thule was such a place. Since classical times, Thule marked the imaginative horizon of the unknown North, and for some it inspired a distinct call. Among the pioneers was Pytheas of Massalia who in the 3rd century B.C. went further north than any other from the classical world. Pytheas visited the British Isles, ‘but the bold and hardy explorer does not seem to have stopped here. He continued his course northward over the ocean, and came to the uttermost region, “Thule”, which was the land of the midnight sun, “where the tropic coincides with the Arctic Circle” (Nansen 1911, vol. I, p. 53). Pytheas was an astronomer, and the most important observation he brought back was the length of the day during summer in this place, six days sail north of the Orcades, added to which was an observation of a frozen sea. The actual location of Pytheas’ Thule remains uncertain; most of Pytheas’ own observations have been lost, and are known only through slightly later, and highly critical renditions (by Pliny and Strabo among others), who were skeptical about the possibility of life that far north—considering the improbable observation of a solidly frozen ocean.
Whatever the actual geographical turning point for Pytheas, the notion of “Thule” soon took on a life of its own and was to refer to a moving and imaginary horizon that marked a boundary between a habitable and civilised South and a barely habitable land of barbarians in the far North. Perhaps the most influential source for this particular image of the North was found in Vergil’s vision of Augustus’s resurrection of the Roman Empire to which even Ultima Thule would surrender (Harbsmeier 2002, p. 37). In Seneca’s Medea (1st century), the Chorus comments on the future possibilities of the Argonauts, and says that when the world grows older the ocean will open and new continents will be disclosed, and Thule will no longer be the farthest of lands.

In antiquity, Thule provided the imaginary horizon of human life, where unknown people lived in strange ways. Space does not permit me to go further into this, and I shall leave antiquity by giving the word to Nansen:

[A]t the close of antiquity the lands and seas of the North still lie in the mists of the unknown. Many indications point to constant communication with the North, and now and again vague pieces of information have reached the learned world. Occasionally, indeed, the clouds lift a little, and we get a glimpse of great countries, a whole new world in the North, but then they sink again and the vision fades like a dream of fairyland.

(Nansen 1911, vol. I, p. 124)

In the early Middle Ages, the northern horizon moved as people from the British Isles and Scandinavia began travelling longer distances at sea. Around 825, Thule appears in a work by the Irish monk Dīcuil (Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae), and given the context, there is no doubt that it refers to Iceland—like it would for Adam of Bremen and Saxo Grammaticus a little later. Some authors have wanted to project this back onto Pytheas’ Thule (e.g. Stefánsson 1942), but this is highly unlikely, given that Pytheas speaks of a people trashing and eating oats, among other things. So far, there is no archaeological evidence of human presence in Iceland at Pytheas’ time.

The Icelanders themselves were to push the frontier even further and, consequently, to relocate the barbarians. By their voyages to Greenland, and to Markland and Wineland, they had met some truly savage people, the
skrælingar; the etymology is contested, but the word may point to either a weakness or to a howling creature. The earliest source is Islendingabók (“The Book of the Icelanders”) written by Ari inn fróði between 1122 and 1133. He relates how the (Icelandic) Greenlanders had found people in Wineland, whom they called Skraelings (Benediktsson ed. 1968, pp. 13-14). It is unclear whether at this time, the Skraelings were Indians or Eskimos, but later references in the Old Icelandic literature are unambiguous in their pointing to the Eskimos. Thus when the (Greenlandic) Norsemen went hunting for seal and walrus at Norðsettr (the northernmost hunting grounds on the western coat of Greenland) they would see traces of settlements and also meet the ‘small people’ of Skraelings. In Eiríks saga rauða (“The Saga of Eric the Red”), the Skraelings are described thus: Þær væru svartir menn ock illiligir ok hófði till hár á hófði; their væru mjök eyggið ok breiði í kinnum / “They were black and ferocious men, who had wiry hair on their heads; they had big eyes and broad cheeks” (Sveinsson and Þorðarson, 1935, p. 227). The Norse observers were not too pleased by what they saw, and in some other sources, the Skraelings are described as trolls. Clearly, the farthest North was populated by savages, and even though the name Thule is not found in the old Icelandic sources, the horizon of the civilised world stopped short of the Eskimos.

The history of Thule does not stop here, of course. A few more images will take us to the time of actual polar exploration and Knud Rasmussen. When King Charles V of Spain set out to conquer the New World, he took Vergil’s Tibi serviat ultima Thule as his motto (Harbsmeier 2002, p. 37). His quest did not take him north, but others went there and warned their compatriots. Jean Malaurie, who went to the northernmost part of Greenland in the 1950s, thus quotes a certain Pierre Bertius, cosmographer of the Roy Trés-Chrestien, Louis XIV, who wrote in 1618:

The cold is indomitable . . . and . . . it kills in number. Winter lasts nine months without rain . . . The richest protect themselves . . . by fire; others by rubbing their feet and others by the warmth of the caves in this earth . . . All this land is full of cruel bears with which the inhabitants wage continual war. There are also . . . if what they say is true – unicorns. They hold that there are men called pygmies . . . Pygmies have, it appears, a human form,
hairy to the tips of the fingers, bearded to the knees, but brutish, without speech or reason, hissing in the manner of geese.
(quoted in Malaurie 1956, p. 30)

This was what came to Malaurie’s mind—according to himself—when he was about to anchor at Thule, where he was to work in the area that had then been definitively named by Knud Rasmussen (in 1910). I shall return to the naming and claiming of Thule below, but first I shall have Edgar Allen Poe have his say on Thule as the final indication of the mythical portents of Ultima Thule. In his poem *Dream-Land* from 1844, the first verse goes like this (Poe 1989, p. 70):

By a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only,
Where an Eidolon, named Night,
On a black throne reigns upright,
I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule—
from a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,
Out of space—out of time.

*The Polar Eskimos: People and Politics*

The poetical Thule was to be located in both space and time around 1900, when polar exploration was at its height. Yet, it still carried a heavy mythical load of strangeness. This is evident for instance in the book published in 1905 by Knud Rasmussen, in which he relates his encounter with the ‘new people’ of the Cape York area of northernmost Greenland. In the preface, he writes:

When I was a child I used often to hear an old Greenlandic woman tell how, far away North, at the end of the world, there lived a people who dressed in bearskins and ate raw flesh.

Their country was always shot in by ice, and the daylight never reached over the tops of their high fjelds.

Whoever wished to go there, must travel with the South wind, right up to the Lord of the wild northern gales.

(Rasmussen 1908:xix)
Like Nansen, Knud Rasmussen was driven by a wish to discover unknown people, and by referring to the old woman’s tale—as told to himself—he makes it part of his own story. It was he (and his fellow travelers) who named these people Polar Eskimos, and in that sense, he discovered and defined them in one move. Yet, the tiny Cape York Eskimo population (also sometimes referred to as Smith Sound Eskimos) at Cape York was not really unknown to Westerners when Rasmussen arrived in 1903.

The earliest documented encounter with this isolated people took place in August 1818, with the Scotsman John Ross’ voyage of discovery on behalf of the British Admiralty (Ross 1819). The aim was not to discover a people but hopefully to discover a North-West passage. The latter did not succeed, but, inadvertently, the former did in the form of an Eskimo people: the Arctic Highlanders, as Ross reverently called them. Soon others were to follow Ross northwards, but it was not until Robert Peary’s first expedition (1891-1892) that prolonged contact was made. A member of that expedition, the Norwegian Eivind Astrup, wrote extensively about the people, ‘the Eskimos at Smith Sound’, their customs and their intelligence. His book was published first in Norwegian, with a title meaning “Among the Neighbours of the North Pole” (Astrup 1895), far North, indeed. The ‘thickness’ of his ethnographic description far exceeds Ross’, and on the whole the Smith Sound Eskimos were relatively well known by the turn of the century.

Yet, when Knud Rasmussen published his account in 1905, he certainly under-communicated the fact that others had been there before him. Even so, it is evident that earlier accounts and images of Thule weave themselves into his imageries and new stories:

Never in my life have I felt myself to be in such wild, unaccustomed surroundings, never so far, so very far from home, as when I stood in the midst of the tribe of noisy Polar Eskimos on the beach of Agpat. . . .

. . . like a mountain slide, the whole swarm rushed down to the shore, where we had pulled up – a few old grey-haired men and stiff-jointed old crones, young men and women, children who could barely toddle, all dressed alike in fox and bear-skin furs, which create such an extraordinarily barbaric first impres-
sion. Some came with long knives in their hands, with blood-stained arms and upturned sleeves, having been in the midst of flaying operations when we arrived, and all this produced a very savage effect; at the moment it was difficult to believe that these “savages,” “the neighbours of the North Pole,” as Astrup called them, were ever likely to become one’s good, warm friends. (Rasmussen 1908, pp. 9-10)

They did become friends, however, and Rasmussen’s book provides an extensive record of their life-ways and narratives. In his diary, Knud Rasmussen speculates about how to present them, and not least how to find a title for his book that may convey how “the Polar Eskimos are a free people, living in an indisputably free country, outside of any law” (ibid.).

All the way through the ‘first’ encounters with the Polar Eskimos, there are echoes of ancient images of “the land of Beyond” and its strange people. These people live more northerly than anyone, where it seems hardly possible. Astrup sums it up neatly:

Our small merry brethren in the Arctic regions represent an extremity of the human race; an insignificant section of it, who take up the battle of existence in regions which to our eyes offer poor prospects for life’s sustenance, and where icy death would seem to reign supreme. (Astrup 1898, p. 48).

Wildness, merriness, lawlessness, and freedom—all merge into a sustained image of the frozen life beyond.

Within this image there was room for modern considerations of the far North as an economic asset, however. After his own expeditions, Knud Rasmussen urged the Danish government to take action in a region that was increasingly contested between Danes, Norwegians and Americans. The Danish government hesitated, and Knud Rasmussen took it upon himself to, first, establish a mission (in 1909), and next, a trade station in North Star Bay. He organized a private society, called the Thule Committee, and found financial support from well-to-do Danes that could supplement a personal loan of a considerable amount. This enabled him, in August 1910, to buy and to inaugurate “Cape York Station Thule”. The aim of Thule Station
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(in daily parlance) was threefold: it should open northern Greenland for Danish colonisation, it should support scientific expeditions that would do research on Eskimo culture within and outside of Greenland, and it should give the Polar Eskimos access to foreign goods and, conversely, serve to export local goods, mainly fur (Sand 1935, p. 385). The trade station became a major economic success. It financed the better part of Knud Rasmussen’s seven Thule expeditions, as well as a local health clinic, a new church, a vicarage and so forth. When Peary returned from the North Pole in 1909 and saw the Danish flag hoisted at Umánaq, he allegedly was so baffled that he forgot to navigate and ran his vessel aground (ibid.). Peary never came again.

What is most significant in the present context is the fact that Thule had finally found its place on the world map. Knud Rasmussen called it Thule with reference to the “ancient Greek expression for the farthest, used also by Goethe in the poem about the last kings of Thule” (Taagholt 2002, p. 43). Whether Knud Rasmussen himself actually referred to Goethe is unclear; Goethe never actually wrote a poem by that name, even if in Faustus he once refers to ein König in Thule. Probably, Taagholt implicitly refers to the work about the Polar Eskimos entitled The Last Kings of Thule by Jean Malaurie (1956), which certainly did transform Goethe’s lyrical image to ethnographic description, once again testifying to the intertextuality of any narration.

Going back to the trade station at Thule, it was clearly considered the northernmost human habitation; its people were of a particular kind, and for some time yet, they were to live outside of national law. In 1929 a special Thule law was made, defining procedures for decision-making and retributive practices. The preamble said that as the “owner” of Thule Station, Knud Rasmussen wanted to make sure that the Eskimo tribe like other peoples all over the world could take part in decisions made in the interest of the community (see Harhoff 2000). The Danish state took over the administration of Thule in 1937 (four years after Knud Rasmussen’s death), but the Thule law was in force until 1969—underscoring the fact that Thule was still somehow beyond ordinary national law.

By his deeds, Knud Rasmussen took his ownership to a higher level, when in 1933 he testified at the International Court in Hague when the legitimacy of Danish rule in all of Greenland was challenged by Norway. By appealing to his native background and his extensive knowledge of the
diverse communities of Greenland as a whole, he talked the victory home to Denmark. He, Knud Rasmussen, just knew that they were one people, indivisible (Rasmussen in Søby 1983).

One would have thought that by then the mythical images of the people of Thule, the land just beyond the horizon, would finally give way to more realistic depictions, and not least to an acknowledgement of the new people as part of human society, instead of trolls or hairy midgets. Yet, the legend continued far beyond Knud Rasmussen, as testified to by the above-mentioned Jean Malaurie who embarked on the “French Geographical Mission to Thule” in 1950-51 and whose prologue to The Last Kings of Thule contains the following passage:

Thule. Polar Eskimos. During my previous visits to Greenland I had learned that primitive Eskimos lived in the north, very far north, near to a mysterious Thule. No Frenchman, I believe, had lived among them. I had felt something of the depth of character of the mixed people to the South of Greenland, and this made me want — each year more fervently — to go up to the sources, to still higher latitudes. Here, I was told, there lived a few people untouched by civilisation. (Malaurie 1956, p. 15)

The echo from Knud Rasmussen’s work is manifest, and in some sense Malaurie writes against better knowledge here; he was perfectly aware of the existence of the Thule station and familiar with Knud Rasmussen’s works. But even so, Malaurie continues and extends the received legend of Ultima Thule, beyond civilisation — where no Frenchmen had lived! The measure of civilisation may have shrunk, but the imagery is the same as before. Like others before him, Malaurie also began his narrative by describing the passage in some detail, adding a sense of time to the length of the journey, and, not least, narratively building up to the arrival story, in the course of which “Thule, legendary, remote Thule” becomes a reality (Malaurie 1956, pp. 29-30).

Bursting into a Latin rendering of Seneca’s poetical image at the sight of Thule, Malaurie testifies to the importance of ancestral visions, and the mutual influence of maps and metaphors. This also goes for his first assessment of the people; having anchored in Umánaq Bay, he and his fellow
passengers hear greetings, and “muffled in our sweaters we ran to the rails. The ship was surrounded by a dozen kayaks, their occupants staring at us. They were small, with yellow flat faces, lighted by enigmatic smiles, and they examined the season’s human cargo, awaiting their moment” (Malaurie 1956, p. 30). Small and enigmatic, the strange people are here depicted like predators in wait for their prey; the last kings of Thule are not less alien than Goethe’s poetical king longing for a golden reward.

A less-than-golden moment awaited the real Thule people. In 1953, the population was moved from Umánaq (Thule) to Qaanaaq, because of the establishment of the (American) Thule Airbase (see Gilberg 1977, Taagholt 2002). Since then they have asked for compensation from the Danish state, who have not abided, however, and recently the Thule people lost their case at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Their (forced) removal from Thule was not seen as a violation of their rights, nor did it require any restorative measure from the state of Denmark in the eyes of international law. In 1953, when the people from Umanaq were moved, 51 persons settled in Qaanaaq: 18 men, 11 women and 22 children. Today there are about 600 people living there, in the distant shadow of the Thule Airbase, certainly with access to modern goods but no longer to Thule itself.

Maps and Metaphors: The Cartographic Illusion

The history of Thule—first as a metaphor for a distant land in the North and more recently as a site on the map of Greenland—is a revealing case of the interpenetration of maps and metaphors. In this case the metaphor preceded the map; or, in a different phrasing, an illusion drove the explorers to the limit. As Nansen had it:

The history of arctic discovery shows how the development of the human race has always been borne along by great illusions. Just as Columbus’s discovery of the West Indies was due to a gross error of calculation, so it was the fabled isle of Brazil that drew Cabot out on his voyage, when he found North America. It was the fantastic illusions of open polar seas and of passages to the riches of Cathay beyond the ice that drove men back there in spite of one failure after another; and little by little the
polar regions were explored. Every complete devotion to an idea yields some profit, even though it be different from that which was expected. (Nansen 1911, vol. I, p. 3)

The illusion that drove explorers to Thule was located in an ancient image of the past that had been constantly renewed through western history. From Pytheas, Vergil and Seneca, through Dicuil, Adam of Bremen and Ari inn fröði, to Goethe and German romanticism, Poe and American gothic literature, and Ross, Peary, Nansen until Knud Rasmussen, Thule was a distant land in the unknown North, where only strange people could live. Knud Rasmussen finally located Thule on the world map, but we have seen how the ancient image of Ultima Thule and its inhabitants was still at play in the work of Malaurie in the mid-20th-century, and even more recently once again summed up by him (Malaurie 1990).

The metaphor of the unknown drove explorers along, and urged them to map the blank spaces; later, the maps themselves became new metaphors as happened to Vancouver’s chartings of the Pacific coast of America (Fisher and Johnston 1993). The result of the mapping of both the place and the culture of the Polar Eskimos was as much a continuation of metaphor as it was a new map. Thule was found and situated, but the result was a "cartographic illusion" (Ingold 2000, p. 234), omitting the process by which the explorers had arrived there in the first place—including the process by which they came to imagine Thule as their goal, and the process by which they inadvertently came to represent it in particular terms. New horizons opened, but they were soon enclosed by old terms. The natural freedom of the neighbours of the North Pole, praised by many of their ‘discoverers’, became walled in by legal language and by colonial policies and economic interests.

This history of “Thule” reminds us that both maps and histories are matters of perspective, and of available imageries. In the process of vision and revision of the image of Thule, the mental map turned into a tenacious metaphor that was itself remapped every time the horizon shifted. When, finally, Knud Rasmussen located the place firmly on the map, the ancient connotations of Ultima Thule were grounded as well—for the next generations to discover for themselves. The sad ending of the story of the Dream-Land is that having been appropriated by advancing civilisation, it is once again the
land beyond reach, hostile and uninhabitable for real people. The military confinement in many ways is “out of space, out of time”. The horizon may have moved, but metaphors still inform the maps by which people now orient themselves in space. Thule is still on the edge of the world.

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Geared for the Sublime:
Mobile Images of the North

Edward H. Huijbens & Karl Benediktsson

“Nature the Way Nature Made It”

Put yourself in the place of a typical foreign visitor arriving in Iceland: she has decided to travel to the country to experience a space of pristine, sublime nature. The enduring image of the North as “nature the way nature made it” continues to do its work for Iceland’s tourist industry. Yet, immediately upon leaving the aircraft at Keflavík International Airport, the visitor senses that nature is intricately tied up with technology in contemporary Iceland, not least with travel technology. Billboards promise extraordinary experiences of nature, mediated through the technology of the so-called “superjeep”. Passing numerous exemplars of these wide-tired and muscular-looking (some might perhaps even say menacing) off-road vehicles on the 40 km stretch of dual carriageway from the airport to Reykjavík, the visitor may be forgiven for thinking that she has entered the land of the ridiculous instead of the sublime (fig. 1). Or, do the categories of the sublime and the ridiculous perhaps merge completely in this case?\(^1\)

Indeed, this particular travel technology and the travel practices enabled

\(^1\) From the website of the Iceland Tourist Board.
by it have become an important part not only of a rapidly growing tourism economy, but of the way in which Icelanders themselves relate to their country’s landscapes. Possibly nowhere in the world has 4x4 travel become so common as a leisure activity. This chapter looks at these travel practices, their history and the images engendered by them. We argue that in order to comprehend these practices one has to understand 4x4 travel in terms of affording disclosure of the landscapes of the highlands. The rhetoric we present is one of a sublime encounter that is being promoted through the superjeep, as a means of reaching nature as it was intended. We build our thoughts on Heidegger’s (1993) example of the automobile. He argued that the parts that make up the machine, as well as the labour of the factory workers, all belong to the technology of the automobile, but do not constitute its essence. For Heidegger, the frame of mind that views the world—its reserves of metal ore, its chemical structures, its human population—as raw materials for the production of automobiles approaches more closely the essence of it as being-in-the-world. We thus claim that encountering nature through and by way of the superjeep frames the encounter, much like the world itself is framed and assembled in the automobile, or in our case, the superjeep. Heidegger goes further, though. He claims that the usual urge is to think of the technology assembled in the automobile as an instrument, as a means of getting things done; he attributes this way of thinking to our understanding of causality as linear and progressive. This understanding, however, misses the automobile’s actual essence, and tends to make people think that by simply improving the automobile meaning making it better able to get things done—they will master it and solve the

2 The close yet uneasy relationship between these two concepts, implicit in the idiom “from the sublime to the ridiculous”, was brought to our attention when one of the authors (KB) presented this material at a conference in Brisbane in July 2006.
problems that accompany it. On the other hand, if modes of causality come to be understood as ways of being responsible for the arrival of things into existence, as the assemblage of the automobile, one can begin to understand that its being and assemblage has to do with the way one is oriented to the disclosure of the task at hand. In this case, the orientation is the task of getting access to the landscapes of the Icelandic highlands, couched in images of the sublime. This sublime encounter through the superjeep is thus an occasioned activity (see Laurier et al. 2002) where the jeep is not an instrument to get you ‘there’, but one that through its very assembling, maintenance and use creates the ‘there’ at each occasioned encounter.

Following this quick introduction, we next travel at breakneck speed over some vast theoretical terrain, providing a brief review of the concept of “the sublime”. An overview of its historical trajectory enables an appreciation of the varied meanings associated with this important aesthetic category. We then proceed by describing the origins of the 4x4 conversion industry which is flourishing in Iceland at present, and how it has changed character. This is a story of practical problem-solving gradually sedimenting into a technological assemblage known as the “superjeep”, which recently became available to the general public. We will argue that “the sublime” indeed continues to exert its influence, albeit in a variety of forms, in the re-imagined North of superjeep travel practices. Through the imagery and rhetoric produced about superjeep travel in the highlands, a subliminal encounter emerges: a sensory experience which props up these images, affording their disclosure.

**Imagining the Sublime**

A concept of many and varied shades of meaning, “the sublime” has a long pedigree in the history of aesthetic ideas. It is not our intention to recount or analyse its provenance in detail, as many others have already done so (e.g. Brady 2003), so a few basics will have to suffice.

In the context of aesthetics, the basic meaning of the sublime is that of a thing or natural phenomenon which is considered awe-inspiring. Two 18th-century philosophers, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, both dealt at length with the concept of the sublime and contributed to its subsequent popularity in the heyday of 19th-century Romanticism, and arguably
into the modern and late-modern era. For Burke (1987), the sublime was antithetical to the beautiful; it was above all about fear, or violent emotional response to something that was considered overwhelming. Kant (2000) likewise separates the beautiful from the sublime; whereas the former is characterised by harmonious form, the latter is found in formlessness and the ability to surpass the capacity of sense and imagination. The Kantian sublime can overwhelm the senses either through sheer magnitude or vastness, or by the force which it displays.

During the Romantic era, the sublime was elevated to the highest form of aesthetic pleasure, a pleasure that was always tinged with pain. Poets, painters and travellers increasingly sought out places of ‘wild’ grandeur and sweeping vistas, which for the Romantics became the antithesis of soulless industrial modernity. Implicit in this was a sharp distinction of nature from culture—a fact a longstanding Western tradition (cf. Glacken 1967) that was reinforced greatly in Enlightenment thought. It incidentally also fuelled the sentiments of technological progress.

Gradually, however, the form and content of the sublime experience of nature changed as modernity progressed, as Bell and Lyall (2002) have discussed in the context of tourism in New Zealand—a country that has many aspects of physical geography in common with Iceland. While early enthusiasts got their emotional kicks by travelling to high mountains and gazing up towards the mist-shrouded peaks, the sublime experience was later inverted: the traveller should scale the mountain and look down in awe. A horizontal version of the sublime—of flat expanses and apparently limitless distances—also appeared. Finally, Bell and Lyall argue, the sublime experience has to an increasing degree been accelerated, as evidenced by evermore intriguing travel options and technical contraptions available to the modern ‘nature tourist’: bungy jumping, para-gliding, heli-skiing, and so on. We have, in their words, moved “from languid and leisurely over-clothed aesthetes surveying and depicting the nineteenth-century vista, to lycra and neoprene-clad sublimity junkies hurling into the next extreme panorama” (Bell and Lyall 2002, p. 32).

Hence, technology is at the present time well and truly entangled with the notion of the sublime. This is perhaps not really all that new. Already in the 19th century, technology was creating its own form of subliminality, notably in America (Marx 1964; Nye 1996), where it engendered
an “intoxicating feeling of unlimited possibility”: the technological sublime (Marx 1964, p. 198). In particular, the new travel technology of the railroad radically changed the way in which Americans understood their own country and their place in it. Technology itself, simultaneously instead of and alongside nature, became the very object of emotional awe associated with the sublime, in an era which paradoxically put much store in human reason. This is neatly encapsulated in the words of a 19th-century commentator: “It is truly a sublime sight to behold a machine performing nearly all the functions of a rational being” (quotation in *ibid.*, p. 194).

Here we can start to see the superjeep appearing on the distant horizon. Our argument is that these twists and turns of the concept of sublimity can enable us to better appreciate the (to the outsider sometimes almost ridiculous) appeal that 4x4 vehicles some converted into superjeeps seem to have in Iceland. What Marx terms the technological sublime, which he associated with the awe-tinged fascination for technology and what it can do, we would like to expand by tying it in with the more classical notions of the sublime. We argue that this fascination allows for an appreciation of landscapes that is afforded by and through the technology itself, but nonetheless based on modern day environmental discourse drawing on notions of the sublime.

**Highland Travel Technology**

In another article about the history of 4x4 technology and associated travel practices in Iceland, Huijbens and Benediktsson (2007) have documented how these vehicles were introduced and put to use in a country lacking in roads and other traffic infrastructure. That article stops short of outlining in detail the spurt of technological innovation that led eventually to the development of the superjeep in the 1980s. In this short chapter, the intention is to pick up this thread and outline these practices to date, as well as the way in which the technology associated with 4x4 conversion has developed in the last few decades in order to underpin the notion of superjeep travel as occasioned activity. Further still, the aim is to delve into the way in which jeep conversion technology has settled into a productive capacity vested in privately owned companies with an independent portfolio. This is now a well-established industry.
The following is based on interviews taken by one of the authors (EHH) with the proprietors of 11 companies that specialise in the conversion of 4x4 vehicles into superjeeps. These individuals are for the most part around 40 years old and have been ‘hooked on’ jeeps from their early teens. In Iceland, one is able to get a driver’s licence at the age of 17 and all those interviewed got their first jeep at about that time in their lives. They all basically tell the same story: when they were entering the world of automobility in the late 70s and early 80s, the modification of their own jeeps was a domestic affair, done by themselves in their own garage. This garage work in the 80s was generally undertaken by specific groups of enthusiasts and friends, resulting in networks of people who advocated a specific method of conversion and/or specific vehicles. Knowledge about the most promising technical solutions was far from ubiquitous:

[The instigators] protected their information and experience about what to do and how, like dragons guarding a chest of gold. This was, yes, a specific cult or a group of believers (Interview HH, 13th September 2005, authors’ translation)

Some men were noted as innovators and entrepreneurs. Many of these would set up operations in their garages and do conversions for their friends and fellow ‘believers’. The technological hurdles these jeep enthusiasts were busy trying to overcome were varied. The main one though was how to drive in snow and/or wet and muddy conditions.

The initial surge of technological innovation was associated with developments in the selection of wheels. Initially, the practice of modifying 4x4 vehicles centred on experiments with rims and tires. The very first would experiment with fitting tires from the Swedish Volvo Lapplander vehicle, or even from agricultural machinery (notably manure spreaders) to ordinary jeeps. These were big balloon tires that could be deflated and inflated according to need, giving the vehicle a capacity to “float” on snow and/or mud. They were used along with some extra-large imported tires designed for 4x4 trucks. These tires were mounted on larger rims that needed to be securely fitted to the vehicle. The key attribute here is the width of the wheel. If the intention is traction at an angle or during climb, the wheels need to be thinner, whilst achieving float they need to be wide. But vehicles with manure spreader tires
were deemed exceptionally ill-suited for driving on proper roads and especially in town, which sparked a controversy as to whether their use should be legal or not. Initially the practice was illegal, resulting in practitioners having to sneak out of sight on the outskirts of towns to place these wide wheels under the vehicle before heading into the highlands.

The problem highlighted by those opposing the introduction of modified 4x4 vehicles was that the modifications necessary to fit the wheel under the drive train or chassis, depending on the type, was not always secure and done properly. These modifications include an increased ground clearance of the chassis that ranges from about two to ten centimetres, but rarely more, in order to increase the space available for the extra large wheels to fit underneath. What has to be borne in mind is that placing these large wheels on an ordinary jeep is not simply a matter of bolting them on. The body panels of the vehicle must be trimmed in order to fit the wheel underneath. The chassis needs to be heightened, effectively raising the vehicle to fit the wheels. Additions have to be made to the suspension of the vehicle, its steering equipment, balancing system and other equipment. All these modifications result in the practical conversion of the vehicle into something commonly known today as the “superjeep”. Although standard conversion kits are available on the market now, during the early period, and still for many practitioners today, the knowledge about the technical intricacies of the modification is, “just something one picks up. I have been directing Formula Off-road tournaments for a couple of decades now and seen a lot and I guess some ideas somehow just filter in” (Interview SB, 30th August 2006, authors’ translation).

Methods of conversion were almost as many as the practitioners in the early period, which meant that the quality of the work was often lacking and that groups, or ‘culs’ as referred to above, formed around certain methods. It was not so much that the conversion as such was different, but the materials varied, as did the quality and placing of the add-ons under the chassis. In response to this controversy, and the debate around safety and the suitability of these vehicles for traffic in towns and cities, the 4x4 vehicle owners got together. The issue became the platform for an association of 4x4 vehicle owners. This association is known today as “The Touring-Club 4x4” and was founded in 1982. The first task of the “4x4”, as they are commonly referred to, was to set up a technology committee. According to 4x4’s founding member number two, the committee “completed the very
urgent task to secure permission for people to drive on these tires. The argument had to be sustained that [the modifications] were without risk and done legally and in a normal way and with technology” (Interview AB, 22nd March 2006, authors’ translation and emphasis).

Securing permission for people to drive on these tires was what rallied jeep enthusiasts into an association and looking at the 4x4’s aims today it is evident that this initial impetus remains. The aims of the “Touring Club 4x4” are (verbatim from the club’s statutes), first to “reach all those with an interest in travelling the country on 4x4 vehicles,” and second to “set a good precedence in terms of environmental issues and nature conservation, by acting in accordance with environmental standards and by initiating public debate.” Their third aim is to “guard the interest of its members in terms of equipment and accessories for 4x4 vehicles and travel in co-operation with the proper authority.” Fourth, the club aims to “add to and maintain knowledge about 4x4 vehicles and their equipment, and about travel in inhabited and uninhabited areas of the country.” Their final stated aim is to facilitate social rapport between members (Ferðaklúbburinn 4x4 2006). A running theme, from the statutes of the touring club to its various activities, is the original impetus for the formation of the association, emphasizing the technology of travel, as told by the founding member referred to above.

The individuals of the club’s technology committee were instrumental in the standardisation and stabilisation of conversion technology. The weakest point of modified vehicles is the steering shaft, as it has to be ‘stretched’ in order to compensate for the additions to the chassis. Both add-ons and the stretched steering shaft are tested and certified by IceTec (Technological Institute of Iceland); this co-operation between an official institute and 4x4 enthusiasts is one of the main achievements of the 4x4’s technology committee. On the other hand, the development and manufacture of the accessories needed is solely in the hands of those doing the modifications (figs. 2, 3). Although IceTec offers a seminar on how to produce parts for 4x4 conversions, those practicing the conversions are not required to attend. They are required only to have parts made for the steering shaft certified at IceTec, who makes use of X-ray technology. The parts “are just made and developed by us, the members, the hard way!” (Interview AB, 22nd March 2006, authors’ translation).
During the early 1990s, the technological innovations associated with 4x4 conversion in Iceland were gradually stabilised. This is when many of the companies that specialise in 4x4 vehicle conversion today were formed. The entrepreneurs concerned—themselves having been involved in the period of experimentation in the 1980s—are now literally capitalising on their acquired skills and tacit competencies. The argument here is that today conversion practices have turned into a conversion industry with the level of standardisation and quality assurance needed to have a marketable product. The technology has stabilised to the degree that the accessories needed for modification can now be bought as a kit for the vehicle in question, or alternatively, the conversion can be made by a conversion company at a dedicated garage. The most prominent of the conversion companies is Arctic Trucks.

Arctic Trucks developed as part of the Toyota dealership in Iceland. When the dealership changed hands, the previous owner bought the conversion division and set up an independent firm specialising in 4x4 conversions for all types (Arctic Trucks 2006). Although this was not the first firm specialising in 4x4 conversion, it is the first to present a clear vision of the future of the conversion industry:

![Fig 2 and 3: Under the chassis of a modified Nissan Patrol 4x4 vehicle with about 10cm added ground clearance. Fig. 2 shows an addition to the chassis. The shaft used to go into the black hole at the top. Fig. 3 shows a tailor-made piece lowering the steering shaft and holding it in place. This piece is tested by the Technological Institute of Iceland. (Kliptrom)](Image)
Who we are and what we want to do differently is doing [conversions] better and doing them in a standardised fashion spending more time on R&D. In the beginning, it was all about quick fixes and shoddy work … guys would bung some wheel underneath and then the driveshaft would break or the differential and people would then fix that on the spot (Interview H, 13th September 2005, authors’ translation).

This quote reveals a clear recognition of the sea-change that has occurred since the initial experiments. From our observations, and indeed from those interviewed, we find that those practicing highland travel today are not only those jeep enthusiasts that founded the “Touring Club 4x4” and who were mostly involved in the initial experimentation, but more and more ordinary people—albeit with the necessary financial means. Today, in order to own and maintain a converted 4x4, one is not required to be a car mechanic, be it amateur or professional, anymore. As the specialised shops have been set up, and the conversion kits and practices of conversion have become standardised and routine, anyone who can afford the expense can come and purchase a vehicle, have it modified and drive off into the highlands without fear of breakdown or failure. Were these to occur, the vehicle is simply brought back to the shop and the problem repaired.

In this way, a sport that was practiced by the select few only some 15 to 20 years ago has become available to anyone who can make the necessary investment. That investment is indeed on occasion quite large. As an example of the upper end of the scale, the purchasing price of a Dodge Ram 3500 converted to superjeep standard was in the vicinity of 11,5 million ISK when this was written. But with the Icelandic economy booming over the past few years, this price has not seemed to be exorbitant. As one proprietor put it, “People spend their money on this when they have increased purchasing power” (Interview GM, 7th September 2006, authors’ translation). The highlands that were the domain of those that could travel there by means of their tacit competencies have now become a public domain, albeit only for those with money to afford the technology. There is here a change in the way that the conversion technology affords disclosure of the landscapes of the highlands, a change coinciding with the standardisation
of technology making it in a way disappear, but at the same time become awe-inspiring and imposing in the form of the superjeep.

*From Nudes to Nature in the Garage?*

The main argument sustained by the 4x4 technology committee during their struggle for official recognition was that the modified vehicles were of great importance for public safety in a country that often has severe winter storms, disrupting regular transportation. On the other hand, the rhetoric of most practitioners of highland travel today is about a special relationship with the land. Their practices are, they argue, about enabling the ordinary citizen to get out of the rat race and into the uninhabited highlands and vast ice-fields of the interior in order to experience the calmness of wild nature.

According to the statutes of the “Touring Club 4x4”, their second aim—listed prior to the point regarding technology that was in fact the basis for founding the club—is to set a good example in environmental matters. This rhetoric of the importance of the natural, and to escape in terms of getting away from civilisation, stands in quite stark contrast with the actual practices of getting there through technological means. Yet, time and again in interviews, the very same people that said they had been “hooked on machines” from an early age also claimed they were only doing this to facilitate a nature experience. Before, in the heydays of experiments, “we did not give any thought to environmental issues. No, the guys would just find the nearest slope and spin their wheels without any consideration of what was underneath” (Interview AJ, 23rd August 2005, authors’ translation). Another commentator, when talking about the capability of the vehicles, linked that to whether proper roads should be built in the highlands rather than using the 4x4s and said:

> I would rather have the vehicles adapted to the roads rather than the roads adapted to the vehicles. Mainly as it is more environmentally friendly; it is less visible; and there is less disturbing of the environment (Interview FJ, 22nd March 2006, authors’ translation).

The “Touring Club 4x4” now has an environmental committee, whose
members work with issues concerning developments in the highland interior and comment on these issues in the public media. Environmental issues are firmly on the agenda now, they claim, and that is where, for 4x4 enthusiasts, the key issues to be debated lie. When a member of the environmental committee was interviewed, he addressed their concerns at length:

What we want is to travel the country in our 4x4s for years to come and use the same tracks we have been using. We don’t want to make new tracks – I think there is plenty of tracks available, maybe only a short stretch might be added here and there if needed – but also we want [the already existing] tracks marked so these and only these will be travelled, and we will not have a proliferation of new tracks and then when something changes we are left with them. That is my vision, also I would like to see bulldozers banned from the interior because they lower the road level, and during winter snow accumulates onto the road and with the thaws the water does considerably more damage, I would like to see all roads level with their environment. If the traffic exceeds the capacity of the road, and it needs a lot of bulldozing for maintenance, I say, level the road and pave the shoulder… with keeping roads as they are in the interior you reduce speed and thus reduce noise, especially if the road is not raised above the environment (Interview FJ, 22nd March 2006, authors’ translation).

What we read from these quotes is a concern for the environment that one would not have encountered a few years ago. A development in technology, originally fuelled by fascination and enthusiasm for conversion, has turned into a practice of nature conservation. Concerns about not leaving marks and tracks in the highlands were predominant in these interviews. One interviewee stated that he did not use his jeep at all outside existing tracks. Yet, wanting to go elsewhere, he invested in a light six-wheeled all-terrain vehicle, which he claims does not have the same impact and leaves no tracks. That may or may not be the reality; the concern is nonetheless there.

But, although the concern is there, we argue that the practitioners are
Geared for the Sublime

rehearsing an *en-vogue* environmental rhetoric. The environmental concern manifest in the interviews and in the setting up of the “Touring Club’s 4x4” environmental committee was not originally introduced by the practitioners but is being maintained by them as part of a wider societal discourse. What this means to us is that a fascination that originally resided solely in the capability of a technological artefact—the superjeep—is now being translated into a kind of environmental sensibility affording the disclosure of the landscapes of the highland interior. The Icelandic garage, whose grimy walls have long been adorned by nude calendar girls, is becoming infiltrated by somewhat different images and imaginations of nature framed by the assemblage of the machinery to get you ‘there’.

**Conclusion**

Being fascinated is perhaps only a way of approaching what we have more poetically referred to above as “the sublime”. The way in which those involved in 4x4 conversion described their enthusiasm can very well be equated with Marx’s formulation of the “technological sublime”. But we want to go a step further. We argue that, by way of the technology as it developed and stabilised, the affordances accrued for a certain imagining of the landscapes of the highlands, an imagining that draws on wider societal discourse couched in notions of the sublime. Thus the technological sublime is intricately bound up with the more classical nature-related images of the sublime, but manifesting in vehicles that, to the unaccustomed eye, border on the ridiculous. In this chapter, we have thus argued that the sublime and the ridiculous may indeed have merged in the Icelandic cult of the superjeep. This cult can of course very easily—and justifiably—be critiqued from a variety of standpoints. It obviously raises some poignant questions about gendered ideologies and practices; about the ideologies of human-nature relations (cf. Gunster 2004); and no less poignant questions about the environmental impacts of these travel practices. Yet we want to argue that, as a cultural phenomenon, the superjeep certainly does warrant a more careful scrutiny than recent accounts of the 4x4 vehicle as simply ‘toys for the boys’ or the environmental ‘axle of evil’ imply. For the practitioners, the superjeep itself is awesome, and it also does enable an appreciation of an awesome, sublime nature.
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In Iceland, Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768) is best known for his moralist poems, some of which even today enjoy considerable popularity. It is especially because of these poems that Eggert is still considered one of the earliest founders of Icelandic nationalism. The following article does not use his poetic material to reveal and analyse his view of the world nor his vision of Iceland and Denmark, but rather focuses on his extensive account of travels in his native land. Based on the book *Reise igiennem Island*, I will show why and how the image of Eggert Ólafsson as a nationalist developed, and discuss whether this view is still, and if it ever was, justified.

In approaching this particular subject, special attention is paid to Eggert’s way of describing Icelandic nature and culture, his understanding of state organisation, royal authority and its legitimacy.

We assume that the description of an area is to some extent also a creation of an area, since the area described only becomes real through the describing and receiving subjects. Hence Iceland was for the majority of the Danish government and populace only real through the existing travel accounts and only existed in the form given by these accounts. Thus Eggert Ólafsson’s travel account is rightly seen as the creation of a new Iceland, although it did not necessarily create a new nation in the generally assumed
form. This account surely had a highly constitutional function for a new collective and valuable image of Iceland, as it was read and received by the majority of the Northern European educated elite. It is also without a doubt that Eggert Ólafsson believed in the benefits of modernisation and contributed to the development of the island, but the emphasis on Eggert's constitutional function for Icelandic nationalism or even independence is somewhat problematic.

Reise igjennem Island

Eggert Ólafsson was neither the first Icelander to describe the country, nor was he the first scientist to traverse it in the name of Danish authority. Even before the 18th century, when the ideas of rationalisation and enlightenment had become more and more important, several Icelanders had already tried to refute and demystify the horrific and outrageous stories traditionally linked to an unknown island in the far North. But consistent with common late-Baroque belief in the inferiority of the uncultivated North compared to the cultivated South, all these authors tried to normalize the Icelandic land and nation. These descriptions often tried to stress Iceland's similarities with the rest of Europe, or at least Northern Europe. This effort of normalization overpowered the desire for objective description and sometimes lead to pure denial of strange natural phenomena on the island. This influence is noticeable in early scientific accounts, such as Niels Horrebow’s Tilforladelige Efterretninger (1752, p. 23).

Eggert Ólafsson also tries to redress a false image of Iceland, “dette hidintil saa lidet, dog mangestedes urigtig bekjendte land” (1772, p. 1042). His account is characterized by a certain independence from external references or foreign images; he points out differences and yet confers equal value. This emancipation from a world view that exalts uniformity and homogeneity rather than difference and alterity is demonstrated in the auto references Eggert uses. Instead of continuously comparing Iceland to Denmark or other “civilized” cultures, he compares one part of the island with another Icelandic region or the Icelandic status quo with the situation in the past.

Unlike earlier travel accounts, Eggert structures his description in accordance with his actual travels. Thus he does not give general statements about the land or the people, but he divides his work into four chapters which correspond to the four districts of the country and treats them ac-
cording to his travels. The survey is generally characterized by a wish to
note everything remarkable and does not discriminate between strange and
easily-explain phenomena. In his detailed description of a natural envi-
ronment profoundly different from the European one, Eggert does not in
any way deny or dismiss the immense effect Icelandic nature must have had
on the foreign visitor. But he discovers that discussion of hetero stereo-
types, rather than adoption of these foreign views, is necessary to create an
auto image. When examining the Icelandic glaciers on behalf of the Dan-
ish Academy of Sciences, he does not underestimate the impression these
glaciers would have on a foreign spectator. He explicitly states that some-
body who sees them for the first time in their life must be more impressed
than the native Icelander. The intimidating effect of Icelandic nature thus
becomes an attribute dependent on the recipient’s cultural background. Fi-
nally, Eggert states that one “does not need the poetic terms of speech of
the older days to imagine those effects of nature.” (ibid., p. 101) It is neither
necessary to stress the Icelandic nature’s intimidating and terrifying aspect
nor to defend the glaciers variance from European or Danish nature by
declaring them something more valuable, or even supernatural.

Yet the comparison with other nations is not completely absent from
Eggert’s work. Comparisons and scientific observations of agriculture, the
art of workmanship, the Icelandic and Danish manner of nutrition or heat-
ing also aim to correct negative hetero-stereotypes. Instead of proclaiming
the differences between Iceland and the rest of Europe to be less than
those generally assumed, Eggert seeks, finds and presents different expla-
nations to the differences which extend the previous homogeneous view
of the world with a new, strange and original perspective.

In accordance with this view of a variable but explainable world is his in-
tention to demystify the island’s image, though within certain limits. Eggert
tries to find logical explanations to most of the supernatural phenomena
and creatures, such as mer-people, sea or river monsters. He also declares
some curiosities in the Old Icelandic saga literature as pure fantasy. The
cave Surthellir, for example, loses its traditional connection with the giant
Surtur and the name is plainly explained in an etymological manner (ibid.,
p. 238). Despite this emphasis on rationality he is still affected by a pre-
modern understanding of the world and explicitly expresses that the whole
world is only understandable with God’s help:
Karin Schær

saa bør man ikke [...] nægte alle Aander, samt deres Virkninger, og derved at kalde Guds Ord i Tvil, og samtykke skadelige Vild-farelser, blot fordi vor svage Fornuft, og meget utilstrækkelige Philosophie kan ikke udvikle de Ting, som den alviise Skaber har for den største Deel skuilt, og deri seet paa Menneskets eget Beste. (ibid., 480)

But within these limits, and conditional on his Christian belief having the last word, Eggert tries not only to expunge old and eerie explanations and associations from his reader’s mind, but also takes care to provide other understandable theories. Eggert’s ultimate destruction of the traditional association of hell in connection with Hekla—which allowed Iceland to be the ‘place of purgatory’ is essential. He and Bjarni Pálsson were the first people ever to climb the volcano and the description of the peak bears scant resemblance to supernaturalism (ibid., p. 868). He describes the top of the volcano as one would imagine a mountain top today—snow instead of burning earth. The detail that he reached the top exactly at midnight is an effective deconstruction of unnatural phenomena. Referring to the hot springs traditionally associated with dangerous burning water and earth, and thus sometimes even hell, he goes a step further and describes the drifts of steam and smoke (from hot springs) coming up over Reykhol Valley as beautiful.

Eggert develops an image of Icelandic nature as something deeply different to that of other European countries, and yet abjures defence of such differences. His account contains a very self-confident image instead of describing something as inferior or supernatural. In accordance with this description he develops a stereotype of the inhabitant. The Icelandic is seen as an admittedly less cultivated but at least equally valuable person as the Danish peasant, with a few peculiar but explainable habits. The only Icelandic deficit Eggert admits is that the existing resources are not (yet) fully utilized. In various parts of his mostly-plainly descriptive travel account, Eggert gives examples of how the situation could easily be improved and sometimes even paints a very bright Icelandic future (ibid., pp. 26, 156, 168f., 322).
Eggert as Nationalist?

This work was seen as the beginning of Iceland’s glorification and even the beginning of the struggle for independence, an idea that is more than problematic. When comparing Eggert’s description of Icelandic elite and the Danish authorities, it soon becomes clear that a brighter future can only be achieved with Danish help. He repeatedly expresses the view that the people of Iceland need special guidance (“Anledninger og Veiviisning”, ibid., p. 302) in order to learn how to exploit the island’s natural resources and thus improve living standards. A new aspect in his view is that this improvement would not necessarily mean an adaption of Danish customs. Again, Eggert recognises and accepts the difference of his homeland compared to other European countries. He stresses the fact that an imitation of Danish or other European ways of life would not necessarily mean improvement in the specific Icelandic context (Reise, 24 and esp. 969). This insistence that a specific Icelandic modernisation would be necessary to improve the country’s situation has often been read as an anti-Danish sentiment. And indeed some passages of the *Reise igjennem Island* seem to reinforce this interpretation, such as when Eggert opposes the patriot to the inhabitant imitating Danish customs:

Mange rose denne Levemaade (the imitation of Danish customs); især holde de Fremmede meget af Folk, der viide saaledes at leve. Det heeder, at Handelen blomstrer derved, at Indbyggerne behovles og blive omgjengelige, med meget andet. Men den sande Patriot tænker ventelig anderledes. (ibid, p. 969)

But reading these utterances as anti-Danish or even as the beginning of a nationalist feeling would, in my opinion, be an anachronistic interpretation. Compared to earlier travel accounts, Eggert surely draws a very self-confident picture of Icelandic peculiarities and clearly states that Icelandic culture is more appropriate than the impress of Danish culture on the Icelandic situation. Unlike previous “normalizing” travel accounts, he has developed the understanding that instead of one universal ideal—from which Iceland was always far away—there are different living situations which need to be approached differently. Alterity thus no longer means inferiority. Although this is of course a basic requirement for the later development of nation-
alism, Eggert was far from being a nationalist or considering the Danish Crown as foreign dominion. When discussing this problem, it is important to consider that Eggert was not only sent by the Danish Academy of Sciences, but that he was also educated in Copenhagen, at a university where Holberg’s spirit was still very present. Throughout the travel account it becomes clear that Eggert’s love of enlightenment ideals and modernisation was only as significant as his love for the absolutistic Danish monarch.

His belief in modernisation and progress is nearly always bound to King Frederik or the Danish magistrates. All improvements which would lead to Icelandic progress were left to the authorities to decide. It would, for example, be useful for the whole country to build public baths at several easily accessible sites in the country, but decision on these innovations is left to the judgment of others (ibid., p. 116). Much of the time, important and useful rules made by the Danish authorities are cited which are not followed by the Icelanders. Sometimes, the Danish authorities are even needed to reawaken older Icelandic customs which have been forgotten (ibid. p. 178). The problem for Eggert is most strikingly that most Icelanders do not understand the goodness sent to them by their absolute king.

The common belief that the Danish monopoly had stretched the country’s economy to its limits and thus fed the Icelanders’ hatred for foreign rule cannot be demonstrated in the travel account. However, in Eggert’s description there is a hint that Danish authority and welfare did not always serve to the best of the country. In connection with Iceland’s second largest economic sector, the wool trade, Eggert mentions that unscrupulous merchants surely used Iceland’s bad image to exploit the inhabitants:

Den rette Uld, […], er blød og fin, ja kiendeligen bædre, end den Sællandske, hvilket en lang Tid har været en Hemmelighed hos de Fabriqueur, der have aarlig tilhandlet dem den Island- ske Uld af Compagniet, for en ringe Priis. Om de Handlende have fundet deres Regning ved, at Ulden skulde hedde slet, lade vi staae ved sit Værd, men det er vist, at disse Tiders Naturkyn-dige have oft af denne Kilde disse og andre fleere for Landet ufordeelagtige Beretninger. (ibid., p. 199f.)

Eggert finds the fact that Danish merchants used Iceland’s poor reputa-
tion to acquire their raw material cheaper worth mentioning, but he clearly considers the individual merchants responsible, not the system as a whole. He also points out that imperfect human beings in administrative positions can also, quite frequently, be found on the Icelandic side and they bear some responsibility for the bad economic situation of the country (ibid., pp. 337, 738).

Finally, in the last few pages, it is once again made clear that innovative ideas and a prosperous future will only come from Copenhagen, or at least can only be realized with Danish help:

According to Eggert the efforts of the Danish Crown and its authorities are necessary “to strengthen and raise the status of a nation at the limits of its existence.” He even goes a step farther and calls the recovery of the Icelandic economy and nation a royal and “fatherly” intention, not an Icelandic one. Thus, although it is right to assert Eggert genuinely believed in the country’s renaissance and often refers to the brighter situation in the Icelandic past (ibid., p. 45), this renaissance was, as he understood it, the rise of a nation as a province of a greater realm and a loyal subject to the Danish king.

Conclusion

In his account, Eggert appears at first glance to support two ostensibly contradictory aims. Firstly he creates a self-image, through his descriptive creation of the nature and inhabitants, which for the first time is independent of existing hetero-stereotypes. He neither formulates his account as
an antithesis to nor in agreement with older descriptions. For the greatest part he has no need to rely on external references. Thus he creates the basis for an ‘imagined community’ whose territory and understanding is within the area described, and independent from foreign image. That people have considered this the starting point of nationalism is understandable but not necessarily justified.

On the other hand, Eggert neither forgets nor disappoints his employer. He reliably submits information consistent with developing closer ties between the province and the mother country, for a further integration of Iceland into the Danish realm. This integration does by no means repudiate Eggert’s personal view and in fact supports one of his tenets, namely the country can only be rejuvenated by the Danish authorities.

Eggert Ólafsson interweaves a detailed and, within its limits, objective image of Iceland in the minds of both his compatriots and the authorities in order to provide opportunities for a better future. He neither supported nor was aware of the movement he set in progress that ultimately was the first step in loosening ties with the Danish motherland.

References:


In the early pre-dawn hours of March 24th, 1989 over 11 million gallons of crude oil spilled into Alaska’s Prince William Sound as the Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground. The largest oil spill in U.S. history began to immediately wreck havoc upon the local environment and onto the other delicate ecosystems that relied upon P.W. Sound to survive and thrive. The magnitude of the spill and inadequate containment and cleanup responses only further compounded the initial disaster. Simply put, local, national, and industrial organizations were not prepared for this type of event even though the area was a common route for similar large oil shipments. Just as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency described the incident in a profile of the oil spill, the effects of the accident were immediate and far-reaching:

Many factors complicated the cleanup efforts following the spill. The size of the spill and its remote location, accessible only by helicopter and boat, made government and industry efforts difficult and tested existing plans for dealing with such an event.

The spill posed threats to the delicate food chain that supports Prince William Sound’s commercial fishing industry. Also in danger were ten million migratory shore birds and waterfowl,
Annie Duffy

hundreds of sea otters, dozens of other species, such as harbor porpoises and sea lions, and several varieties of whales. (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2005)

As this quote also illustrates, while acknowledging the effect that the massive spill had and would continue to have upon the environment, many official government and company reports also emphasized the impact it would have on other natural resource industries, specifically commercial fishing, and how that would have further negative consequences for Alaska. The inclusion of these comments indicates how embedded the natural resource industries, specifically oil, mining, and fishing, are with Alaska’s history and identity.

The resulting media coverage shocked both Alaskan residents and people who lived outside of the region. Alaska is often described as the ‘Last Frontier’, and in terms of visual imagery is generally depicted as a vast, unspoiled wilderness in many works of art. Alaska also has a significant population of people who moved to the area specifically to live in a place represented as one of the world’s few remaining unblemished regions, and amid a pristine and picturesque nature. Images of birds coated in oil, dead fish washed ashore, and humans wearing protective gear while scrubbing oil off of saturated beaches—dramatically contrasted against the backdrop of majestic mountains underneath clear blue skies—were especially powerful in conveying the enormity of the event.

In “The Wild, Wild North: Nature Writing, Nationalist Ecologies, and Alaska”, Susan Kollin writes about the media coverage of the Prince William Sound spill: “Most news reports ignored the history of the region’s economic development and instead produced stories lamenting the destruction of the nation’s most important wilderness area” (Kollin, 2000).

Kollin is correct to draw attention to this glaring oversight. Although touching upon all aspects of Alaskan lives, it can be easy to forget the enormous footprint of the natural resource industry. Even for those not directly employed by it, the industry is such a large economic force that as a unified block it wields tremendous influence over local, statewide, and federal government, and therefore has social and cultural effects as well.

In terms of U.S. history, Alaska is new. Although Alaska is a young state, it has been populated in one form or another for several thousand years.
Traces of settlements belonging to peoples we now call Alaska Native date back from 8,000 to 10,000 BCE. The fur trade originally drew non-indigenous people to settle in Alaska, and the Russians developed the first permanent white settlement on Kodiak Island in 1784. Americans also came to the region to participate in the fur trade. In 1853 oil was discovered, shortly afterwards coal mining began, and in 1861 gold was struck. In 1867 the U.S. purchased the rights to Alaska from Russia and in 1868 the “Department of Alaska” was formed (SLED, 2006). Already operating at a hectic pace, business interests then began to develop Alaska in earnest.

Development of natural resources progressed rapidly: salmon canneries were built, more gold was struck, and the fishing, mining and timber industries flourished. As the home of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), and several U.S. National Parks—Denali, Gates of the Arctic, Glacier Bay, Katmai, Kenai Fjords, Kobuk Valley, Lake Clark, and Wrangell Saint Elias—Alaska has tremendous environmental and subsistence importance beyond the natural resource industry. The state is home to several unique self-governing indigenous Alaska Native tribes, and it is a vast, complex region that encompasses and exemplifies many similar environmental and cultural concerns and conflicts faced by other northern regions around the world. Traces of these complex cultural concerns and environmental experiences as well as the impact of the natural resource industry’s development can be found both literally and figuratively in the rich and diverse breadth of art produced by Alaskan artists, past and present.

For Better or For Worse: Ties that Bind

The popular image of majestic Mt. McKinley towering over the people down in the low lying-lands helps to reinforce the naïve belief that Alaska is that ‘pristine untouched land’. Along side this image is the knowledge that development of Alaska, which seems frenzied and possibly even reckless in retrospect, provided opportunities for the explorers and entrepreneurs to strike out on their own, make their marks, and reinvent themselves. Both of these aspects appeal just as strongly to people today as they did in the 1800s, and in some ways are even more appealing to artists. The artist Rockwell Kent describes the mental image of Alaska that drew him to Fox Island in 1918:
I came to Alaska because I love the North. I crave snow-topped mountains, dreary wastes and the cruel Northern Sea with its hard horizons at the edge of the world where infinite space begins. Here skies are clearer and deeper and, for the greater mystery of those of softer lands. (Cook and Norris, 2005)

The paradox of the situation becomes readily apparent to many artists. Artists make varied types of art: some more abstract than others; some more quiet, introspective and personal than loud and demanding; and others make work that is topical and intended to confront issues they feel the need to address. Whichever type of art an Alaskan artist is making, if they are making work that concerns itself with Alaska, either its physical presence or iconographic one, they cannot ignore what they observe happening. They are in the context of a resource dependent community. However, just as some non-artist Alaskans are for development and some are against, artists also have mixed positions on the subject.

The Lure of the Iconographic Landscape

Rockwell Kent is an excellent example of how the idea of Alaska and the idealized vision of the Alaskan landscape was an irresistible draw to the artist-adventurer. Kent was clearly not disappointed by his decision to travel north—even though he faced the harsh frontier with his young son in tow—evidenced as he writes shortly after leaving Fox Island in 1919, “Know, people of the busier world, that there on that wild island in Resurrection Bay is to be found throughout winter and summer the peace and plenty of a true Northern Paradise.” (ibid.)

Kent certainly did not omit the difficulties of this lifestyle. In fact, his journals and writings (1919) reveal that he seems to have relished in them and the sense on strength and independence that he felt:

And so this sojourn in the wilderness is in no sense an artist’s junket in search of picturesque material for brush or pencil, but the flight to freedom of a man who detests the endless petty quarrels and bitterness of the crowded world—the pilgrimage of a philosopher in quest of happiness and peace of mind.

During his stay on Fox Island, Kent found a place where he could have a personal and artistic breakthrough. That his efforts were met with such acclaim, and the resulting commercial success of his work, would become a feat that other artists would try to follow. Kent was a temporary visitor to Alaska, but he was followed by artists such as Sydney Laurence, Eustace Ziegler, and Rusty Heurlin. These painters would become the first resident Alaskan artists making art in the Western tradition.

In particular, Sydney Laurence is an artist that contributed to the foundations of Alaskan art and imagery. In some ways he took Kent’s romanticism even further, and his repeated images of the majestic mountain, looming over the boundless forests below, perfects what one artist calls “the lonely landscape” (Woodward, 2005). Laurence does not paint scenes of leaking refineries or sewage and trash laden rivers. Instead he chooses to depict an Alaska that is eternal, stoic and invincible.

For Laurence, Alaska was immeasurably greater than the humans who scrabbled about on it. We see that in his paintings through the diminutive scale of human habitation, its vulnerability among the light and grandeur of the landscape. He produced that image not by eliminating human traces, but by juxtaposing them with the landscape in such a way that the dominance of the land over man was made clear (ibid.).

*Artists Among the People: Recording Change*

Although this paper focuses specifically on issues involving Western art, the changing modern world, represented by the natural resource industry’s presence in Alaska and the arrival of Westerners, has had a profound impact on the indigenous peoples of Alaska which should be acknowledged, as some artists have. Claire Fejes was an artist from New York City, trained apart of the U.S. Works Progress Administration (WPA) program, who came to Fairbanks, Alaska in 1946. In 1958, Fejes traveled to Sesaulik, an Inupiat whaling camp on Alaska’s arctic coast with the intention of painting Alaska’s First People.
On this trip and the many others she subsequently took, Fejes formed deep and long-lasting friendships with many of the villagers. Unlike most of her predecessors, she was able to enjoy relationships of mutual respect and admiration. Rather than conquering an unknown frontier, Fejes was interested in other ways of living and connections with other cultures. The care that Fejes felt for her painting subjects and friends is evident in the work itself. During her many excursions she was able to capture a thriving, vibrant culture and document its changes. One of the most important aspects of Fejes’ work is that she was not conducting a scientific study, or documenting an anthropologic subject. Fejes did not consider her Inupiat hosts as members of a primitive or less evolved culture.

In stark contrast to Kent or Laurence, Fejes found “real life” not in an isolated landscape, but among a tightly knit community whose members were able to convey to her a sense of timelessness. She felt as though she “had undergone a sort of baptism” (Fejes 1966) and found her escape from the hustle and bustle that Kent lamented within a tightly knit community buzzing with activity. Perhaps most dramatically, Fejes’ sense of authentic nature includes people rather than dismisses or minimizes them.

“The Lonely Landscape” Revisited
For those contemporary Alaskan landscape painters who are still drawn to the iconic image of Alaska and wish to paint fairly undisturbed vistas, the opportunity still exists. Alaska is fortunate to have several national parks that provide the opportunity to trek in and work directly from the land. In particular, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Denali National Park are two areas that artists use to create remote landscape work. In acknowledgement of the importance of having this type of environment and subject matter made accessible to artists, parks such as the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve have established artist residency programs specifically to encourage and support artists who work directly from this type of nature.

As supportive as these programs may be, rather than allowing the artist-adventurer type to continue to exist, the artist is instead reduced to a temporary visitor, an intruder of sorts, on a limited sojourn with only small amounts of allotted time and permission to document the sites and capture the “Sense of Wonder” that Laurence exuded (Woodward 2005). This has
the side effect of reducing the resulting work of these artists to that of creative visitors engaged in a form of aesthetic tourism. Although that is certainly not the intention of the artists, and the pieces they create may be beautiful and substantial, having so few places left in Alaska where one can actually create the type of art considered most ‘Alaskan’ is toxic and confining in a sense that is a complete contradiction to the very idea of Alaska.

For artists who want to make contemporary landscape work in Alaska and not err on the side of sentimental tourism, the artist must move beyond trying to capture simply the majesty of Alaska. Artists such as Kesler Woodward and David Mollett do this in their landscape work by stepping back from the established Alaskan visual identity and bringing in strong stylistic allusions to other art movements that clearly post-date the natural Romanticism of the early part of this century, such as color field painting or hyperrealism. Additionally, some may impose conscious references to other geographic regions or qualities of light upon what are clearly intended to be Alaskan landmarks with distinctive recognizable features.

Acknowledging the Changing Face
Concurrently, other artists embrace the visual elements that the natural resource industry has brought to Alaska. Rather than finding remote painting locations, or carefully focusing in on a nearby undisturbed patch of wild greenery, they find inspiration in the dichotomy of steel slicing through miles of tundra or by making work out of discarded machinery or mechanical bits and pieces. Contemporary photographers in particular make a great deal of work showing the Alaska pipeline as it snakes throughout the landscape.

Although there are artists whose aesthetic preferences lead them to the creation of this type of work, there is definitely a clear, commercial reason for such an abundance of pipeline photographs. Photographers are often commissioned to take high quality photographs that will grace the brochures, posters, and other marketing products produced by the oil companies and other natural resource industry members. In these types of images, obvious yet tasteful, elements of industry, such as oil platforms, are purposefully shown in the most beautiful light and in large wide-angle shots that make them seem small and insignificant compared to the beautiful and undisturbed acres and acres of wild Alaska around them.
This kind of photography demonstrates exactly how the natural resource industry visually impacts Alaska on two levels: first, by creating structures that mar the landscape; and second, by creating a demand for this type of artwork and then proceeding to fund the creation of the work. Often shot by art photographers who regularly exhibit in galleries and museums, widespread use of these types of images makes it nevertheless difficult to see the work for itself. With such a heavily manipulated context behind its generation, the work becomes more about marketing and advancing agendas than it does about light, color, or form on the picture plane.

Work of similar subject matter made in other mediums appears to escape this fate. Possibly because it cannot be so easily mass produced, and is rarely commissioned for marketing purposes, painting of pipelines, coal bunkers, and railroad tracks can be appreciated for their formal nature; commentaries and subtexts of the artists’ feelings toward the subject matter can be read within and into them.

Amalgams: Combining Worlds and Assimilating the Discarded

While some artists condemn the industry, other artists incorporate discarded pieces of it into their work. Why there is so much found art being made in Alaska is an interesting question. The creation of found art spans the art world, and artists’ own, self-imposed boundaries. Artists who consider themselves to be more experimental or mixed-media inclined are immediately drawn to it. In addition, even the most traditional, classically minded Alaskan artists find themselves turning out the occasional piece of work that incorporates some piece of metal they found in the back yard. For its small population, the amount of found art being made in Alaska seems to be quite disproportionate.

Perhaps the landscape is so littered with these little odds and ends they seem part of the habitat. Or it may be because of Alaska’s uniquely brief sense of Western history. When an object happens to turn up that is likely older than the state itself, it can imbue a sense of reverence on the discoverer. For Paul Gardiner, “Found objects have an identity, history, and patina…Found objects can add a ‘realness’ and authority to a piece” (Decker 2001).

Other artists, such as Da-ka-xeen Mehner, set out to make art out of salvaged equipment or tools. Industrial materials that have been abandoned
and buried, rather than properly and expensively disposed of, find new life and purpose in large sculptures that celebrate their worn and weathered forms. They are commonly used as metaphors for self-identity and cultural issues, as well as for their formal aesthetic value.

**Drawing Conclusions: The Natural Resource Industry Paradox:**

As the brief Alaska timeline in the introduction illustrates, the natural resource industry predates the arrival of Western artists in Alaska. An argument can be made that without the natural resource industry there would be no Alaska, let alone Alaskan artists. While that could be true, the industry has been long present in Alaska but until recently has not been significantly consciously recognized in the visual identity of Alaska. Kent and Laurence are two examples of artists who created images that overlaid their desire for what Alaska needed to be for them on the canvas, which did not include documentary quality realism. This makes sense as the artists were products of their times and during those eras there was not a great deal of alarm or sense of preservation.

Through the time that has passed since they painted Alaskan panoramas, the effects of a changing world, changing art world, and the onset of the media information age have been felt. As the world has grown smaller and seemingly more fragile, and global warming and environmental concerns have moved to the forefront of a greater number of people’s minds, those responsible for making the imagery associated with Alaska are documenting those increased concerns and the heightened awareness.

In a remarkably short period of time Alaskan art has begun to move into a more mature stage and now work that references the industry or has the imprint of it—whether supporting it, decrying it, or observing it from a removed vantage point—can be found throughout the state and beyond. Images such as those made by Woodward, Mollet and Mehner are now the dominant force in Alaskan art, and the contradictions at all levels of the natural resource industry paradox—from the money that finances the economy to the objects that inspire the artists to create new works, are obvious and acknowledged by great numbers of Alaskan artists and non-artists alike.
References:


Icelandic National Images in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson

The Image of Icelanders as the Other

This example from a travelogue by the Frenchman La Martinière from the middle of the 17th century typifies a lengthy tradition of describing Icelanders as an uncivilized, half-animal, half-human people:

The people of Iceland, for the most part, dwell in caverns, hewn out of the rocks, and the rest live in huts, built like those in Lapland, some with wood, and others with fish bones covered with turf; and both they and their cattle lie under the same roof. Their beds are composed of hay or straw, upon which they lie in their cloaths, with skins upon them, and make but one bed for the whole family. Both men and women have very disagreeable persons: they are swarthy, and dress like the Norwegians, in coats made of the skins of the sea calf, with the hair outward ... They live by fishing, are very brutal and slovenly, and most of them pretend to necromancy. (La Martinière 1769, p. 439–440)

Ideas of this kind dominated images of Iceland as the ‘other’ at least until the late 18th century; this applied not only to Iceland but to the whole
northern periphery, including Iceland, Greenland, northern Scandinavia and the northernmost areas of Russia. It must, however, be mentioned that there also existed another image tradition relating to this area, a tradition of a utopian kind, side by side with the dominant dystopian stereotypes.

The image history of Iceland in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries will not be discussed in any detail here; the thesis of this paper is that national images of the country changed fundamentally in the 19th century. Descriptions of Iceland became generally much more positive than before and writers started to present Icelanders as innocent, noble savages, living on what their native soil had to offer. Late in the 19th century, authors writing about the country started to compare the life of the Icelanders in the Saga Age with the Golden Age of Greece and Rome, citing both the Icelanders’ heroic deeds in the Viking Age and their intellectual and cultural achievements, mostly connected with the medieval Sagas. Examples of this kind are numerous. The British historian and statesman James Bryce, for example, stated that the Icelanders were

an intellectually cultivated people which has produced a literature both in prose and in poetry that stands among the primitive literatures next after that of ancient Greece if one regards both its quantity and its quality. Nowhere else, except in Greece, was so much produced that attained, in times of primitive simplicity, so high a level of excellence both in imaginative power and in brilliance of expression. (Bryce 1916, p. x-xi)

In short, Iceland became the Hellas of the North in the late 19th century. Whole books were even written on the matter, e.g. Aus Hellas, Rom und Thule. Cultur- und Literaturbilder by the Austrian Josef Calasanz Poestion (1882), Thule here meaning Iceland. Another example is Island und Hellas by August Boltz from 1892. These kinds of national images of Iceland prospered until the Second World War, not least in the Third Reich, where discussions of the holy island in the North were not uncommon.

A few of the reasons for these changes will be discussed here. Visits to Iceland became more and more frequent in the 18th and 19th centuries, together with greatly increased interest in and publication about the country and its culture. However, some further factors should be mentioned in
relation to the changes in images of Iceland in the 19th century. Since antiquity the qualities of North and South have been viewed differently. In the 18th and 19th centuries ideas of North and South changed dramatically in the spirit of French philosopher Montesquieu. In addition, the steadily increasing nationalism of the 19th century turned the interest of intellectuals and politicians in Central and Western Europe to the North, and not least to the high North. There arose a demand for Iceland: it was thought that the country preserved a language very similar to the ancient Gothic language and life there was thought to be similar to the life of the ancient Germanic tribes described by Tacitus. Book after book was written about the country and the culture of the Icelanders, both medieval and contemporary developments. Travellers—or Iceland pilgrims—were so frequent in the Geysir area in the 1870s that the British writer and designer William Morris complained of pollution around this famous hot spring.

Creating a Self-Image

In Icelandic literature the question of the national character of the Icelanders has been discussed for a long time; this discussion was closely connected with the image of the country as the “other” in European literature. Well before 1800 some Icelandic authors responded to the dystopian images of the country. They “wrote back”, mainly explaining what the Icelanders were not: complete barbarians. In this connection may be mentioned Arngrímur laërði (the learned) from the early 17th century and the bishop Þórður Þorláksson from the late 17th century. They and other Icelandic writers tried to persuade learned people in other countries that the Icelanders were of the same origin as people in civilized Western Europe. These efforts are actually similar to the efforts made by the Swede Olaus Magnus in the 16th century and by the Dano-Norwegian Ludvig Holberg in the 17th century to “correct” the dominant images of their home countries in “civilized” Europe. This struggle, this writing back from Iceland, was more or less in vain until the 19th century, but with increased nationalism in Western and Northern Europe and the changing image of Iceland as the other in the 19th century, a path was opened for new kinds of Icelandic self-images.

This change is evident in Icelandic literature from the late 19th century, and in poems, schoolbooks, handbooks for travellers and interviews in foreign magazines. These views were expressed, for example, in the journal
The Tourist in Iceland, published in Reykjavík for foreign tourists in 1893. The author starts with a justification for an interest in Iceland:

We are all more or less apt to stare at the grandeur of what we term the foremost nations of the world. Their weight in the affairs of men is so potent, that we instinctively are drawn by the current of popular opinion, so that we have but little time or leisure to glance at the more obscure parts of the world. Often these out-of-the-way-places, however are highly interesting—and studying their history and looking at their natural beauties we are amply rewarded for our trouble of being as it were exception to the rule. (The Tourist in Iceland, p. 5)

And the reward was, according to the author:

In the first place we have a saga or history unique as it were … We possess a literature of our own which we may say is the admiration of the civilized world … In the second place we possess a very interesting and highly cultivated language … In the third place, especially during summer, we possess a most salubrious climate, invigorating pure and healthy. Our scenery is unique … Such is briefly stated the country which we now are going to open to our foreign readers. (ibid.)

Half a century later the self-image of the Icelanders was presented in a much clearer and more decisive form when Guðmundur Finnbogason, a well-known intellectual in Iceland in the first half of the 20th century, wrote on the character of his people, a topic he had been researching for more than two decades. He published a paper on the subject in the Icelandic periodical Skírnir in 1943; in the same year his article was translated to English and published under the title The Icelanders by Anglia, the Anglo-Icelandic society of Reykjavík. It was also Finnbogason’s intention to publish his paper in an anthology edited by a Dutchman whose name he does not mention. That book was to contain similar articles on other nations of Europe and their characters. It can only be regretted that the book was never published because of the war.
In his text Guðmundur Finnbogason discusses the character of a nation as a concept, but also how origin, race and environment have influenced the character of his countrymen. He states that we can “judge the character of a nation from its deeds, its aspirations, and its ideals in relation to the environment in which it has lived … and in the same way as we measure the height of a mountain at its highest peak, so we must judge a nation by its greatest achievements in each field” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 1943b, p. 7).

The author was highly influenced by the American geographer Ellsworth Huntington. Huntington, who was well known and influential in the early 20th century, was much interested in the relationship between climate and culture, following Montesquieu. Guðmundur Finnbogason argued, using Huntington’s words, that the settlers of Iceland were a highly selected group of people … from among this most gifted group in an uncommonly able race there were selected first those who loved freedom more than the favour of kings, and second those who were inclined to try their chances in a new and difficult land … Thus it was the best of the best who founded Iceland and they created there what Bryce [James Bryce] calls “an almost unique community whose culture and creative power flourished independently of any favouring material conditions and indeed under conditions in the highest degree unfavourable.” (ibid., p. 11–12)

This text is a splendid example of how an image of the other becomes a self-image, how the writings of foreign authors on Iceland were used to construct the Icelandic self-image.

Guðmundur Finnbogason also argued that the environment was vital for the Icelandic character as well: “the influence of the country seems to be in the direction of stimulating a strong national consciousness and characteristic culture, versatility, self-reliance, independence and an equalitarian turn of mind, manliness, tenacity and equanimity in emergencies, alertness of mind and imaginative power” (ibid., p. 10).

But Guðmundur Finnbogason was not content to deduce the character of the Icelanders from origin, history and nature. He undertook a huge project with the purpose of finding out the truth in this matter. He did this
by reading 1000 biographies by Icelanders, 797 by priests and 203 by sheriffs (Guðmundur Finnbogason 1933). In addition, he read 24 descriptions by “honourable authors”, including 20 by foreigners. Through this reading he determined that 10 of the most common characteristics of the Icelanders were the following: 1) gifted, 2) courteous, 3) learned, 4) kind-hearted, 5) poets, 6) hospitable, 7) cheerful, 8) stout, 9) skilful artisans and 10) sincere. Finnbogason found what he was looking for and in the subsequent text he discusses how these qualities appear in his contemporary Iceland; he is full of hope for a bright future for his countrymen because they are “on the whole well endowed both mentally and physically … [and] have always valued intelligence most and enquired about it first” (Guðmundur Finnbogason 1943b, p. 19).

The Icelanders took this image to heart, an image partly characterized by ideas of superiority and racism; it became the self-image of the Icelanders for decades before and after independence in 1944. The texts by the Icelanders mentioned here are parts of this tradition, an attempt to make the small visible and to call out loudly enough to be heard—and a clear sign of a deep sense of inferiority.

Icelandic Self-Images at the Beginning of the 21st Century

More than 60 years have passed since Guðmundur Finnbogason published his article. It is interesting to investigate how the official national self-images have developed: are they still the same or have they changed in accordance with a changed world?

The Icelandic President, Mr. Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, has been travelling widely in the last decade, giving speeches on many occasions and being interviewed in the press. Based on some speeches by the President it seems to be the President’s opinion that the success of investments in Europe by some Icelandic businessmen in the last few years can first and foremost be explained by the national character of the Icelanders. An example of this is a speech given by the President at the Walbrook Club in London on May 5, 2003. “We are succeeding because we are different,” began the President, telling his audience that he is going to offer them a “list of a dozen or so of elements that I believe have been crucial to Iceland’s success story … a guide to the ground in which achievements are rooted.” Among these elements are: 1) the Icelanders have “a strong work ethic”, a “heritage from
the old society of farmers and fishermen”; 2) they “go straight to the task and do the job in the shortest time possible”; 3) “Icelanders are risk takers, daring and aggressive”; 4) they lack “tolerance for bureaucratic methods”; 5) they have a “strong element of personal trust”; 6) they are flexible and easily form “small groups of operators”; 7) the boss himself or herself stands in the front line; 8) they have a “heritage of discovery and exploration”; 9) they value the “importance of personal reputation”, as “rooted in the medieval Edda poems”; 10) they show “creativity, rooted in the old Icelandic culture which respected the talents of individuals who could compose poetry or tell stories” (2003, pp. 3–6).

As we can see the characteristics of the Icelanders are similar in the eyes of Guðmundur Finnbogason and of President Grímsson. Finnbogason mentions self-reliance, independence and an equalitarian turn of mind, manliness, alertness of mind, imaginative power and poetic abilities. The President believes Icelanders are risk-takers, daring, aggressive and creative; they go straight to the task and do the job in the shortest time possible with the boss in the front line.

According to the President these elements explain why Icelandic businesses “win where others either failed or did not dare to enter. Our entrepeneurs have thus been able to move faster and more effectively, to be more original and more flexible, more reliable but also more daring than many others” (ibid., p. 6). As Guðmundur Finnbogason was optimistic 60 years ago, so the President is too. “With a little help from Hollywood movies”, he says, “You ain’t seen nothing yet”, meaning that these are only the first steps in the progress of Icelandic businesses abroad.

It seems that the national self-images of Iceland have changed little in the past fifty years, and the President is clearly of the opinion that there exists a kind of national character or essence, different from the characters of other nations. He would not agree with scholars who state that nationality is not “an interpretation of a reality, but the formulation of an ideal, desired identity” (Alphen 1991, p. 2–3).

Final Remarks

Scholars of national images have mentioned several factors that influence the development of images of the “other” in general, certain “structural constants in the stereotypical imagination” (Corbey and Leerssen 1991, p.
These factors include the size and strength of a country: negative images are more common for strong nations than weak. Distance from a cultural and economic centre is also important. The farther away from the centre a country is situated, the higher its grade of otherness “in a gradually expanding circle from neighbouring to further removed peoples”, as one scholar has put it (Pieterse 1991, p. 198). In addition, the periphery is commonly regarded as “backward, bypassed by history, lost in time” (Leerssen 1991, p. 8). And if the country is an island it is more likely that the description will include more or less utopian or dystopian traits.

In the case of Iceland the smallness of the population, complete lack of power, distance from Western European centres, and location in the North created utopian and dystopian images of Iceland as a wonder- island—sometimes a devil’s island, sometimes a paradise. Negative images dominated until the early 19th century but because of a strong demand for Nordic cultural heritage in the 19th century, the dominant image of Iceland as the other developed into the image of the Hellas of the North, as mentioned above.

In Iceland there was also a demand for this image, as we have seen; a colony that wanted to be independent—the smallest of small nations, poorest of the poor—needed arguments to convince the world that it was worth being counted among civilized peoples, and not populated by “swarthy” savages, as it had often been expressed. It was even better if it could be claimed that this small nation was of importance for the surrounding world, even superior to other peoples.

This kind of discourse was easily understandable 50–100 years ago. But at the beginning of the 21st century, in a world that seems to be completely different from the world of the early 20th century, one would expect that the discourse of leading politicians would have changed. Can it be explained why this is not the case? Is the reason perhaps that Iceland hardly discussed its self-images after the Second World War: its struggle for independence morphed into a demand to have the medieval manuscripts returned from Copenhagen and for an exclusive 200-mile fishing limit around the country through the 1970s. Now that the manuscripts are back and the Cod Wars over, the political and cultural leaders of the country have maintained the same pre-War, pre-independence discourse. Or is the reason that Iceland’s otherness is still intact: the smallness of the society; the country’s location...
in the North, the distance from the financial and cultural centres of Europe; and the colonial heritage have remained more or less the same as a century ago. Does a feeling of deep inferiority still influence Icelandic politicians? Or are these images actually signs of increasing nationalism in Iceland, the same tendency as seen in several neighbouring countries in Western Europe? This discourse, these images of the national character of the Icelanders, may also just be left-over, because

stereotypes act as knowledge structures which make people see certain characteristics in the target culture and ignore others … [and] steer our attention in the same way as some object that we are looking for … In this way we see what we are taught to see and our observations also confirm the stereotype. Having stereotypes leads one sometimes even to see things that that are not really there. (Lehtonen 2005, pp. 72–73)

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Imagery of the North from a Distance

Diana Petkova

Empirical Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural research (Petkova and Lehtonen 2005) found that people’s images of other countries were based on the geographical position and the natural features of the countries in question. 200 Bulgarian and 200 Finnish university students were asked about their attitudes to different countries and national “others” in the spring of 2004. The respondents filled in questionnaires containing structured and open-ended questions. The Bulgarian students were also asked what they associated with certain countries such as Finland and Sweden. The most frequently mentioned characteristics of both were certain nouns and adjectives: snow, cold, lakes, forests, Nordic, to name a few. Many of the Bulgarian respondents characterized the Nordic countries as ‘distant’ in opposition to some of their neighbouring countries, which they considered to be ‘close’ and ‘similar’. Thus it seems that geographical distance predetermines the way in which a country is perceived. The more distant the country is, the vaguer the perceptions of it are and, vice versa: the closer a given national community is, the more distinct the assumed personality traits of the people living in it become.

On the basis of the empirical data from the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study, this paper discusses the basic constituents of the images of
Finland and Sweden as well as the differences in perceptions of them by Bulgarians; it also examines the cultural and social factors responsible for the construction of the dominant images of these two Nordic countries. In discussing the latter, it will first be necessary to outline the overall image of the North as seen from a geographical distance.

On the Concept of Country image

The modernist approach to cultural and social communities views them as essential and given products. According to the scholars adhering to this approach (Deloche 1860), a country or a nation is either predetermined by God’s will or is a result of the natural human desire for life, held in common. No matter whether such modernist scholars see the national community as organic or as voluntary, their basic assertion is that it is a natural, essential or primordial product. From this point of view national and cultural communities have certain essential features that are inherited and given and that distinguish them from all other communities. These features are also thought to shape the ‘national character’ (Peabody 1985; Kleinfeld and Kleinfeld 2004) of the nation.

This paper takes a social constructivist approach, and maintains that national and cultural communities should be examined not par excellence, as entities in themselves, but as reflected in people’s minds and expressed in their attitudes and perceptions. Thus it is not the national community itself but the image of it held by its members that becomes the basis of the collective identification with it.

National image also incorporates the self-concept of the national collective. In this approach the analysis concentrates on the collective self-perceptions and self-attitudes of the members of a given nation. The image of the self is always built in opposition to the image of the other. Freud (1985) was the first to postulate the dual principle “self–other” in collective identification. The ambivalence that characterizes this human identification process is inherent and can be observed on both the individual and group level. Both individuals and groups need the other to affirm what they perceive is typically and uniquely theirs. The opposition self–other applies equally to contemporary national identities and images. Still today, nationalism is understood as an intermingling of the three major discourses: ‘self’, ‘other’ and ‘the world’ (Delanty 1999).
The self-image of a national community is constructed both consciously and unconsciously. A country’s image is often a special target of national image management and PR communication, for example. It may be intentionally promoted by institutions such as schools and universities. At the same time it may be unconsciously created by the media, through newspapers, television and radio, fiction, the Internet, etc.

The second aspect of a country’s image is the other-image that outside, foreign, nationalities have of that country, reflecting their own ideas. Foreigners may shape their image of the country in question on the basis of their own personal experiences and impressions but most often their attitudes are strongly influenced by the media. Thus the image of a national community is a two-fold construction, representing both the collective self esteem of the nation and the attitudes of non-members towards it.

Current research on the construction of images of countries has been focused on social and cultural stereotypes. It is considered that all nationalities share some stereotypes (beliefs about certain personality characteristics that other social, ethnic or national communities possess) and auto-stereotypes (the characteristics thought to be typical of the one’s own community). However, some stereotypes can be rather harmful because they may arouse hostility, xenophobia and racism. Autostereotypes, in turn, may be used as a self-handicapping strategy. This usually occurs when social groups or collectives feel threatened and less tolerated by other cultures. In this case thinking negatively about oneself is designed to reduce the responsibility for a potential failure (Lehtonen 2005, pp. 79-82).

Bentele (1995, p. 63) draws attention to the difference between the image of the nation and that of its inhabitants. The image of a nation, or a “country image”, is created by information mediated by the mass media, by the qualities of products and services experienced, by the people met, and by direct experience of the country in question. The sources for the image of the people living in it may be the same, but the former is considered to be more important for international politics and business.

However, despite the suggestions of scholars that the image of a country and the image of its people are two different phenomena, the data from the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study shows that the two are not separated in respondents’ minds. For example, when the Finns were asked about “Bulgaria the country”, many of them described the supposed char-
acteristics of the people living in it. The same was true among the Bulgarian respondents, who tended to identify Finland not only with nature, brands and services, but also with the closed and reserved character of the Finns (Petkova and Lehtonen 2005, pp. 82-83). Thus the data suggest that the two images are closely intermingled and that the image of the people is in fact an important component of the overall image of the country.

Country image is thus a social-psychological construct which represents both the self-concept of, and the attitudes of non-members towards a given nationality. On the basis of the constructivist approach, this paper discusses the images of Finland and Sweden, held by Bulgarians, as multifaceted constructs, stored in the collective memory. It argues that although country images vary according to the specific cultural context, there is a universal process of image construction. Images of different countries may be quite different in content but their form, major constituents, and the mechanisms used in building them are always the same. One constant characteristic of a country’s image, for example, is the geographical position and natural features of that country.

**Geography, Borders, and Cultural Characteristics**

In the 1970s some scholars asserted that in an epoch of telecommunications and new technologies geography does not actually matter because all the people in the world form part of the “global network nation” (Hiltz and Turoff 1978). From this point of view, in the process of globalization and cultural homogenization the differences between East and West, on the one hand, and North and South, on the other, will be progressively erased until a uniform global society is created. However, this paper argues that despite technological and cultural unification, geography will remain a basic factor determining the main characteristics of cultural communities and, hence, their images.

The impact of geography on the cultural model is usually analyzed in relation to features of geographical relief and climate. For example, in describing different types of cultural mind or mentality, Mestrovic et al. (1993) postulate that mountains shape a conservative and traditional character among the communities living in them, while seas or fields forge social groups that are open-minded and ready to learn more about the world. Despite some obvious exaggerations by the authors, people from the maritime
regions do indeed have occupations, habits and way of life that are different from those of people living among mountains. Thus it seems plausible that differences in geography, climate and nature are spontaneously translated into differences of culture.

Images of countries, national communities and regions are also very often built by means of imaginary borders. In contrast to the lines drawn on the map, the borders forming part of the country image are not strictly fixed but instead can shift. For example, in the recent past Europe was thought of as divided into two basic regions: Western and Eastern Europe. Since the collapse of the socialist block and the intensive political unification resulting in a broad European Union, the former division between East and West already seems artificial. Nowadays this division is more a question of ideological and political remnants from the past than one of real cultural patterns. At the same time, if a comparison is made between the North and South of Europe in general, and between Scandinavia and the Balkans in particular, considerable cultural differences can be discerned in the way of life, the customs and the social-psychological attitudes of the people living in the two regions. Thus the borders between the South and North are as much geographical as cultural. At the same time, mapping where the South ends and the North begins is practically impossible. Furthermore, the very perception of what North and South are can shift too. This is confirmed by the data from the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study.

**Bulgarian Images of the North**

The Bulgarian respondents were asked about their attitudes to specific nationalities and ethnicities, including the Finns. Another question asked them what comes into their minds first when they think about each of the countries given in the questionnaire. They had to list three or more associations. The countries chosen were Greece, Turkey, Finland and Sweden.

We asked the students about their opinions of more than one target nationality in order to anchor the reciprocal Bulgarian-Finnish evaluations in the most relevant national other images in each country. And second, we chose to ask about attitudes towards both neighbours and distant countries because we wanted to see whether the associations of the students would be oriented in relation to the region or whether they would be able to differentiate between two countries in one and the same region. The results were expected
to provide us with some information about the overall images of these countries as well as about the main constituents of the countries’ images.

The Bulgarians’ characterizations of Finns were classified as follows: 52.1% positive, 17.5% negative and 30.4% neutral. Of the 200 responses, the attributes most often ascribed to the Finns were: “technologically developed” (121); “silent”, “closed”, “reserved” and “non-sociable” (75); “hard-working”, “work-loving” (39); “organized” and “disciplined” (41); “blond” (28); “good-hearted” (17); “clever” and “intelligent” (15).

The most often repeated associations with Finland by the Bulgarians were: “Nordic country”, “distant country”, “cold”, “snow”, “ice” (97); “Finlandia vodka” (90); “communication technologies”, “mobile phones”, “Nokia” (44); “lakes and forests” (31); “I don’t know anything about the country” (24); “winter sports”, “ski-sport”, “ski-competitions” (20); “hard-working people” (16); “blond and tall people” (15).

The most often repeated associations with Sweden among the Bulgarians were: “developed country”, “welfare country”, “high social standard” (50); “Nordic country”, “distant country”, “cold”, “ice”, “snow” (41); “smorgasbord” (30); “blond people” (26); “I don’t know anything about the country” (25) “good bands”, “good singers”, “good music”, “Roxet” (18); “good football”, “football teams” (16); “automobile industry”, “Swedish cars”, “Volvo” (16).

The associations with both Finland and Sweden were closely related to the natural characteristics and the geographical distance of the two countries. Thus it seems that the position of the country on the map and natural features are very important components of a country’s image. Finland and Sweden were perceived as Nordic countries distant from Bulgaria. The countries in the North were also characterized as distant in opposition to some of Bulgaria’s neighbouring countries, such as Greece, which were considered to be close. Thus geographical distance can also be transformed into a social-psychological and cultural differentiation from the country in question. Statements such as “I don’t know anything about the country”, which were not rare at all among the Bulgarians, also reveal high-perceived psychological distance from the Nordic countries; this relates both to the lack of existing knowledge of them and to geographical distance.

Another important component of the images of Finland and Sweden is the contemporary social achievements of the two Nordic states. Students
associated them with a high social standard and the communications or automobile industry. Particular objects, commercial products, product brands and cultural celebrities also formed part of the image of the countries ("mobiles", "Nokia", "Finlandia vodka", "cars", "Volvo", "Roxet"). Assumed physical or mental characteristics of the citizens of the countries in question were mentioned by the Bulgarian respondents too.

One interesting finding in the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study was that, despite their geographical distance, the Finns were among the nationalities most favoured by the Bulgarians as potential marriage partners or friends (78%). Several partial explanations for the Bulgarians’ obvious affection for Finns can be proposed but initially the answer may be found in the historical past.

**What is Finland for the Bulgarians?**

It seems that the positive image of Finland and the Finns has deep historical roots. It owes its beginning to the 19th-century belief that Bulgarians and Finns had common origin. The Czech historian Safarik (1848, pp. 268-275) was the first to assume that the proto-Bulgarians were of Finno-Ugric ethnicity. Later his grandson Irecek reproduced his belief. Having lived in Bulgaria for a long time, Irecek was interested in the history and culture of the Bulgarians. He wrote one of the first treatises on Bulgarian national history; the book was published in 1876 in both the Czech and German languages (Reprint 1999). In it he postulated the idea of Bulgarian-Finnish kinship. The Bulgarian historian and ethnographer Drinov (1909, p. 32) was a follower of Safarik and Irecek. Pondering upon the traditions, customs and the songs of the Bulgarians, he too agreed that Finns and Bulgarians were historical relatives. At the same time he stated that the ancient Bulgarians were a minority that had been totally assimilated into the Slavonic majority. Safarik, Irecek and Drinov were very influential in the Slavonic world; their work had a strong impact on Bulgarian historiography and ethnography. Although their thesis about the Finno-Ugric origin of the Bulgarians was fiercely opposed in the 20th century, they created an image of the Finns as a heroic, generous and mythical nation.

Another reason for the Bulgarians being well-disposed to the Finns is the historical fact, known by most Bulgarians, that the Finnish Guard fought in the Russian army during the Russo-Turkish war (1877–1878),
which resulted in the liberation of Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire in 1878. Thus for many Bulgarians the Finns are not just a distant nation but liberators, and it is to be expected that the Bulgarians would manifest positive attitudes towards them.

A third explanation for the Bulgarians’ affection for the Finns may be found in more recent history. The image of Finland was shaped at the beginning of the 20th century by the book *In the Country of the White Lilies*, written for the Bulgarians by the Russian writer Grigori Petrov. In just one decade the book was reprinted more than 10 times and became one of the most popular written-works in the country. Furthermore, at the end of the 1930s, the book was officially included in the secondary school curriculum. *White Lilies* gave an idealistic image of Finland and represented it as a model of economic and social success that the Bulgarians should emulate. The two small nations, Bulgaria and Finland, had experienced political dependence in the past and had had to cope with many hardships. Hence the prosperity of Finland was seen by Petrov as a sign of hope for Bulgaria.

After the 1950s, the image of Finland was promoted by various travel books, such as *A Meeting with Finland* by Golemanov (1967) and *Suomi* by Kiranova (1981). Both of these books adopted a socialist perspective but nevertheless they described Finland as a country with a unique and beautiful natural environment and the Finns as a proud and freedom-loving people.

In recent years the image of Finland created by the Bulgarian mass media has been that of a technologically-advanced nation with a high level of social security and a high standard of living. These images can also be found in the Bulgarian associations with Finland in the answers to the open-ended questions. Thus together with natural features and geographical distance, mutual historical and cultural relations are an important factor in the image of a country. The historical relations of friendship between Bulgaria and Finland, both true and hypothetical, are obviously the reason for the positive image of Finland held among the Bulgarians.

*Geographical Distance in the Perception of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’*
Although the Bulgarian informants associated Finland and Sweden with the Nordic region, they differentiated between the two countries. The empirical study of Varamaki (2005) showed that the Japanese people did not
have distinct images of the different Nordic countries before visiting them. Most of the Japanese informants had an overall image of the North, where mostly geographical and natural features predominated, such as ‘snow’, ‘ice’, ‘cold’, and ‘nightless nights’. At the same time they attributed fjords and mountains to Finland, which was analysed by Varamaki as a lack of detailed knowledge about the three Scandinavian states.

Although the Bulgarian informants outlined much more detailed pictures of their neighbouring countries, they were nonetheless able to differentiate between the Scandinavian states. This fact becomes even more important if it is taken into consideration that most of the Bulgarians interviewed (90.5%) had never been to Finland. Despite the geographical distance of the Nordic countries and the explicitly declared lack of knowledge of them reported by some of the respondents, both Finland and Sweden are European states. Hence the Bulgarians had more distinct images of the Scandinavian countries than did the Japanese informants. This means that bigger geographical distance from the target country creates vaguer associations with it. Also, even at a considerable distance, countries from the same continent are perceived to be geographically and culturally ‘closer’ than those belonging to a different one. This once again shows that geographical borders are often translated into cultural borders.

The fact that geographical distance has a strong influence on social psychological attitudes and perceptions is demonstrated by the so-called ‘projected autostereotypes’ in the Bulgarian-Finnish study. The Bulgarian and Finnish students were asked to list, by free association, what they believed people in certain countries think about them. Among these groups were Germans, Finns/Bulgarians, Russians etc. This question was not aimed at revealing what other nationalities might really think about the Bulgarians and Finns but what in fact the Bulgarians and Finns think of themselves. Thus projected stereotypes do not reveal what the foreigner really thinks about us, but they project our own fears about how we appear in the eyes of others. Projected stereotypes are thus an integral part of the collective perception of ‘self’.

The Bulgarian respondents listed 192 assumed Finnish characterizations of the Bulgarians of which the most frequent were ‘unknown’ and ‘distant people’ (53); ‘sociable’ and ‘loud’ (29). The Finns listed 225 assumed Bulgarian characterizations of the Finns. Some of them supposed that the
Bulgarians associate the Finns with a Nordic position (22); others believed that they conceive the Finns as ‘silent’ or ‘quiet’ (22). Thus it seems that geographical peculiarities also predetermine the collective self-perceptions of nations. Natural features and geographical position, then, are important components of both the self-image and the image of the community held by non-members. In addition, the geographical and natural features tend to be associated with particular character traits. Silence is typically assumed to be a characteristic of a northern culture and talkativeness of a southern culture. This is also confirmed by the empirical data obtained in the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study (fig. 1).

One of the questions was concretely related to the reciprocal perceptions of the sociability, national characteristics, and value orientation of Finns and Bulgarians. This question was structured, and the Bulgarian and Finnish students had to select one or more from a list of different alternatives. We listed some stereotypical options found to be used in earlier studies to describe Bulgarians/Finns.

32 (16%) Finns and 90 (45%) Bulgarians chose the option: “Bulgarians/Finns are quiet and reserved” against 168 Finns and 110 Bulgarians who did not. Also, in their free associations the Bulgarians underlined “non-sociable” and “reserved” as characteristics of Finns, while many of the Finnish students stated that the Bulgarians are “lively” and “sociable” (Petkova and Lehtonen 2005, p. 53).

![Figure 1: Statistics from the Intercultural Research](image)
This indicates that Finnish silence and Bulgarian talkativeness are both hetero- and auto-stereotypes. Of course, this is not the whole picture of the Finns’ and Bulgarians’ communication styles; rather, they simplify and exaggerate some aspects of perceived Bulgarian and Finnish social behaviour. At the same time, the answers prove that silence/talk are important ingredients of the Finnish and Bulgarian cultural identities and national images. They are also specific characteristics of the Northern and Southern European cultural models that are closely connected to their geographical and natural features. Silence is always associated with snow, ice and cold, while loud and noisy talk is usually related to sun and warmth.

In the literature on cultural models and identities, the latter are often described by reference to a selection of basic cultural characteristics, such as individualism/collectivism, high/low context, time orientation, femininity/masculinity, etc. The major idea behind our study was the importance, when assessing the cultural models of Northern and Southern Europe, of considering in that assessment talkativeness/non-talkativeness or silence/non-silence in relation to the natural features of the two regions.

One very interesting case in this respect is the image of the Germans in the Bulgarian-Finnish intercultural study. Many of the Finnish respondents (44) described the Germans as cheerful, polite, sociable and loud. At the same time 69 Bulgarians stated that the Germans are cold and non-sociable (Petkova and Lehtonen 2005, pp. 42-43). For the Finns, Germany is the South and the Germans offer an image of a loud speaking, talkative and friendly nationality. For the Bulgarians, Germany represents the North, usually associated with cold and non-sociable people. This example shows that the perception of the North and South is not stable but the imaginary border between them can shift according to the informants’ geographical location.

Thus the Finnish and Bulgarian images of one and the same target nation, Germany, turned out to be diametrically opposed. This confirms that the image derives from a particular cultural context and is related to characteristics of the observers’ own culture. In such a way the assumed cultural characteristics of the target nation are relative: the representatives of a given nation may be seen as cold and non-sociable by one culture and as sociable and loud by another, according to the informants’ culture. So, a nation or a cultural group is always seen from the perspective of a particular cultural paradigm and its image may shift according to the social and cultural context.
Conclusion

From the data given above it is obvious that the image of a nation is always shaped from a particular perspective. More concretely, there are two main factors that contribute to the forging of a country’s image. Firstly, the history of mutual relations turns out to be one foundation upon which the image is built. Secondly, it is their proximity with the nation in question, either geographical or cultural, that the people appraising it considered important. Geographical distance is often translated into a perceived social psychological distance from the country-in-question. This is also the case with the Bulgarian images of the North. They are built on stereotypical assumptions related to the natural characteristics of the Nordic countries—such as “cold”, “snow”, “ice”—in turn transformed into particular traits of character: “cold”, “non-sociability” and “silence”. However, the Bulgarian images of Sweden, and especially of Finland, are very positive due to their historical relations, both true and hypothetical. It can be concluded that the image of a country is a particular mental construction of the observer, representing the cultural specificity not only of the target nation but also of the culture of the people constructing the image.

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Inuit Symbols and Canadian Nationhood in the Imagined North

Christopher M. Fletcher

*Inuksuit, Nation, Biography*
This paper explores the cultural and geographic shifts in the deployment of the Inuksuk (pl. Inuksuit) as a marker of a complex and globally-situated Canadian identity, rooted as it is in a longstanding relationship with an imagined North (Grace 2001; Hamelin 1975; Atwood 1972). Inuksuit are stone cairns of various forms constructed by Inuit at strategic points on the landscape. Inuksuit are integral to Inuit technology of occupation and subsistence in their Arctic homeland and serve to indicate a variety of information critical to a mobile subsistence-production society. In linking Inuit to a cultural landscape, Inuksuit have an iconic position that has been documented in film, photography and writing most notably as a popular coffee table book by Hallendy (2000). A decade ago noted arctic photographer Fred Bruemmer published a pictorial essay entitled “Sentinels of Stone” in Natural History (1995). The article presents a number of nicely composed photographs of Inuksuit with text about their utility in orienting Inuit movement across the tundra and the reminiscences of Elder Inuit on how an Inuksuk would be addressed and gifted when a difficult water journey was planned. It seems from his description that Inuksuit were both objects that served as navigation tools and agents that contribute to the success of the trip.¹ Inuit
constructed Inuksuit with purpose and related to them as subjects, such that personal biographies of some Inuit—life trajectories through time and space—meshed with those of the stone cairns. There is interdependency inherent in this relationship in that Inuksuit require people to construct them and people require Inuksuit to persist. They are both things and actors in the lives of Inuit. Hallendy explores these themes and reiterates the functional and cosmological significances of Inuksuit for Inuit.

In recent years representations of the Inuksuk have been strategically deployed by Inuit organizations in their corporate logos and the Nunavut Territorial regalia, an indication of the symbolic resonance that this form takes in Inuit political development (Graburn 2004). While there is an evident geographical and cultural logic in the above example, Inuksuit now also regularly appear far from the Arctic and in many guises. They serve to market various products, as decorative garden ornaments or spontaneous markings along highways, as monuments to special events and so on. The materials required—stones—are nearly ubiquitous and the form lends itself to spontaneous creation and instant recognition. These representations range in size from a couple of inches in the case of airport gift shop trinkets to ten or more meters, as in the Inuksuk constructed to mark the visit of Pope John Paul II to Toronto for World Youth Day in July of 2002 (fig. 1). They are also regularly given as gifts by Inuit organizations and by representatives of the Canadian government and other institutions. Official Inuksuit, that is to say Inuksuit sanctioned by a state or other governing body, have appeared in Brisbane, St. Petersburg, Kandahar and Washington. In all of these cases the Inuksuk seems intended to evoke Canada as a conceptual space associated with the North. The original association of Inuksuk to Inuit and the Arctic seems to be shifting to encompass Canada in entirety.

The vast majority of these Inuksuit are intended to represent the human body, constructed with a discernable head, arms and legs. As a number of Inuit and other commentators noted when an Inuksuk was chosen for the Vancouver Winter Olympics logo, the popular use of the term Inuksuk in

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1 It is always difficult to write of Inuit practices as told by Elders as the overwhelming tendency is to use the past tense and in so doing situate cultural practice outside of the current era and within a period of “traditionality” that is difficult to define, much less realize. Rather than bracketing off the past as a discrete cultural period it is best to think of the past tense as belonging to the interlocutor in his or her reflections. To do so leaves open the distinct possibility that others practice and believe similarly today.
English for this form of stone assemblage is inaccurate within the Inuit language. Innunguaq is the appropriate term in Inuktitut. “Inuksuk” is a linguistic borrowing that draws from a partial knowledge of Inuit ways by mainstream Canadian society and, one could add, reflective of a knowledge deeply scored by the weight of the accumulated generations of southern Canadian stereotypes of Inuit (Fletcher 2004). Regardless, “Inuksuk” is now part of the Canadian English and French vocabulary along with kayak, anorak and perhaps two or three other words from Inuktitut. These temperate Inuksuit are generally signifiers, or mnemonics, of Canadian landscape inclusive of, but not limited to, the Arctic. Their frequent place in official gifting contributes to the idea of Canada as a nation. In this paper I will explore a few examples of these wandering Inuksuit for what they suggest about underlying notions of Canadian nationhood. This is not intended to be a neat and bounded symbolic analysis nor is there space here to fully situate Inuksuit in the broader context of indigenous cultural production and nation building as a modernist project. Rather, I present here a preliminary reading of Inuksuit as cultural texts, in the way that Geertz has proposed in his definition of culture, as a semiotic process concerned with the “webs of significance” we all spin for ourselves (Geertz 1974, p. 5).

The metaphor of culture as web is especially apt for Inuksuit as they serve now, and seem to have been conceived of by Inuit, as nodes that bring together and concentrate broader fields of space and action. In the North they mark routes and meeting sites, sources of food and power. Individually, Inuksuit mark specific spots for those who may read them for their intended information. Collectively they form a symbolic language of spatial relations that links
knowledge to geography and human occupation. They are eminently social constructions for the Inuit, connected as they are to a broader understanding of the place of people in an animate landscape. As Inuksuit spread across the southern parts of Canada and around the globe they continue to link disparate places to concentrated ideas of a Canadian geography and identity, both of which are necessarily fragmentary concepts in individual experience. In approaching the incorporation of Inuksuit into the national imaginary, I will highlight the relationship between the experiential qualities of places marked by Inuksuit and the ideological space of the nation, the latter of which can never be grasped as a singularity but is rather continually enacted and represented.

I am influenced in my thinking and writing on Inuksuit by the idea that they are agentic in Inuit cosmogony and, as I discuss here, that this is true for non-Inuit as well. Inuksuit, like people, have biographies that are shaped by the intentions of those who build them and the reactions they engender, however momentous or mundane. Consequently, this paper and my approach to Inuksuit are organized around the “object biography” (Kopytoff 1986), where the meaning and utility of the inanimate is in constant movement over time and between peoples. Objects and people are mutually involved such that “[t]he manner in which people and things are attached to each other has a series of spatial and temporal effects, creating networks which extend over time and space” (Gosden 2004, p. 40). In archaeology, commodity, and material culture studies an object biography approach is useful for situating things within their historic frameworks. Interpretations of the present are limited by the current awareness of meanings attributed to things in the past. Objects are evocative of times and events, bringing them with us into the present. Likewise, through looking at multiple biographies of the same object we can see how it is transformed by temporal, cultural, economic and political events, imbricating these with personal experiences, interpretations and a variety of sociological factors. Inuksuit are objects in motion in personal and collective imaginations.

**Northern Images in Popular Culture**

The appearance of Inuksuit is not limited to airports and front lawns; they also appear on our television sets. An example that is particularly relevant here comes from the Historica Foundation of Canada. This organization was established to raise historical consciousness about Canada
in the general population through television and radio spots, educational materials, and web information. Founded by a wealthy business leader, and supported by national elite, the Historica website offers a number of “Historica Minutes” that have been shown as advertisements on television and are linked to a broader effort to construct and popularize a unified Canadian history in the wake of the most recent national “identity crisis” that followed the 1995 Quebec referendum on sovereignty (Mackey 1999).

In this context the efforts of Historica are clear efforts to build national consciousness through (selective) historical consciousness raising. The “Inukshuk [sic] Minute” features a stranded RCMP officer who is injured and somewhat inexplicably alone in the North. Inuit house him and help him to build an Inuksuk to signal his location to a rescue party. “Now the people will know we were here,” a young Inuk says to the white man.

Embedded in the Historica minute is a cultural power play concerning the source of inspiration for and the communicative intent of Inuksuit. At issue is whether Inuit or Europeans are responsible for the invention of this symbolic form and, by extension, the historical coherence of Inuksuit within a generalized Canadian set of relations to the northern territory. There have been two versions of the Inukshuk Minute: the first ran briefly on television and stated explicitly that the Inuksuk was created by Inuit to attract the attention of European whalers who would rescue the RCMP officer. In other

2 The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are the national civilian police force. They were often the first evidence of the state in the North and West as Canada was settled. They remain the police force in much of rural Canada and throughout the three territories. The “Mountie” is an enduring symbol of the state and of nationhood with a turbulent and mythologized relationship with Native peoples in Canada. See Mackey 1999 for an analysis of the juxtaposition of the red coated mounties and First Nations peoples in national imagery.
words, Inuksuit are a product of European presence and the Inuit desire to be in association with them. The assertions of version one are not supported empirically. As those who have traveled the arctic landscape know there must be thousands of Inuksuit found across the coast and tundra, and they are clearly of indigenous pre-contact origin (Heyes 2002). The second version of the minute has dropped this text while maintaining the drama around the RCMP officer’s predicament and the Inuit response. Despite the change in dialogue, the Canadian Encyclopedia entry, produced by Historica and linked on the website to this clip also makes the assertion of contact as motivation. In both instances the thrust of the story is intercultural, friendly and familiar to many Canadians: ingenious Inuit help out worldly White man. In effect, the stranger who stands for the State is positioned as the motivator for action that leads to the invention of the Inuksuk. The possibility that the Inuksuk finds its genesis in White presence is an oddly resonant yet unlikely scenario.

The televised Historica Inuksuk story highlights questions of time, origin and innovation in national space. This example of attribution and interpretation of the origins of Inuksuit shows how myths of nation-building located in the wilderness play out in popular culture in the present, suggesting as well sources of narrative coherence that underpin the ease and willingness of southern Canadians to adopt the Inuksuk as their own. If Inuksuit appear because white people do, the logic goes, aren’t they in effect part of a generalized Canadian heritage? These attributions speak to the power to determine the nature of spaces—imaginary and real, Northern and national—and the organization of people and practice that resides in

Very few Canadians actually see the Arctic although it is likely true that it is present in all of our imaginations at some point in our lives. Elementary schools across the country have featured curricula on Inuit (or “Eskimos”, when I was a child) for decades.

The origin of this interpretation is difficult to locate in the available literature. The most likely source is Hallendy’s book in which he discusses the human Inuksuk (properly called Innunguaq in Inuktitut) form. Some of these at least were indeed constructed to draw the attention of whalers to a meeting place for trade (Hallendy 2000, p. 46). Hallendy does not, however, say that the Inuksuk finds its origin in these encounters; rather, that it has served in this fashion.
the colonial imagination. The Inuksuk in this instance concentrates multiple dimensions of mimesis where the stone stands for ‘human’ and springs from the mind of those who see themselves represented. This Inuksuk is thus not an Inuit creation but a likeness of the European.

While clearly there are some misattributions in the “Inukshuk minute”, this case of intercultural borrowing strikes one as less planned cooption than a lax reading of the available data through an unexplored ideological framework of state-Inuit relations. What stands out is that Inuit technology is part of “our” heritage, as the last panel of the Historica Minute states, and that Inuit smoothed over the rough bits for the representatives of the government who first appeared. Embedded in this virtual Inuksuk is a naïve reading of Inuit experience with the state that plays into other representations of them as politically and culturally unsophisticated, particularly in the days when the government presence in the North was fragmentary.

From private-sector work on popular Canadian history we move into the curation of the public memory. The National Archives of Canada has some new promotional banners hanging above and within its formidable entrance in Ottawa (fig. 3). At first sight it is not clear that the dark and various shapes represent a stylized Inuksuk. The letter “i” for “information” superimposed over the stone form is vaguely Inuksuk-like as well. The individual stones bear graphic reproductions of archival materials, newspapers, maps, stamps and Aboriginal petroglyphs from Ontario. The incorporation of Inuksuit into the current logo of the archives is continuous with the Historica Minute message. The archive Inuksuk concentrates a historical time into its embrace and once again brings our national consciousness—

Figure 3: Banners at the National Archives of Canada, Ottawa (photo: J. Fletcher).
embodied as it is in the archives—under the scope of the ubiquitous stone cairn. In embedding history in the timelessness of the North, and the Inuit occupation thereof, the existence of Canada is symbolically pushed back into the murky depth before confederation and colonization. This is a neat piece of temporal trickery that imputes nationhood to all time and obviates the very well circumscribed beginnings of this country. The archive Inuksuk challenges the fixity of national time and presents an expansion of the archive’s mandate into what would otherwise be a zone of (re)collection that might better belong to the Museum of Civilization across the river in Hull, Quebec. Archives are concerned above all else with the preservation of documents of national significance. They are, as many have said, the site of the national memory. This graphic Inuksuk usage brings to mind the ambiguous place of the North in the broader Canadian national consciousness; it plays at the edges of that theme, and presents a challenge as well.

The slogan “Knowledge is Here/Ici le Savoir” drawing us into the archives—which is but a repository of information that serves knowledge—is very current. It simultaneously evokes a historical knowledge of country and current discourse in Aboriginal institutional contexts, including traditional knowledge of various sorts, particularly the ubiquitous ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge or ‘TEK’. What kind of knowledge and indeed who’s knowledge does the National Archives’ sign refer to?

This Inuksuk presents an ambiguous juxtaposition where Inuit and Canadian, knowledge and culture, and North and South come together in a way that elides the question of time, and history, from the constitution of nationhood. It emplaces the nation in the mythical timelessness that the North and the Inuit have tended to connote, yet does so within an institution conceived with the very purpose of marking, circumscribing and containing the temporality of the national framework. The archive Inuksuk sublimates the historical origin of the country and, like the Historica minute, it also accomplishes a suggestion of kinship with the logic that if Canada is timeless then Euro-Canadians and the Inuit are related, rather than distinct peoples; that Inuit have always been Canadians, or that perhaps Canadians of European descent are Inuit. It could be argued that the Inuksuk in this representation is calling on the current interest with TEK and not attempting to make pre-colonial assertions. Both the connection with archives and the embedding of other imagery from various time frames suggest otherwise. The
intercultural politics of historical identification embedded in these uses of Inuksuit draw on the cultural specificity of Inuit, thus bringing attention to difference within Canada and at the same time overwriting that difference by promoting national heritage as a singular event.

**Commemoration**

There are at least two instances where Inuksuit have been invoked as commemorative markers of Canadian military loss far from the North: an Inuksuk built on the Canadian military base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, and another at Bernières-sur-Mer in Normandy, France. Both emerge from Canadian military actions and serve as potent examples of an emerging national sensibility that aggregates around the Inuksuk form.

Nations are geographically characterized and (ideally) unambiguously bound spaces within which places are manifested, shaped, contested and enforced in the structuring of identity and political and social practices (Osbourne 2001). Serious challenges to national integrity may play out as collective experiences of fear, desires of reprisal, subjugation and definitions of collective identity in alterity to the other, all of which contribute to cohesion in collective understandings of the nation as a given feature of the world. To give one’s self, daughter or son, to the nation at war is construed as the ultimate demonstration of territorial and ideological belong-

![Figure 4: Dedication of Inuksuk, Kandahar, Afghanistan (AP).](image-url)
Reciprocated by the state, those who die during conflict are incorporated into the national space-time through sanctioned monumentalization of their contribution. War monuments fix the ritual enactment of collective memory within specific place and transform individual grief into public space.

Canadian military activity since the founding of the United Nations has focused on the pacifying role that peacekeepers are mandated to play in global conflicts. There is considerable attachment in Canada to the idea that a small country (in terms of population) with middling political and economic power can influence much larger geopolitical situations through non-aggressive intervention. It was with this gentle militarism as a backdrop that the death of four Canadians in Afghanistan during the post-September 11, 2001 U.S.-led invasion aimed at overthrowing Afghanistan’s Taliban rulers struck an important cord. Their deaths resonated throughout the country, with thousands attending memorial services and discussion in the media continuing for several weeks. Suddenly Canadians were thrust into the realization they were not peacekeeping but active fighters in a conflict of unprecedented origin and uncertain significance. The reports of the war seen on the news did not help clarify the story and reinforced the dissonance with Canada’s self-ascribed role. The image of Canadians

![Figure 5: Inuksuk amongst military hardware (photo with permissions J. Buchele, www.jbuchele.com).](image)
fighting people in one of the poorest countries on the planet is unsettling for the national self-image. While it was hard to understand the motivations to structure society such as it was in Afghanistan, it was also difficult to see these people as enemies.

That the four Canadian troops died in an ambiguous accident involving a bomb dropped by a U.S. fighter plane accentuated the dissonance of involvement there. Among the lesser stories that emerged out of these tragic events was the construction of a memorial to the dead soldiers in the form of an Inuksuk. This is a transformation of the role of the Inuksuk that, as far as I know, had not been previously envisaged but has subsequently become increasingly common. No doubt there is a comfort that the imagined landscape of home plays in times of conflict; note the relative ease with which we can associate that with the Inuksuk, arms spread in welcoming embrace. The difficulty of locating a pan-Canadian symbol that concentrates the idea of “home” as a single and encompassing concept lends itself to the adoption of an icon from a shared mythological northern landscape.

The Associated Press photos of the Afghanistan Inuksuk interspersed two iconic images (fig. 4): soldiers silhouetted in a moment of solemn ceremony and the Inuksuk in a barren landscape. When it was reported that the Kandahar Inuksuk points toward home the congruity with its northern

Figure 6: Inuksuk for D-Day memorial, Bernières-sur-Mer, France.
cousins became clearer. This Inuksuk links the function of directionality of northern Inuksuit with a global geography of belonging.

More recently, I came across the image seen in figure 5 of the same Inuksuk on the personal website of someone working in a paramilitary capacity in Afghanistan. This view undermines the associations embedded in the other images, suggesting instead an isolated and constrained Inuksuk amongst more impressive military hardware. It is harder in this instance to picture images of home; rather, it calls forward a Canada ringed by menacing, teeth-like stones embedded in a technology of war that makes simple stones insignificant. Is this Inuksuk reflective of the Canadian soldier’s experience in Afghanistan or perhaps of Canada’s place in post-September 11 geopolitics: welcoming, embracing and fenced?

The theme of Inuksuk-as-war-memorial seen in Afghanistan is repeated in the commemoration for those who lost their lives on the beaches of Normandy, France. The image here (fig. 6) comes from the Veterans Affairs website and marks the 60th anniversary of D-Day, a major event for both countries. There is marked Canadaphilia in northwestern France that finds its origins in the liberation and, at least from that point of view, the Bernières-sur Mer Inuksuk demonstrates that the French interest in Canada is not nostalgic but rather current.

My own encounter with the contemporary manifestation of this relationship came during a visit to the Association France-Canada (AFC) in Paris in 2002. I was invited along with colleagues from Canada, France and Greenland to comment on Nunavut, the theme of that year’s AFC meeting. The AFC membership includes an important and diverse Normandy contingent with backgrounds in academia, administration, arts and education, many of whom are former residents of Canada (Quebec in many instances). The Canadian Embassy was a major player in the events surrounding the meeting, including receptions at the Ambassador’s residence and presenting a strong federal political presence throughout. It is clear the AFC has a diplomatic role to play in situating official relations between the two countries. Canada’s position in the French political consciousness is something of a tightrope-walk that reflects the two positions that Canada assumes in France. The first focuses on the shared wartime history in which Canada is a celebrated liberator, at a huge cost in human lives, of an occupied France. The Canadian role and sacrifice along European war fronts
in turn played a strong role in the emergence of a post-imperial English Canadian national identity. The second concerns the political integrity of Quebec, with its even deeper historical associations to France as country of origin. Not surprisingly, Canadian provincial and federal diplomacy are particularly significant in France. Thus the Inuksuk in Bernières-sur-Mer calls our attention to the Canadian sacrifice in the war and to the ongoing issue of Canada’s relations with France. At the dedication of the monument, M.P. John McCallum said the following to the assembled veterans and dignitaries:

In Canada, Inuksuit were employed as vital landmarks in the vastness of our Northern latitudes. They were among the most important objects created by the Inuit, the first people to inhabit Arctic Canada. And were reflective of the Inuit’s very close connection to the land. Some inuksuit were built to mark a place of respect and are seen as memorials.

It is so significant that this ancient symbol of Inuit culture is situated here in Bernières-sur-Mer, a town steeped in yet another Canadian connection. The Queen’s Own Rifles has its own unique place in Canadian history since it is a regiment that predates even our own confederation as a nation.6

Here, once again, we see the linkages of Inuksuit, nation and timelessness coalescing. This calling out of the French Inuksuk to those at home was responded to the following year when Aboriginal veterans and their families were invited to the annual commemorative events and at least one more Inuksuk was built in Normandy, this time by Peter Irniq, former commissioner of Nunavut (Salat 2006).

*Beyond Symbolic Appropriation*

As the examples I have discussed here show, Inuksuit accomplish many things and carry different meanings for those who create them and for those who encounter them. Their proliferation around the world is a particular

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example of the transformation of an indigenous symbol/form through its uptake by colonizers and others with no immediate cultural connection. It is a case of cultural borrowing or diffusion that is continuous with the symbolic and cultural appropriation of indigenous representation by colonizing states (Russell and McNiven 1998; Howes 1996; Churchill 1994; Hjartarson 2005). Such borrowings are resplendent of an ongoing fascination/repulsion with the indigenous other that plays out in the movement of symbols between societies and their commodification wherever the power to contain and reshape indigeneity is invoked. The case of the Inuksuit does not fall neatly into this paradigm, however; I would argue that there are both continuities and disjunctures across cultures in the intents, meanings and effects of the various Inuksuit that appear here. Our own biographies intersect with those of objects and with those of other people; relationships and senses of self are mediated through objects.

At some point, Irving Layton, Canada’s recently deceased poet of standing, tossed off this _bon mot_ about what it means to be Canadian: “A Canadian is someone who keeps asking the question, ‘What is a Canadian?’” Defining Canadianness is indeed an (Anglo-)Canadian obsession and the Inuksuk plays a number of important roles here. The most important may be to serve as a universal symbol of the country to the outside world—as the promoters of the Vancouver Winter Olympics Inuksuk logo have said to justify their awkward choice—one that finally reduces the complexity and plurality of Canadian peoples, provinces and regions to the visual equivalent of a sound bite. Perhaps a truly Canadian symbol is emerging here, one that draws geography out of the mythological North into a national mythmaking such that all of this land is redeemed in its northernness, and all of its citizens see themselves as navigators over impossible space. Of course, the Inuksuk is somewhat ironically positioned to lead a nation into some form of unifying identity that transcends our particular historical, cultural and linguistic duality/plurality. It serves to point out, and to sublimate, the simple fact that Canadian geography encompasses the lands of many indigenous Nations that are largely silenced by this ongoing obsession with remembering.

Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to suggest that the movement of symbols between Inuit and others is a one-way street. Indeed, the Inuit have made a strong statement for their inclusion in the national political
framework based on their embrace of Canadian citizenship and nationhood. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national Inuit political organization, has repeatedly promoted its vision as “First Canadians, Canadians First” and their corporate logo shows four Inuit dancers forming the shape of a maple leaf, the symbol of the nation that is emblazoned on the Canadian flag. The traffic in symbols points beyond the paradigm of appropriation and towards a process of co-elaboration of identity—Inuit and Canadian, particular and collective—in the global ecumene. Through the deployment of our various symbols and the meanings they engender, we acknowledge a mutual entanglement over time and into the future that the biographies of Inuksuit, shared now between Inuit and non-Inuit, bring forth in social context. All of this imaging North and South is confronting a new challenge in the form of climate change and the very real possibility of regularized summer shipping through the Arctic archipelago in the coming decades (ACIA 2004). Canadian sovereignty over the North has until now been largely a question of diplomatic semantics and the occasional gesture of military presence. Through a variety of surveillance and paramilitary operations, most notably the Canadian Rangers program, Inuit have long been engaged in the demonstration of Canadian occupation of the North. The United States has never accepted Canada’s claim to northern waters. This is occasionally brought to light in the newspapers, as was the case in the days after our most recent election when the new prime minister grandly chastised the U.S. ambassador for stating what has long been policy. Regardless, the North is potentially moving out of the imaginary and into the real geography of more and more southern Canadians and people from around the world. This represents a potential transformation in what we take the North to be, shifting us from a trope of impenetrability to one of fluid movement. If the Arctic is “opened”, then Canadian sovereignty over the imagined North is fundamentally challenged.

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Alaska’s Eternal Frontier: Rural Masculinity and Landscape Nostalgia

Timothy Pursell & Maureen P. Hogan

Alaska evokes considerable romantic nostalgia. It is imagined as America’s “last frontier,” a land where the wilderness will never end, where the grasses will always grow, and the rivers will always run—not to mention oil, natural gas, and other resources. Alaska calls to mind images of vast undeveloped lands and vast quantities of wildlife. Beautiful and big, cold and scary, Alaska must be a place for only the bravest and most rugged of souls who continue to engage in the pioneer experience, braving the dangers of Alaska for personal enrichment, resource development, or somehow to perpetuate and preserve authentic American values that have been lost and degraded “Outside” in the overly urbanized Lower 48. Much geographical imagination is at work here: that Alaska is still unspoiled; that it is a boundless land of opportunity for anyone who comes to Alaska, and also that the Lower 48 is somehow truly degenerate and truly urbanized. This identity is constructed and reaffirmed through story telling, and it was the hearing

1 A longer version of this paper will appear in Men & Masculinities in 2007 as “The Real Alaskan.”

2 “Lower 48” refers to the contiguous 48 states. Alaskans refer to anywhere else as “Outside.”
of several jokes and stories about being or becoming Alaskan that inspired our work on these topics.

Our work examines how these notions of Alaska as a natural preserve and a historic experience intersect with contemporary constructions of masculinity. Just as an essentially rural Alaska is juxtaposed to an essentially urban Lower 48 (never mind about the Dakotas, upstate New York, etc.) so too a rural, healthy Alaskan masculinity is juxtaposed to a decadent, compromised Lower 48 masculinity which, even when rural, is seen as hopelessly tainted by connections to and domination by an urban (effete) hegemony. We examine why Alaskan identity is constructed in terms of nostalgia for landscape at particular historical moments and we show how these value systems translate into a construction of masculinity in Alaska that is fascinatingly anachronistic while endlessly useful for satisfying and denying modern disaffection with postindustrial consumer culture. We do not wish to argue that there is anything inherently wrong with this process, but we are alarmed that what is clearly socially constructed is at times used to justify odd political stances, including the bizarre situation whereby Alaskans are proud not to pay taxes and are hostile to the federal government while at the same time a majority of Alaskans work for state or federal institutions.

Is Alaska still natural, pure, and unique in an age of late capitalism and global consumer culture? Is the ideal of a rugged Alaskan male being undermined in some way by Alaska’s role in the global economy, not least, the carbon fuel economy? We suggest that, if anything, these economic systems further strengthen hegemonic rural masculinity in Alaska as a key marker of Alaskan uniqueness and Alaskan ability to reject and transcend global consumer society precisely because Alaska is more than ever tightly linked to the world through globalization.

To Pee in the Yukon

To give a sense of the kinds of narratives that inspired us, let us begin with a conversation held on St. Patrick’s Day 2005 amid considerable Alaskan frivolity in downtown Fairbanks. A friend of ours told us that when he moved to Fairbanks twenty years ago to take a job in the oil industry he was told that to become a “sourdough,” i.e. a real Alaskan, he would have to do three things: (1) pee in the Yukon River, (2) shoot a grizzly bear, (3) fuck [sic] an Eskimo. We have since heard this joke in various iterations...
in which domination of nature (where Alaskan Natives are often reduced to scenery) is a common motif. It is perhaps obvious that these are mainly male activities and rites of passage. Our friend confessed that despite twenty years in Alaska, he had not fulfilled any of these requirements. Indeed, if all Alaskan men were held to this standard, only a bare minimum might be real Alaskans. But the values are the key, not the acts themselves. To be authentic, an Alaskan man must prove his ability to dominate nature. He must control the landscape and the wildlife.

Although a connection between control of nature and masculinity seems to be common in many rural areas (Campbell and Bell 2000), we argue that the belief that Alaska still epitomizes the notion of wilderness is a unique characteristic of Alaskan gender identity. Although the notion of wilderness is problematic in itself (Nash 2001), notions of wilderness in Alaska are almost immediately layered with nostalgic references to the pioneer past as a time of triumph in a struggle against nature. Limerick (1988) has argued how reflection on the frontier and pioneer past are a means of ascribing frontier values to contemporary Americans, wherein Natives become part of a conquered landscape. Although at times Alaskan Natives are celebrated as “ecological Indians” in some nostalgic references to landscape, or collapsed into an “Eskimo” stereotype (see Fienup-Riordan 1995), more commonly, emphasis on the frontier as a marker of Alaskan identity tends to marginalize them, especially in narratives about male adventure including our St. Patrick’s Day tale.

Beginning with the discourse of wilderness, additional discourses emerge relating to ruralness, urbanity, ethnicity, and femininity. We have encountered stories from the right, the left, from Greens and from boosters that Alaska still represents a special situation: unique, incomparable, and exceptional. We argue that instead Alaska shares basic gender constructs prevalent in white American popular culture in the age of capitalism, but that the tensions arising from this situation are denied, negated, or erased by emphasis on Alaska’s unique connection to its landscape. Nostalgia reinforces these processes as Alaska’s uniqueness (and the uniqueness of Alaskans) is celebrated in notions of the pioneer male, particularly embodied in the figure of the gold miner. We argue that this understanding of the inter-
twining of a discourse on wilderness with a discourse on masculinity helps to understand better the ebbs and flos of environmental and development debates in Alaskan and in America generally.

Rural Hegemonic Masculinity

No single type of masculinity ever exists. We understand masculinity to be a plurality of possibilities made visible through performances and practices that vary greatly across social, cultural, historical, and geographic contexts. Masculinities have changed over time, but we accept the idea that at any given time and in any given place, not all masculinities are equal (Kim-mel 1997). Some identities are systematically “otherized” as less desirable (ethnic masculinities, queer masculinities, working-class masculinities, and female masculinities), while one becomes the cultural ideal or hegemonic masculinity, a term made popular (and useful) by Robert Connell (1987, 1995). Through public consent, hegemonic masculinity is taken up as “common sense”: a self-evident ideal to which all men should aspire. Hegemonic masculinity is a phantasm, a socially constructed and symbolic process that is relatively unstable, unsustainable and utterly unattainable in the first place, but its attractive potential is almost limitless.

In the United States, the hegemonic male is white, male, youthful, good-looking, able-bodied, virile, independent, and financially stable. His image is found in all forms of media. Yet it is often overlooked that this hegemonic form assumes an urban context. Rural men are marginalized from the national hegemonic type (Little 2002). Urban men may use rural spaces to affirm their masculinity, but they are not really a part of those rural spaces. Recent scholarship has begun to explore the contradictions between multiple, local masculinities and the dominant, media-projected national stereotype (e.g. Campbell and Bell 2000).

By contrast, in Alaska, urban masculinity is otherized as inauthentic, out of touch with nature, and incompatible with an Alaskan lifestyle. Thus a real Alaskan man is deeply connected with nature—even if his occupation and lifestyle tie him firmly to urban Anchorage. Local dominant masculinity is inextricably tied to wilderness landscapes, and these landscapes are elided with the historical phenomenon of the frontier and the pioneer and which marginalizes (through dialectical relationships) the feminine, the urban, and the Alaska Native. Alaskan masculinity depends on a nostalgic relationship
with wilderness and Alaska's frontier past, which places a domination of nature at the center of rural paradigms of masculinity in Alaska. These clearly Western, capitalist terms explain much about the political controversies pertaining to natural resource management in Alaska today.

**Build Your Own Frontier**

Nostalgia has been described as an emotional yearning for times and places that are lost, never to be re-attained. In some instances the lost past is just barely out of reach. Alaska is regularly described as a “young” land. Statehood (1959) is within memory of many Alaskans and even the Gold Rush past c. 1900 is just barely beyond living memory—people who are alive now knew people who were alive then. Alaskan nostalgia blends both romantic yearnings for a better past, the Frontier, as a corrective to a perceived deficient present (Hutcheon 1998), with the immigrant’s “nostalgia” for the new homeland (Lowenthal 1985), a romanticized idealization of the adoptive country as somehow better than the old country, i.e. the Lower 48. In Alaska, the idea of a frontier experience becomes hegemonic and is elided with Alaska’s extreme climate and undeveloped landscapes. Those who live in undeveloped rural conditions are imagined as living in the wilderness and thus carrying on the frontier tradition and the spirit of those who built America. The eminent historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1893) would be relieved to know that in Alaska, the democratic spirit of the frontier will never die because Alaska remains a frontier situation. Politics in Alaska unfortunately more often resemble the frontier conditions of the HBO series Deadwood than Turner’s ideal of a free Republic.

How does nostalgia reinforce these constructs? Appadurai has described a kind of armchair nostalgia (1996), a “nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (p. 78). This kind of nostalgia plays out in the debate over oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Those who have never been to ANWR or to Alaska argue passionately about the need to preserve the refuge at all costs based on nostalgic imaginings of an untouched landscape. These nostalgic arguments are categorically different from biologists’ concerns about habitat destruction. In a different vein, Svetlana Boym has articulated two forms of nostalgic behavior (Boym 2001). The first is reflective nostalgia, which is “concerned with historical and individual time… [It] is more about the individual and collective memory”
(p. 49). Here, nostalgia remains vague with references to lost values and experiences. This she contrasts with restorative nostalgia, which she says takes itself much more seriously. Restorative nostalgia seeks to rebuild and restore that imagined community and “manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past…” (p. 41). In Fairbanks for example, we see this kind of restorative nostalgia in adventure outings, museums devoted to the pioneer past, historical sites, parades, theme parks, and annual celebrations. These are phenomenological, institutionalized (but not always permanent) efforts to give some reliable structure to the identity of people and place, and they are reinforced through everyday practices and discourses. Thus, the same discourse is trooped not only through a site like “Pioneer Park” (a theme park) but also through business names like “Frontier Tire & Auto,” “Gold Hill Liquor,” or “Prospector Outfitters.” Because such tropes tend to suggest that “things were so much tougher back then” and “things are harder here than in the Lower 48,” they serve to downplay or even erase unresolved traumas from the historical past and lead to confusion rather than understanding of historical bases for current economic, environmental, and social issues in Alaska.

Most Alaskans feel themselves to be special or unique because of where we live. Alaskans like to believe that we have escaped from the materialism and anomie of the Lower 48. According to these imaginative modes, Alaskans have virtually gone back in time to a landscape lost everywhere else in the USA. This is also the key motivating factor for Alaskan tourism. If not all Americans can travel back to a lost landscape, they can at least buy its appearance through an Alaskan vacation. This is a vital issue for Alaskan economic development; tourism offers tremendous growth potential for the state. “Alaska” has become a globally recognized trademark no longer merely meaning “dangerous” and “cold” but also “unspoiled,” “pristine,” and “endangered.” Pie-eyed tourists crisscross Alaska in Princess Cruise buses filled with these sugarplum fantasies—but so do everyday Alaskans hurtling across the state in 4x4 pickups equipped with GPS systems, laser-sight rifles, and satellite phones, especially with the idea that such luxuries are necessities here. Alaskans give purchase to the restorative nostalgia of a simpler pioneer existence through our regular scorn for the modern, urban consumer society of Outside, yet Alaskans are inextricably engaged with consuming and supplying the needs of the same global society, not least
through the twin economic importance of wilderness tourism and natural resource extraction.

This has implications for masculine identity. Unlike urban hegemonic notions of masculinity giving privilege to the corporate “suit” (almost a denial of nature), rural hegemonic masculinity requires physical contact with nature, residence within nature, and (frequently) dominance over nature. Since the city lifestyle is coded as inauthentically Alaskan and effete, to be a real Alaskan man, you must struggle with nature. We see this taking place nostalgically as well as in real life. For non-Alaskan Natives, authenticity is complicated because so many Alaskans and Alaskan families are recent immigrants to the state. Thus ties to a nostalgic landscape and the pioneer past gain salience as markers of belonging. Through various public rituals and popular discursive practices, Alaskans constantly re-inscribe themselves into a pioneer lifestyle, a perpetual frontier existence, and an eternal wilderness. Central themes collapse various historical epochs into a “pioneer” existence that is linked through common experience of climate, landscape, or isolation. Thus time and landscape are nostalgically amalgamated into a romanticized rugged individualism where men are men, and the sociological differences between the heady days of the Russian explorers, the various gold rushes, World War II, and the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline become inextricably linked and indistinguishable through discursive coding. The pageant of Alaskan history becomes a pastiche. This is nonetheless an extraordinary process since an incredibly diverse Alaskan population (at times including Alaskan Natives) finds resonance in these nostalgic links. Shared experience of challenging landscapes and climactic regions become the sole factors tying together disparate historical, geographic, and occupational subjects into a functional, contemporary Alaskan identity.

The problem with this, as we see it, is that the genuine common experience of challenging landscapes quickly collapses into ideas about the frontier and pioneer experience. While pioneers certainly laid the foundations for much of Alaska and Alaska was one of the last frontiers of European settlement and conquest in North America, the constant equalization of the frontier with democracy is problematic. Despite attempts to argue that even Alaskan Natives were once pioneers who explored Alaska, the pioneer/frontier mythos marginalizes Alaskan Natives by casting their
historical identity as eternally conquered peoples. A recent historical flap in Fairbanks over renaming a tourist attraction highlights this. A collection of historical cabins, playground equipment, and exhibition spaces was built on the banks of the Chena River for Alaska’s 1967 Centennial of Russia’s sale of Alaska to the United States. Known for years as “Alaskaland,” in October 2001 the park was renamed “Pioneer Park.” Pioneer Park was felt to be a more fitting description of the primarily historical character of the park (where workers are required to wear Gold Rush Era costumes), and Alaskaland was argued to have confused tourists who came to find an amusement park with roller coasters. The rhetoric about tourists seems to have masked a desire to reaffirm the pioneer nature of Alaska. Defenders of the name rejected other alternatives such as “Centennial Park” or “Gold Rush Park.” Although the park celebrates a key era in Fairbanks history, the renaming illustrates the domination of restorative pioneer nostalgia in Fairbanks. A potentially inclusive identity based in landscape was rejected in order to celebrate an event where the deeds of white men occupy center stage. It specifically places men (gold miners) at the center of the picture, and it affirms the idea that to be a pioneer is to be rural, living in a log cabin, and that authentic Alaskans either are or should think of themselves as pioneers. Thus, true Alaskans continue to imitate pioneers and define themselves by these activities especially when they engage in non-pioneer activities like surfing the Internet.

Where Men Can Be Men

Men seem to be drawn to Alaska because it allows them to liberate themselves from something else. Travel literature, novels, and memoirs regularly describe how Alaska provides a bonanza of liberation, and many modern metaphors look back to the Gold Rush Era. Various gold rushes were vitally important for Alaska’s development. Until gold began to be found, few settlers chose to move to Alaska. But gold rushes around Juneau, Nome, the Klondike, and Fairbanks caused Alaska’s population to grow rapidly and, indeed, cities like Fairbanks owe their existence entirely to the discovery of gold.

While few Alaskans can trace their roots to the Gold Rush Era, almost every Alaskan is familiar with stereotyped images of prospectors and saloon girls. Literature about the gold rush can be found in almost every bookstore,
gift shop, and supermarket. These range from Jack London’s gritty stories to humorous work by Robert Service to historical fiction re-creating an exciting era (even mystery novels). Common themes include visceral struggles with nature (weather, wolves, etc). The stories exhort men to recapture their primitive, natural, authentic selves by venturing into the wilderness. Animalistic wilderness becomes inscribed into a man’s body, and the degraded, urban man becomes whole once again. As Susan Kollin has pointed out, Alaskan literature highlights the notion that Alaska is the ideal venue for this primeval struggle between man, nature, and self (Kollin 2001). The insistence that even 21st century settlers in Alaska are taking part in frontier life merely reinforces this imagery. Any man who moves to Alaska and bags a moose need do little else to prove his authenticity. Any man who lives in Alaska for years and never hunts continues to have something to prove.

As our discussion of nostalgia indicated above, Alaska must be an anachronism for the geographic imagination to work. But this depends on a significant degree of self-delusion. When tour companies regularly drop wilderness adventurers off into the Bush equipped with the latest outdoor gear, has Alaska become a set of simulacra, mere theme park reflections of its historical self? Even in the face of a Disneyfied version, courtesy of the tourist industry, Alaska must be kept discursively natural: pure, real and authentic so that Alaskans can feel we/they are living in an authentic landscape. Various kinds of stories are told to prove that Alaska is still wild and unique. For examples a focus on bear attacks feeds the popular idea that such attacks prove that Alaska is a still a wilderness to be feared rather than one that has been tamed. Each bear attack (not to mention the case of Timothy Treadwell, the subject of the recent documentary *Grizzly Man*, set in Alaska) proves that Alaska is still wilderness, a dangerous place.

Susan Kollin has argued that, psychologically, Americans need Alaska in their back pocket, even if they never come here (Kollin, 2001). They need to know that there is a place in the United States where it is impossible to be alienated from nature, and we argue that this exerts a special attraction for men. Alaska remains a proving ground for masculinity, and even though the wilderness challenge has been somewhat tamed, the wildness of Alaska is still palpable and deadly. As we will argue, the case of Chris McCandless (to take one of several famous cases) shows the deadly allure of proving one’s masculinity in the age of Late Capitalist conveniences.
Based on a true story of twenty-three year old Chris McCandless, in *Into the Wild* (1997), Krakauer tells the story of a young man who was profoundly inspired by the writings of aesthetic idealists such as Thoreau and Jack London. McCandless decided to abandon the trappings of consumer culture in favor of “finding himself” in the Alaskan wilderness. McCandless arrived in Fairbanks in the spring of 1992 and seems to have intentionally tried to limit his ability to survive. Rather than outfitting himself with full gear and maps for wilderness camping, he stripped himself of possessions with the ultimate goal of a minimalist experience of living off the land with only a botany field guide. After four months alone in the bush near Denali National Park, McCandless died of starvation in an old abandoned bus.

Part of the ironic tragedy in the McCandless case is that any genuine Alaskan man (even a slope-shouldered academic) entrenched in his rugged individualism, would have known better than to attempt McCandless’s scheme without prior information and skill acquisition. Indeed, many Alaskans criticized McCandless as ill-prepared (Krakauer, 71-2). McCandless’s death evokes both the danger of Alaska and the danger of such lone quests inspired by the solitary writing of a Jack London. Successful Alaskans, for all their individuality, rely on the transmission of knowledge from strangers. McCandless’s nostalgic attempt to escape from civilization to discover a rugged masculinity in isolation (a la London) was a death sentence that most longtime Alaskans skillfully avoid through knowledge of the seasons, proper gear, and advice from more experienced people. Although McCandless lived in a form of the bush, he never became a genuine “Alaskan” and his quest for masculine validation was nothing more than chasing a phantasm. Had he survived the experience, different conclusions might have been drawn and he would have entered the ranks of colorful Alaskan originals. Although both “authentic” Alaskan men and McCandless share the idea that Alaska can liberate men from civilization and cityscapes, the outcomes and means could hardly be more different.

*Commodified Identity in a Consumer Culture*

One area that is rarely written about is everyday urban Alaska as a 21st-century phenomenon. Though, as we have shown earlier, one can easily summon tropes about the individual and nature when talking about Alaska, those about the social and cultural life—especially the banality of everyday
life (work, shopping, driving kids to school and soccer games) in a post-industrial and increasingly commercialized urban Alaska—less readily find the tip of the tongue. What is the everyday Alaskan like? What do everyday Alaskans do? And more central to this paper, how is the hegemonic Alaskan masculinity negotiated in the 21st century? These questions are indeed dangerous to ask because they threaten the constructed notion of Alaska as wilderness ready for discovery by an adventurer or tourist.

In many ways, Fairbanks, where we live, has all the markings of late capitalism that other American cities do. For example, if we wanted, we could spend all day shopping at Wal-mart, Sam’s Club, Lowe’s or Home Depot, eat at McDonald’s or KFC, stop at Starbucks for coffee, and then go see the latest blockbuster film at the megaplex theater. Multi-tasking at work, trying to pay bills on time, keeping up e-mail correspondence, and maintaining personal and familial relationships soak up much of our daily life. Yet as Alaskans, we perform these mundane, Late Capitalist tasks while surrounded by vast, dramatic landscapes with a tiny human population. Our lives take place literally on the debated battleground between continued conquest of the land for further development or preservation of the land as a vestigial wilderness.

Just as Alaska is constructed as unique from the Outside, it is also assembled that way from within, even in urban spaces, in the way we talk to each other and perform our identities for ourselves and for Outsiders. We do this in order to maintain our identity as “Other,” special and unique—a rare breed of Americans that can handle a rugged, cold Alaska.

Even in urban spaces like Fairbanks, the mythology of hegemonic rural Alaskan masculinity holds its ground; in reality, a more negotiated urban masculinity, or a hybrid rural/urban masculinity, or any other multiplicity of masculinities (e.g., Alaskan Native, queer, female) surely exist. More work, especially ethnographic and other empirical work, needs to be done on the actual lived practices of men in Alaska, as well as how women negotiate the “Real Alaskan” identity—especially since it is so deeply coded as male.

As Kollin (2001) warns, if we Americans fail to see that Alaska is not “the nature state” of the nostalgic imagination, we will misunderstand the social, cultural and political nature of the environmental problems Alaska has, and thus buy into misguided solutions. The nostalgic assertion that
Alaska remains a last frontier where pioneers conquer the land can be a political tool to obscure actual damage done to Alaska’s fragile ecosystems (Haycox 2002). Nonetheless, assertions that Alaska must be maintained as a supposed pristine wilderness are no better because they turn conservation in Alaska into a sort of ecological band-aid for the rest of the United States. The danger for Alaska is that unreflective adherence to notions of rugged individualism all too often obscure Alaska’s serious social and environmental problems. We maintain, therefore, that these nostalgic narratives need to be critically examined in order to understand not only how they privilege a hegemonic Alaskan masculinity, but also how they may be implicated in the complex social and environmental problems that Alaska faces today.

References:


Cultivating Culture? Images of Iceland, Globalization and Multicultural Society

Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir & Kristín Loftsdóttir

Introduction

Until recently the image of Iceland was of a homogenous nation with an ancient history and clear cultural boundaries. Foreigners and cultural diversity were not part of the image held by Icelanders nor that depicted to the outside world. Following a growth in the number of immigrants to Iceland, the concept multiculturalism has increasingly come up in general society.

In Iceland questions have been posed in regard to how the social and political participation of new inhabitants can be secured and how separation and inequality based on national origins can be avoided in a context where the majority of immigrants come to work in low-paying jobs. These discussions and the growing debates of what it means to be an Icelander clearly show that former ideas of a homogenous nation of Icelanders with a common history and language are to some extent beginning to be challenged. Icelandic culture is, however, still most often discussed as something one has and can be a member of. This is taking place alongside a gradually more critical discussion of the culture concept among scholars.

An important question that needs to be addressed in the Icelandic context is whether emphasis on ‘multicultural’ supports participation in a new society or whether it leads to separation and isolation of certain groups from
the nation-state and to cultural racism. What images exist of a multicultural society in Iceland? What is the popular image and how do the state and regional governments approach difference?

In this chapter, we focus on the images of multiculturalism in Iceland and how they signify changing images of Iceland itself. We discuss the general debates within Icelandic society as well as policies of the nation-state in relation to multiculturalism. We start with contextualizing the concept ‘multiculturalism’ historically, emphasizing both the roots of culture and race and how these two concepts have been interwoven for a long time. Furthermore, we stress scholars’ criticisms of the concept multiculturalism and its growing currency in the modern world.1

Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism has obviously a strong historical connection to the culture concept. Culture has been one of anthropology’s guiding concepts; the discipline is often defined as the study of culture. Even though there has been little consensus on a single definition of culture, anthropologists generally use it to refer to a complex web of knowledge and traditions that are transported from one generation to the next. It is thus not restricted to either low or high culture as is common in popular usage (Eriksen 2001). The culture concept has been interwoven with the race concept, and in fact it is difficult to discuss one without the other. Until the early 20th century, scholars used the culture concept in a way that assumed that racial differences aligned with cultural difference, even though not always stating so directly. Cultural difference was thus seen as going hand in hand with biological make-up or skin color. American anthropologists, such as Franz Boas, showed that there is no connection between race, culture and language, which was important in counteracting the racism that existed predominantly against people from areas other than Northern Europe. Influenced by Boasian ideas, anthropologists in the middle of the 20th century used cultural relativism as a theoretical perspective to emphasize that culture should not refer to race. They rejected that people’s behavior could be explained by their biological make-up, as was still common at

1 The discussion is based on our two research projects: Unnur Dis Skapadóttir’s project The Creations of Multicultural society in a Global Context: Foreigners in Iceland, Problems and Possibilities and Kristín Loftsdóttir’s project Images of Africa in Iceland.
that time (Stocking 1968, p. 203). Consequently the race concept disappeared for decades from the analysis of culture and society. In the last few years, theoretical discussions of the race concept has, however, reappeared in anthropology because—even though scholars rejected race as a useful scientific concept—it is still used by individuals and social institutions to classify diversity and thus continues to have social and cultural meaning and consequences (Harrison 1998).

Even though anthropologists use the culture concept to broadly refer to a social whole, the popular usage of the concept has adapted it gradually to describe an increasingly fragmented and commercialized reality. Culture is thus used to talk about various sub-groupings within society as well as connecting it to more commercial purposes. The concept ‘multiculturalism’ indicates that cultural traditions are multiple within each nation-state and from different origins. Usually, it refers to the cultural traditions of immigrants brought with them from the home country. Usage in itself thus signals the acceptance of the fact that there exists cultural diversity within nation-states. To some extent, one can claim that this concept came as a response to former assimilation-policies whereby it was assumed that people should give up their language and cultural customs from their home country and take up the way of life of the new (Western) country as fast as possible. Multiculturalism on the other hand has emphasized integration, implying that the diverse cultural traditions should be accepted and celebrated. Interestingly, at the same time as the culture concept became more publicly used in relation to multiculturalism, scholarly discussions have become increasingly critical of its use. Often the usage has underlined and supported prejudices, instead of deconstructing them, in many instances boxing in differences while simultaneously celebrating diversity (Wikan 1999; Bauman 1999).

Two points are particularly salient. First, it has been noted that the concept of culture is more often used to explain the behavior of those who are not Western, thus marking these individuals’ behavior as a deviation from rational behavior. Secondly, there is a tendency to reify or objectify culture, to speak of it as an object that people carry with them (Eriksen 2001, Wikan 1999). The idea of culture as a unit with clear boundaries visualizes culture as a collection of static characteristics and objects, similar to a museum collection (see Rosaldo 1989). This kind of objectification of culture easily leads
to the production of stereotypes of certain groups. This can quite clearly be seen in the portrayal of Muslims, who are often depicted as one coherent category sharing a culture, in spite of the fact that Islam is practiced by people from different parts of the world in dissimilar societies. When concepts such as ‘Muslim’ are used in this way, they simplify social reality by ignoring conflicts within the defined group, diversity of individuals’ beliefs and power differences. As already mentioned, the culture concept was in the early 20th century important in explaining diversity and in criticizing racism. Scholars have, however, pointed out that in more recent times we find a tendency to use the concept culture in a similar way as race was used earlier, and neo-racism in Europe is primarily based on cultural difference (Balibar, 1988). Culture is thus used instead of race as an explanation for lack of development or the weaker situations of certain groups, especially those who do not look European. Also, people of particular cultural groups are seen as thinking the same way, thus culture becomes typological, which characterized the usage of the race concept previously. This indicates that the culture concept can lead to similar exclusion and prejudice as the concept ‘race’ had. Culture becomes not a tool to analyze reality, including history and the relations of different groups, but an explanation in itself.

Icelandic Society

Icelandic nationalistic images have been strongly based on ideas of the purity of the country and its people and language due to isolation, and they often symbolically associated these two. These images furthermore emphasize Icelanders as one whole with a specific essence (Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson 1997; Guðmundur Hálfdanarson 2001). Language is a very important national symbol for defining being Icelandic, and who belongs and who does not belong. Those who speak Icelandic well and/or have Icelandic biological inheritance can claim to be Icelanders. Knowing the language is seen as the key to being and feeling Icelandic, giving access to the culture of poetry and the sagas. Claims of purity of Icelandic language from the Middle Ages until the present are often coupled with an emphasis on the uniqueness of the Icelandic Saga literature (Gísli Sigurðsson 1996, p. 46). This emphasis on purity has been reified in the last few years in relation to tourism, emphasizing pure nature and unique culture. It has been gendered as well as can be seen in frequent references to Icelandic women as beautiful and pure-bred.
The State and Multicultural Society

The Icelandic state has not yet put forward a multicultural policy, but has adopted policy measures that affect immigrants directly; strict immigration laws were enacted in 2003, especially with regard to family reunifications. They were based on Danish laws, a country with a very different immigration context than Iceland. Lutheran Christian religion is the state religion, and is taught in primary schools even though people can legally choose another religious orientation.

The fact that people of different national backgrounds inhabit the country has, however, increasingly begun to be recognized as can be seen by changes in educational material and in the multicultural policies put forward in the capital and in some other municipalities. Analysis of educational material and national curriculum is one place to examine the nation-state’s representation of diversity and the state’s approach to multiculturalism. National curriculum has been mentioned in educational research as informative especially in relation to the wider social and cultural impact of schoolbook texts (Pingel 1999). The current Icelandic national curriculum, placed into law in 1999, does not discuss multiculturalism in its general part, but does talk about the different cultures of other nations. The national curriculum directly addresses the equality of pupils in Icelandic primary schools in the following words: “In making and choosing teaching materials, care should be taken not to discriminate against individuals and groups because of their gender, residence, origin, race, handicap, religion or social status” (Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla, Almennur hluti 1999, 34). The curriculum furthermore states that “in primary schools, the cultural sense should be stimulated, along with respect for the culture of other nations” (ibid., p. 15). The national curriculum also prioritizes Christian religion, not only by making it compulsory but also by stating in the introduction that Icelandic education has roots in Christian values.

Since language is such an important aspect of national identity, the nation state's views towards multiculturalism can fruitfully be analyzed through

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2 School attendance is compulsory in Iceland. The national curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education states the common goals for all primary schools in Iceland and thus directs the major policies in regard to various aspects of education. The present curriculum was legally enacted on June 1, 1999 (see Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla, Almennur hluti 1999).
regulations regarding language. Regulations passed in 2003 stipulated that at least 150 hours of Icelandic lessons, with a minimum attendance rate of 85%, as an eligibility requirement for permanent residency permits for those coming from countries outside the EU and European Economic Area. Those from within the area did not have to fulfill this requirement. Ironically, in spite of the emphasis on language and correct speaking as a core element of national identity, it is not made easy for foreigners to learn the language. Very little funding has been provided for course material and to those offering courses; to compensate, instructors are permitted to charge a fee for teaching, administering tests and for certifications of test completion (article 50). Although studies show that immigrants are interested in language learning and many would prefer to take more than 150 hours, participating in the classes can be difficult as many work long hours and have little financial means to pay for language education (Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2004a).

Icelandic Society: Multicultural or Monocultural?
The concept of multiculturalism has for the last few years begun to circulate in Icelandic society, in particular in connection to the growing number of immigrants to Iceland. Most often it is used to emphasize the necessity of treating people who have moved to Iceland with respect and also in various discussions about increased diversity in Icelandic society resulting from higher numbers of immigrants. The number of people with foreign citizenship has more than doubled since 1987. In 1987, 1.6% of the population was with foreign citizenship compared to 4.6% in 2005. Foreign born were 3.3% of the population of Iceland in 1987 and 8.2% of the population in 2005 (Iceland Statistics 2005). The majority of immigrants have moved to Iceland to work in low-skill jobs, and there are few refugees among them. Others have come to study and for other personal reasons such as family reunification. Many of the labor migrants came to work in the resource-based localities in the regions with low and diminishing population where more workers have been in demand. Thus although most immigrants live in the capital area, they are a much higher percentage and their presence more evident in many smaller villages and towns. Immigration has always been a part of Icelandic reality, but the fact that currently more people arrive and from places farther away than in the past—combined with increased dis-
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courses of multiculturalism in neighboring countries—has probably stimulated the increased usage of the term multiculturalism in Iceland. Immigration issues in Europe appear regularly in the newspapers, often focusing on the various problems of a multicultural society. In these public discussions, Iceland is still generally conceived of as a homogenous society (monocultural), and it is often debated whether we should celebrate multiculturalism or not. For example, a recently submitted article in Morgunblaðið claims that “Iceland should not become a multicultural society, it should preserve its culture and assist foreigners in their own countries”3 (11 September 2006, p. 20). Furthermore, a couple of years ago the Bishop of the state Lutheran church of Iceland said that there was no reason to claim that Iceland was a multicultural society as most inhabitants are baptized into the state church.

His comment becomes especially interesting when considered that he is a representative of the state in a sense, representing Icelandic state religion.

Multiculturalism is most clearly expressed in the annual “celebrations of nations,” which are held in some villages and in the capital area in an attempt to enhance understanding and mutual respect among the inhabitants. In these celebrations, people of different national backgrounds, including Icelanders, show national customs and traditional dances, give out food, dress in ethnic or national costumes, and sell tourist items. National flags and other public symbols are visible in these celebrations. Icelanders tend to focus on traditional food from the past; indeed all include more presentations of the past than of the current daily lives in the various countries. However, although we are cognizant of the reification of culture that this engenders, it should be pointed out that in these celebrations there is simultaneously a platform for communication and growing understanding of similarities as well as differences.

Religious differences have hardly been mentioned in connection with recent immigration to Iceland, except an occasional discussions of whether to serve pork meat in the primary schools. The compulsory Christian education in primary schools has been much debated in Icelandic newspapers, but interestingly more in relation to atheists than in relation to people from different cultural backgrounds. In fact although we are discussing the increased use of multiculturalism the term is still new and Iceland is still mostly perceived as a

3 In Icelandic “Ísland á ekki að verða fjölþjóðarsamfélag, það á að viðhalds sinni menningu og aðstoða útlendinga í þeirra eigin lónum.”
country with a homogenous population. An analysis of Icelandic newspapers shows for example that there is relatively little discussion of multiculturalism in relation to the foreign population. When the term ‘multicultural’ is used, it is usually with reference to new restaurants, language difference, schools, and the multicultural celebrations described above. For example, in the winter of 2003 when new laws—very much influenced by Danish laws—were established, there was almost no discussion of multiculturalism or cultural difference in the debates in the media. The main focus was on individual rights and how people were affected by the new laws.

The concept immigrant is used mostly to talk about people from Eastern Europe and Asia although a large part of the population with foreign citizenship is from Western Europe. Their position is different on the labor market and with regard to resident permits, as most come with a temporary work permit held by their employer, a requirement for those coming from outside the EU and European Economic Area. In some instances, we witness that the term ‘culture’ is used with troubling similarity to the old concept ‘race’ about these foreign populations; for example, broad generalizations about individuals of Asian origin utilize their point of origin and their culture as an explanation for their behavior and views. Common statements are: “These people are so good at cleaning” or “These people are by nature hard working and polite.” In a survey conducted on Icelanders’ view on race,4 88% disagreed with the statement that people of different racial background have different intellectual abilities, but 66.5% of those who answered agreed with the statement: “Culture is different because races differ.” Thus those who do not look European are seen as culturally more different. Consistent with these results, there is a degree of stratification in the view of these foreigners in Iceland. Poles are talked about as more desirable labor migrants, being hard working “like us”. People from Asian countries are portrayed as more different and many of them say in interviews that they have experienced prejudice and direct racial, verbal or physical attacks. Moreover, derogatory words such as tajta (torn-up) and grjóni (rice-y) are sometimes used to describe them. Another concept nýbúi—literally meaning “new inhabitant”—was originally created to refer in a positive way to those who have recently moved, independ-

4 The survey was conducted in 2003 by The Social Science Research Institute for the project Images of Africa in Iceland (see Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2004).
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tent of where from, but the concept has increasingly been used for those immigrants who do not have European features in a way that many foreigners reject. This is similar to the history of U.S. race relation where concepts used about people of African origin have come to have negative connotations (Jones 1997). There are many examples of how nationalism in daily life sends messages about belonging and exclusion. Advertisements on TV commonly refer to nationalistic feelings as is for example seen in a slogan for hot dogs (“Icelanders eat SS hot dogs”) and in the slogan for a big supermarket (“the shop where Icelanders enjoy shopping”). These are examples of how nationalism and belonging are not only reproduced and maintained with the larger (holier) national symbols such as the flag, and the language or national holidays, but also at the more mundane level, what Billig (1995) has termed “banal nationalism”.

There are, however, also diverse images which show attempts to counter stereotypes and prejudice. Looking at Icelandic textbooks for primary school use, a considerable change can be detected in schoolbooks published in the last 10 years or so, where suddenly there is a rise in schoolbooks that attempt to portray Iceland as a multicultural society. A state-run publishing company financed by the Icelandic parliament, the National Centre for Educational Materials (Námsgagnastofnun), publishes most textbooks used in primary schools. These textbooks are allocated to schools free of charge based on certain rules of allocation, being produced in accordance with the national curriculum, thus making it economical for schools to use these books. The Centre publishes a short checklist for its authors with the aim of instructing authors on various issues, ranging from technical instructions to points of general emphasis to what authors should keep in mind. The checklist was originally made in 1986 (Gerður Óskarsdóttir et al 1989, p. 29), but has been revised many times since then. Interestingly, the checklist from 2003, which is probably the most current one, places relatively more emphasis on a multicultural society than the national curriculum. Pictures accompanying texts sometimes have people of different skin-colors, and in some of the books the ethnic origin of these “new”

1 The National Centre for Educational Materials distributes approximately 700,000 copies of materials to more than 42,000 students. See information on the centre’s homepage: http://www.cigep.net/Presentazioni/Namsgagnastofnun.html (accessed June 22, 2004).
Icelanders is mentioned, while in others they are a part of Icelandic society that does not need explaining. Analysis of older textbooks indicated nationalistic tendencies where people with darker skin color were associated with geographical spaces outside Iceland and Europe (Kristín Loftsdóttir 2005). These schoolbooks can be seen as contributing to images of multiculturalism in Iceland, making it self-evident that children of different ethnic background, and/or with different skin color, are a part of Icelandic society without delimiting them to a particular culture.

**Conclusion**

Although we think it is very important to be critical of current ideas about cultural diversity described as ‘multiculturalism’, we are not suggesting that the concept should be given up. We think that when used in a stagnant way, it loses its connection to history, politics and power. A multicultural society cannot only be about the possibility of taking care of one’s own heritage if it does not lead to more understanding between people of diverse origins. In the current globalized world, multiculturality is not an option but a reality. We cannot turn time around and act as if colonialism and the great migration patterns of the last five hundred years did not happen. States of the past were always internally diverse—especially before the development of the nation-state.

Anthropologists are increasingly showing how objects and beliefs gain different meaning in different contexts. This has been extensively studied in relation to globalization, where anthropologists have stressed how apparently static symbols such as Coca-cola, TV series, etc., gain new and local meaning within new cultural settings (e.g. Friedman 1994; Sahlins 1999). It has furthermore been pointed out that culture itself in each society is quite plural, its ingredients being composed of various aspects from different parts and times, gaining different meanings at different times. Rosaldo’s metaphor of culture as a garage sale rather than a museum attempts to capture this confusing characteristic of culture (1989). The anthropologist Gerd Bauman (1999) claims that in contemporary discussion of culture, be it ethnic, national or religious it is usually spoken of as something you belong to, instead of something shaped and reshaped. He points out that reifying culture is not useful in relation to multiculturalism, creating more problems than it solves. We all participate in more than one culture, and cultures do not lay side by side like an elaborate mosaic picture, but
overlap in complex and diverse ways. Culture is thus more usefully seen as an ever-changing mix of various aspects; it is in fact impossible to claim where one culture ends or starts. People are also usually not in agreement about which aspects should be seen as characteristic of what they define as their own culture. Objectification of culture and boundaries between cultural groups can lead to ignoring the diversity within cultural groups and different interests within social groupings.

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—. “Íg er ekki með kynþáttarforðoma en…” Hugtakið kynþáttur og íslenskt


The Use of Images in Aniconic Societies:
Occultism, Protestantism and Imagination in Iceland

Christophe Pons

My intention is to examine the imaginary North in the Icelandic religious field of modern esotericism, through the use of images and re-presentations. This paper is mostly based on the research I am currently undertaking in Iceland among healers and mediums, but also on the many societies for psychical research, usually referred to as “Spiritualistic Societies”. They are actually very numerous and are not only in Reykjavík but spread all over the country.

Modern Western Esotericism in Iceland: a Preliminary Sketch

Following historian W. Hanegraaff, I can argue that New Age, as well as contemporary Icelandic Spiritualism, are examples of the last extensions of modern esotericism: “Esotericism’, on the one hand, and ‘secularization’, on the other (combined in the concept of occultism) thus emerge as the two key concepts in [an] interpretation of New Age religion” (1996, p. 409). In this paper, in order to simplify I will use both “occultism” and “western modern esotericism” interchangeably.

Occultism is rooted in Northern Europe, starting with distinguished figures like Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). But its institutional settlement occurred in North America, with the very famous Hydesville Fox sisters
(1847), and before that with prophets like Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), and Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), to name a few. Historians have stated that occultism came back to Europe through the Nordic countries as well as through the United Kingdom (where it has always been very strong), and, eventually, spread itself to southern Catholic countries and probably to South America, if we consider for instance how strong the French influence is on Brazilian spiritism. My purpose is not to conceptualise these exchanges of spiritual ideas between the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean, but to show first of all that they are embedded in Protestantism, and, secondly, that Icelandic society has been strongly affected by them.

At the end of the 19th century, occultism started to be influential in Iceland. The most popular aspect of it was with no doubt Spiritualism, so-called spiritism. Despite its French lexical connotation, Icelandic spiritism refers mostly to Anglo-Saxon spiritualism, specially the one that developed in Great Britain.¹ It is remarkable that since this time, spiritualism remains strongly embedded in the Icelandic religious field. Although its history had ups and downs according to circumstances, it retains a deep social dimension in everyday life. In addition, the spiritualistic sensibility does not concern marginalised people and disaffiliated social classes, as has often been pointed out in many studies on New Age and New Religious Movements elsewhere. In this respect, we must mention: the Icelandic network of different societies for psychical research (almost 20 spread all over the island); the tradition of mediumship and its origins in the figures of seers and intercessors between the dead and the living; and the recent rise in the number of healers and channelers. Thus, from prophetic times to the recent revival of the New Age trend, the history of spiritualism has enhanced the influence of this alternative religious attitude in Icelandic society.

I will not go far into the historical investigation of this religious attitude, one which must be considered as relatively uncommon among modern Western societies. But let me briefly refer to scholars (especially Pétursson 1983, 1986, 2005; Swatos & Gissurarson 1997) that have underlined (1) the nation-

¹ Even though the terms spiritism (spiritism) or andatrú (belief in spirits) are used, it is more accurate to talk about spiritualism in defining the esotericism movement that surfaced on the island. Regarding the distinction between spiritism and spiritualism, see Janet Oppenheim 1985.
alistic roots of occultism in Iceland, (2) the tolerant and “quiet” relations between spiritualism and the official Lutheran State Church, and (3) the influence of deep “folk-beliefs” that strongly shaped Icelandic spiritualism, above all around specific relationships between the dead and the living (Pons 2005).

**Argument**

This rapid overview, too incomplete to have real historical value, is nevertheless relevant to understanding the images and their use in the field of occultism. Ethnographic (and also historical) fieldwork on occultism, both in Iceland and in other Western societies, reveals two aspects. First of all, occultism enjoys all kinds of images and re-presentations (pictures, photographs, paintings, drawings, sculptures, figurines, statuettes, theatrical settings, voices, sounds, etc.), making great use of them as its favorite way of expression. In this respect, we could say that occultism develops an iconic tendency, if we use the term “iconic” in full—and very large—application to point out all the diverse possibilities for re-presenting, in the sense of presenting again. Secondly, as it was stated above, we know that occultism has Nordic roots both in Northern European and American societies, that is to say it is of Protestant tradition. As a result, my question would be: what is the meaning of the paradoxical use of occultist images inside traditional iconoclast societies? In order to understand such a paradox, I propose analyzing the ambivalence between the two religious attitudes of occultism and Protestantism, arguing that both of them insist on a personal and private, deepseated introspection. Indeed, as A. Faivre argues about occultism (1996b, p. 55), introspection is an imaginative exploration, that is to say a process of imagination-creation, that has specific origins in Protestantism. This hypothesis enhances both the Protestant and the Nordic roots of occultism. But obviously in Iceland, the pattern of iconic tendency is not confined inside these occultist dimensions. Icelandic society is daily producing a fascinating amount of images and representations that seek to show an invisible world. There is a mystical profusion of images that reinforces the ambivalence between occultism, Protestantism and Nordicity.

**The Three Dimensions of Occultist Images and Representations in Iceland**

I will start by giving some ethnographic data on this universe of images. Scholars, doing research on historic and modern esotericism, often under-
line the same profusion of representations. Bookstores, healers’ private rooms, centers for ritual mediumnic seances and the many other places of occultism are commonly seen as Sanctuaries of (the) Kitch. In this respect, Iceland is like everywhere else in Western societies. But when we look into it, it comes to light that Icelandic images and representations are shaping a specific cosmology, mostly based on three main dimensions.

The first dimension is pantheism. In this pantheist pattern, people express very freely an open range of figurations; individuals are seeking new symbols and representations that they interpret based on a process of syncretism, hybridizing and “bricolage”. For instance, inside mediums and healers’ private rooms are often found different kinds of statuettes, pictures and paintings about neo-hinduism, North-American shamanism, UFO and aliens, African amulettes, pendula and others talismans from many different countries. But there is also always a strong European and Nordic influence through the folklore of elves, fayries, dwarfs, gnoms, trolls, huldufólk, old hags, etc. This pantheist dimension is contemporary with a renewal of spirituality that is locally referred to through the expression íslenska nýöld, most often conceived in terms of a rupture within the traditional religious configuration. Now, it is true that in the case of most of these healer-mediums, the cosmogonies, techniques borrowed, and supernatural figures summoned-up all bear witness to the profound changes brought about by the globalization of spiritual goods and an interpretation of extremely heterogeneous symbolic matter. Increased use of stones, crystals, tarots cards, totems and many photographs of the Auras, paranormal materialisations, and drawings of supernatural helpers can be found. Usually the pantheist dimension is not so strongly developed in the collective rooms where society members gather. In such public places, one can mostly find light and bright paintings that represent spiritual beings and wonderful places of the other side, so-called sumarland, a literal translation of the term summer land that was used early-on by spiritualists movements (Mackline 1977).

The second dimension is using less sculpture than paintings; this is a naturalistic pattern refering to the power of Icelandic Nature. Through paintings and pictures of the mountains, waterfalls, ice, fire and wind, the idea of Icelandic mystical strength is worshiped. In this process, places with strong connotation of Icelandiness, like Göðafoss, Snæfellsnes, Þingvellir and Hekla are the favorites, but many others places are represented through
These impressionist paintings. Unlike the pantheist figurations that are mostly hidden in collective places, this naturalistic pattern is extremely developed in common rooms where people gather. This is a common Icelandic referent enhancing the nationalistic feeling of being between us, and that also must be linked to the Naturphilosophy conceptions of North-European romanticism. In addition, it is relevant to notice that such a reference is also significant outside the occultist worldview. The same paintings can be found in everyplace where Icelanders need to get the feeling of belonging among themselves, i.e. in hospitals, schools, town offices, universities, or factories.

Finally, the third dimension is a Christian pattern that specifically underlines the role of angels, the charisma of Jesus and the unexpected presence of the Blessed Virgin. The Spiritualistic Societies generally keep rooms used for little “praying-circles”, with 4 to 6 persons. Very often the prayers are performed in the name of God and with the help of spiritual beings; these circles are also very much attuned to communication with the recently deceased. It is very important to note how much these little rooms diverge from the non-iconic Protestant tradition. They are often closer to Catholic or even to Orthodox chapels, with holy crosses, rosary beads, saints candles, icons of Jesus, of angels and again of Mary, sometimes sporting two wings on her back. But looking at them carefully, it is also very relevant how selective they are. All these Christian images are showing the most beautiful aspects of Jesus and Mary. That is to say that Jesus is always praying, blessing or healing. There is no representation of his Passion. He is never suffering. Neither is he on the cross, nor is there any blood represented. In the same conception, his mother Mary is never crying and is never in pain. She is the representation of the benevolent figure of goodness and Jesus is the representation of the great healer-medium. This use of Christian images and representations is a transversal pattern that can be found both in private mediums’ rooms and collective places.

The Mystical Experience of Imagination

More or less, these three dimensions are the main theme that occultism likes to explore. Nevertheless, in Iceland like everywhere else in Western societies, the socio-anthropological studies hardly consider such a profusion of images and representations as proof of an iconic tendency. On the contrary, they usually focus on individualism and globalization, over-lying
the theories of modernity onto religion. According to this interpretation, individuals are in a despair of meaning. They create their own belief by picking up many different symbols that they choose from a globalized superstore of spiritual goods and services.

Against this dominant interpretation, I suggest this profusion of images and representations bears witness to another religious sensibility, strongly active in Iceland, and which has found in occultism its favorite field of expression. This religious sensibility is properly mystical. It mostly works through experience and imagination.

Much more than socio-anthropologists, historians of art have looked at mystical productions in these terms. Considering 19th-century mediums as artists, they showed how these mediums discovered new expressive paths through artistic and spiritual productions. This is very much the case for the American medium Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908) who was experimenting with new artistic trends, using both innovations and classical dimensions of Christian iconography and folklore. She became famous with the very popular sculptures of “Puck”, a young child with bat-wings, hood and often seated on a big mushroom (Colbert 1996). This example shows the necessity of considering occultism (mediums, cosmologies, and works) as a field of creative productions, a specific attitude of mind like a singular religious sensibility. In her remarkable book on Spiritualism in Antebellum America, the historian B.E. Carroll argued that, beside their divergences, the many diverse religious groups like Transcendentalists, New Church, New Era Swedenborgians, Millerites, Shakers and Mormons have all insisted on personal and private deepseated introspection. It was called “diving in spiritland” as the way of “independence of every individual from the spiritual tyranny imposed by established churches and ministers” (1997, p. 35). Along the same lines, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875) and Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910), both prophets of Spiritualism in America, have focused on the very high importance of this interior journey that everybody should experienced for himself (Delp 1967; Albanese 1992; Melton 1994). Davis was talking about the “inside pilgrimage”, the exploration of the world of personal images, allowed by the strength of the group. For all of these groups, the circular form of mediumnic or praying seances (with 6 to 12 participants), hand in hand and with open legs, was the best configuration for such a personal exploration.
In short, it is clear that all these occultist groups share the common trust of the Individual. The group is gathering in order to fulfill the individual explorations of the self. Then, can we considered this cognitive practice only as being the process of individualism in religious modernity? Of course not, except if we deny the many biographies of gnostics and mystics that never waited for modernity to experiment with this specific religious sensibility (Koyré 1971), and if we forget to look at the Protestant tradition of exploring the self. A good example is with no doubt Karl Gustav Jungs’ conception of the unconscious. Jung is more popular in Nordic countries of Protestant traditions than in South Europe where he is little known and almost never read. For this son of a Protestant minister, exploring the unconscious was discovering an independent human soul that is “using” people as vehicles, during the lapse of time of their lives. As he explains himself, this discovery is a fall into the deepside of the self:

It was like the ground broke down and I was projected to a deep obscurity. I could not help feeling scared. Then, before reaching a very deep level, I was released to stand up on my feet, over a soft and viscous soil. I was in almost full darkness. After a while, my eyes got used and I could see in front of me the entrance of a dark cave; a dwarf was standing up there. He seemed to be of leather, as if he was mummified. I had to glide myself very close to him to pass the narrow entrance…

*Jung 1957, p. 208.*

These last examples provide more clues to the ambivalence between the two religious attitudes of Occultism and Protestantism. But before going into their common origins in personal and private deep introspection, let’s come back to Iceland where this creative activity of imagination is strongly developed.

The Jungian dwarf and Hosmer’s child “Puck” indicate the origins of the images and representations that occultist groups seek. Indeed, both the dwarf and Puck refer to the imagery of Nordic folklore. Today, everyone entering into an esoteric bookstore somewhere in the Western societies will

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2 The translation is mine.
see how much the pantheist pattern of representations and figurations is shaped according to Nordic folklore. But already in the 19th century, occultist groups were using fairies as proof of the invisible world. Beside the practice of taking photographs of dead ancestors, the fairies were also a theme of representations in photographs (Sanderson 1973), theatre (Gafford 1940), sculptures (Colbert 1996), paintings and essays—as seen for instance in the works of Lewis Carroll, a member of the Society of Psychical Research, or Edgar Allan Poe, such as when he was describing the way into the “garden of Arnheim” (Hess 1970).

But the question is less to identify the images that occultism uses for inspiration, rather than to reverse the focus and take into account that these images have daily use in the social life of very ordinary people. The most characteristic example is the taste for private gardens and the many figurations used as decorations during leisure time. In fact, considering the garden hobby, Iceland is not the most representative. As everyone knows, the garden cosmology of a little underground world is more deeply embedded in Great Britain and other Northern European countries like the Netherlands, but always in countries of Protestant tradition. We should then consider the iconic tendency not only as an occultist characteristic, but more widely as an ordinary social habitus of showing the invisible world. It is particularly strong in Iceland with elves and the so-called huldufólk. Recently, there have been cartographic attempts to map the invisible world, especially in maps aimed at tourists which include visual representations of spiritually significant places, promoting an invisible patrimony. Of course, to understand the role and status of these pantheist dimensions of the invisible world in daily society (that is to say outside the occultist arena), one should consider the very old relationship between Esotericism and National Romanticism, in the spirit of Herder or Goethe. In this respect, and following the studies of V. Hafsteinn (2000), we can say that with the help of huldufólk, since independence, Icelandic society was regularly promoting its national romantic spirit. When incidents occurred with road constructions because of huldufólk, it was also the opportunity to proclaim an original mythified Icelandic nature, represented by these invisible beings that are demonstrated through protected rocks and curves in the roads. The strong influence of elves and huldufólk is certainly good proof of the iconic tendency in Icelandic society outside the occultist arena. But we also find the same attitude in the more private dimension of the household.
In the home, the images and representations are more focused on ancestry and lineage. Very often, not far from the corridor, a specific part of the wall is reserved to hang photographs of deceased relatives and sometimes pictures of the original ancestral farm. In some other case, one can also find a specific installation for the recently dead. Using candles, crosses and figurines of angels, these little altars are showing us how the occultist images and representations can have a mourning dimension when used at home by ordinary people. But they also underline the role of the image in the memory of the dead. When photographs were introduced in Iceland, they were quickly used as the mimetic supports of the Dead. Beside the photographs taken by spiritualists, there was also an intense use of photographs in the newspapers for obituaries, which still exists (Árnason 1997). We must also consider the practice of taking pictures of the dead in their coffin, or of the dead aborted fetus, and of slipping the photographs in the family album. Such a practice is hardly conceivable in Southern countries like France.

We could list many more examples of this Icelandistic attitude of using images in order to re-present (in the meaning of “presenting again”) what is now invisible. However, this iconic attitude directly refers to the process of mimēsis that was precisely condemned by Protestant theology. Traditionally in the Protestant worldview, “all kind of visual setting, drama or mimēsis was reprehensible; the representation was false. The imitation was corrupted” and comparable to illusion and falsity, because it was “going against God’s creation” (Goody 2003, p. 131). Many scholars have underlined this point (e.g. Besançon 1994) and we must, one more time, be astonished at seeing such a paradoxal use of images within an iconoclast society. But, as we have tried to demonstrate, the iconic tendency is also in Iceland a cultural disposition, very well shared among common people facing common events of life. This, I guess, is of the same stuff as when around Christmas time people light the graves in the churchyard, showing by this that the invisible dead are very much present among the living at that time.

_The Ambivalence of Religious Experience_

If the paradoxical use of occultist images inside a traditional iconoclast society finds some cultural explanation in the social habitus of showing the invisible world, I nevertheless would like to conclude with the ambivalence of the two religious attitudes of occultism and Protestantism.
Let me note that it is a historical fact that most of the prophetic figures of modern esotericism—until its last extension into so-called New Age—came from protestant countries. The hypothesis I tried to explore was that occultism and Protestantism both have in common a belief in how essential personal and private deep introspection are. Both of them focus on the intimacy of inner faith, whether it is turned to God in the official liturgy, or to a personal world of images in the unofficial esoteric way. We must then reconsider the edge between these two religious sensibilities, not by strictly separating them but on the contrary by trying to look at their common features. In this respect, it is very much relevant to focus on the practice of “praying circles”. Since the 19th century, in Northern Europe and North America, the number of these little groups that gather for praying has never decreased. Sometimes called “cell-groups”, they are generally composed of 5 to 10 persons who share the exercise of praying together, at home and outside the Church. These little communities, which are the prototype of the Weberian sect, have served as alternative movements to both occultists groups (Prothero 1993) and to fundamentalist evangelical revivals (Wilson 1974; Pfeffer 1974). In Iceland, these praying circles (bænahringar) are more of the first type, spread all over the country. Very often supported by female networks of sociability, they take great importance in critical situations. For instance, I was conducting fieldwork shortly after the avalanches that killed 20 and 15 persons in the respective villages of Flateyri and Súðavík in the Vestfirðir ten years ago. This dramatic circumstance caused the emergence of many little prayer circles. More or less, they were precisely demonstrating the hybridization of religious experience. Praying in the name of God, many circles were getting in contact with the deceased, helping them to cross the bridge that leads to the other world. In these cases, the Protestant and the occultist dimensions of the religious experience were fully integrated, and it was almost impossible to know which one was primary. So to speak, a pure product of syncretisms. The conversations were built on metaphors such as “walking on the green grass”, “following the brightness”, “joining the other side” which was mostly described as a “sunny” and “warm place”. These are also unexpected images of the North.

*Thanks to Mélanie Sanchez-Funel for her assistance in the translation of this text*
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Performances of Scale: Visual Culture and Site-Specific Art in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Era

Lisa Ann Favero

A cylinder of steel—4 feet (1.3 meters) in diameter and 800 miles long—transects the largest and nearly the least-populous state in the U.S.A. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline matches in scale the enormity of its setting, the largest expanse of American wilderness.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when the pipeline underwent its phases of planning, construction and early operation, its hugeness acquired a kind of independent, discursive momentum. All sorts of cultural texts from the period are replete with tropes figuring vastness. Especially toward the time of its completion and for some time thereafter, the pipeline and its place often mutually reinforced each other’s largeness, inscribing and reinforcing their mutual enormity: the vast environment created the immensity of the pipeline, and the huge pipeline framed the extent of the place.

Certainly the most important cultural impact of monumentality is felt in the field of art, where scale is one of the terms and tools of the trade. Artists working in Alaska during this era were poised to be especially direct or even literal in making contributions to the broader discourse motivated by monumentality. Those engaged with site-specific modes of art, including photography, sculpture and even performance, were best primed. The contingency of their work on its context positioned them to participate in
the monumentality that was being exercised and enacted around them as a material in the creation of their own projects. These artists were also significant participants in the discursive formation of monumentality, not only by offering their own performances or enactments of it, but by sometimes identifying and articulating problems of size and scale that were semiotically in play with the broader culture.

Thus site-specific art evolved in great measure as a concomitant of the scale of Alaska. In fact, modern expressions celebrating the monumental as related to this place was not unprecedented. Its roots date at least as far back as the middle of the 18th century, to the arrival of Russian explorers whose primary objective was natural resources, not geographic knowledge (Haycox 2002, p. 48). They often cast their “great land” and its resources in terms tending toward hyperbole. Subsequent waves of European development each corresponded to a revival—a reinvention and expansion of the discourse of magnification, applied at once to the land and its elements. With the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, this activity would achieve its greatest proportions yet, due to improved communication technologies and an abundance of media to help fuel the intensity.

Monumentality in Times of Crisis
Monumentality in desire, drive, and need extended well beyond the requirement for fossil fuel that the pipeline physically represented. For the collective American psyche, it likewise responded to a number of perceived traumas and massive threats that had been experienced in a series of encounters with foreign ‘others:’ within the ongoing Cold War; the specter of Vietnam; the power of the uncontrollable and amorphous Arab other blamed for the dependence on foreign oil, as well as the Iranian hostage crisis; and a weakened domestic economy complicated by the foreign other over oil. The monumentality of the physical production which engendered this massive industrial structure engaged the collective imagination to deflect these threats and assert autonomy and power in their face. By virtue of the vast, inhospitable, and barren environment that building the pipeline would surmount, the structure could itself accede a correlative, greater degree of monumentality: the vaster, the harsher, the more rugged its context, the greater its potential for triumph by redemption and restoration of strength. Moreover, the pipeline could be an answer to the monumentality
ascribed to this foreign ‘other’s’ oil production; the size of the Prudhoe Bay field was described, rather remarkably, as being “almost certainly of Middle-Eastern proportions” upon its discovery in 1968 (Naske and Slotnick 1987, p. 248). That this environment was Arctic was also significant to the pipeline’s monumentality: its very climate could claim an antithetical, but equally harsh, geopolitical position as the Arab desert.

It was to a significant degree the monumentality *per se* of the pipeline which caused it to be physically produced there. Fitting this relatively new, unexplored modern American territory or frontier to the psychological need of modern Americans was of greater significance and of far more consequence for the nation than the need to produce oil, which ostensibly motivated the pipeline’s creation to begin with. With the abandonment of the original rationalization that the oil was to be consumed domestically amid little controversy—once Congress allowed it to be shipped to Japan—the fact emerged that the heroic feat of producing a pipeline in the Arctic was, indeed, more important than the oil. It was, in fact, being used as a vehicle for suppressing perceived threats and traumas from ‘others,’ a means for the supposed liberation, conquest, victory and rejuvenation of the nation through an imperialist and colonial endeavor, a rallying point for American patriotism and social collectivity, and a cause for commemoration and celebration once it had been achieved.

This broad cultural project was also projected as an antidote to a perceived threat against masculinity experienced at the level of the individual subject. The need for the pipeline and its gigantism addressed the increasing perception of men that they were lessening in power, and thus at the same time assuaged a general sense of masculine inadequacy vis-à-vis modernism. An individual man associated with this production of monumentality found the possibility of redeeming himself from the process of marginalization and the crisis in masculinity that, for example, the national unemployment rate, the feminist movement and the growing instability of gender identity all combined to produce. Moreover, vicarious reinforcement of power and size is created by its physical presence in the same manner as the largely homosocial construction camps and job sites reasserted masculinity through the quest for wealth and survival under extreme conditions.

It is due perhaps to the psychological benefit of the pipeline that it was able to withstand substantial efforts to counter its monumentality as well
as its threat against the Alaskan wilderness. Ironically, such challenges were actually more effective in the reinforcement of monumentality. In the 70s, authors like E.F. Schumacher, E. O. Wilson, and Paul Ehrlich provided the ideological and scientific grounds for many who opposed the pipeline, environmentalists in particular. Inherent to their work was a critique of capitalism or its consequences. Schumacher, a German economist, questioned the sustainability of large-scale development and globalization while espousing conservation and decentralized economic activity. He was conscious of the need for rhetoric to combat the identified problem and, accordingly, titled his book, Small is Beautiful, to register his opposition to the enormity and invasiveness of structures like the pipeline. He proposed that “bigger” is a better descriptor for the attitude of corporate machines facilitating those projects, or the colonization and globalization that such projects presupposed and created. He also foregrounded the dehumanization and alienation that mega-structures precipitated within the psychology of the individual subject, which threw into relief the hubris of the American omnipotence underlying such big structures. Another challenge was formulated by Wilson and Ehrlich who, as scientists, addressed the loss of habitat that such development caused and the consequences of population growth to the natural world.

None of these writers nor the environmental activists who were indebted to them took issue with descriptions of the pipeline in its enormity. Rather, their criticisms clearly reinforced and inscribed that monumentality with greater efficacy than their opponents, who often preferred to deflect such descriptions of enormity during the planning and construction phases and employed many techniques for so doing. Anti-development activists were essential contributors to the drive, and their resistance framed the will to monumentality that the pipeline manifests. It is noteworthy that the pipeline route preferred by environmentalists, which was to have gone through Canada, was significantly longer than the route that was finally settled on. Had their preference been realized, environmental interests would have been directly aligned with, if not responsible for, a pipeline of even greater magnitude (Ross 2000, pp. 153-154).

This is not to minimize the pro-development forces that played the major role in the figuring of Alaska as a “big” place. They were the manipulators of ever more vast and barren portrayals of the environment to prove
the invulnerability of the wilderness against development, and the same techniques that they used to minimize the pipeline often had the added advantage of enlarging its context, of making the wilderness bigger. This sleight of scale contrasts with the wilderness as portrayed by environmentalists, who framed it as the last frontier; it was consequently small, rare, ecologically fragile, and thus no match for the gigantic, invasive pipeline.

The combined effect was a kind of dialectic of these competing interests, engendering a discourse centered less on a monumentality that was dominant or motivational, and more on scale and proportions which could shift and mutate in relation to monumentality. Scale is a property manifested out of context, from a relationship between things, or from the proximity of at least two objects and the similarity or difference of size insofar as one object provides a context for the other. The relationship that creates scale in one set of terms can shift unexpectedly or even without notice. Scale is a conceptual relationship that can evolve, creating changes and even reversals in size and in the conditions set for arriving at scale in the first place. An object deemed gigantic in one context, even if due to a totally non-material impulse or drive, could in another be rendered miniature, showing how scale possesses inherent features which allow it to be suddenly reduce, or alternatively, inflate.

This shifting of scale is reflected in the discursive constructs of the pipeline and its wilderness environment as a longitudinal examination reveals. In the early 70s, there may have been one trajectory in which an excess of monumentality was present as completion neared and operation began. However, by the beginning of the 90s, the environmental discourse, most obviously through the interjection of knowledge production, achieved a projection of smallness and diminution, with a focus on the shrinking glaciers, and dwindling wildlife and wilderness. Though the momentum of the small had originally arisen in the 70s, its power and efficacy had waxed and waned over the subsequent decades. In the mid to late 70s, it had been easily eclipsed by the successful completion and operation of the pipeline, in spite of its challenges and a continuing advocacy of the small. The major change came in 1989 with the Exxon Valdez oil spill. This catastrophe provided the single most important catalyst in transforming the discourse around small into the dominant, privileged form. The consequences of that event proved how the wilderness could no longer be considered limi-
less and barren, and that its fragility and richness was manifestly threatened to the verge of destruction. Oil companies were forced to shift gears and represent themselves as environmental stewards, thus co-opting environmentalist strategies for imaging wilderness as their means for doing so. Now in the 21st century, smallness is even in the ascendant, with the monumental in decline due to technical failures of the pipeline, the latest of which involves other major spills and a lengthy system shutdown due to extensive corrosion.

Environmentalists and others opposed to development had organized legal and legislative roadblocks to the start of construction. Their efforts finally gave way, and in the spring of 1974 the building of the pipeline began. But by 1971 no one doubted that the pending, looming industrial object would be undertaken at some time. It was an immaterial, imagined object, but its command was so great that it carried many simple interactions and exchanges. The anticipation of its enormity, and speculation over the consequences that it would bring, the meaning it would create—stemming largely from its enormity—electrified the regional culture.

*Site-Specific Art before and during Construction*

Certainly the small Alaskan art community anticipated it just as intensely as any other sector of the regional population. At an informal barbeque in Anchorage in the summer of 1971, resident sculptor Gerry Conaway fell into conversation with an oil executive. During the course of their exchange, the artist declared the coming pipeline to be a work of art. The executive responded enthusiastically. The concept of the pipeline as art, the oilman felt, would provide the perfect stratagem for winning the battle against the environmentalists (Conaway 2004).

Conaway went on to make his proclamation public and sold certificates of ownership of individual lengths of the pipeline as sculpture, thereby authenticating it as art. A person purchasing fifty percent of the segments was to have earned the right to name it. News of the declaration went out over the Associated Press wire, and his gesture became well-known. He then began to produce a variety of sculptural works that abstractly referenced the pipeline, some of which were very small, in a remarkably wide stylistic range (Conaway 2005). Some were Abstract Expressionist in inspiration, others suggestive of Arte Povera and Minimalism.
Endowing the pipeline with the status of art, as Duchamp did with his readymades, was to appropriate the industrial object and claim authorial power over it, or at least contest the authorship claimed by some other entity. If we are to interpret this gesture within the oedipal narrative, we might understand it as Conaway’s means of making himself master of the monumental before it—and the corporation building it—could condemn him to subjugation by scale. It served as a means for preventing the pipeline from effecting its magnum threat of castration just as the pipeline itself stood as a promise of potency both for the nation and the male worker. With Conaway as author, the industrial phallus could be usurped, and his smaller pipeline sculptures and multiples could serve as supplements, tokens, relics, souvenirs, and sanctifiers of his full-scale, largely inaccessible original.

Conaway’s move was not exclusively Duchampian, however. It was also a channel to Robert Smithson and other Earthworks artists at the very moment some of their most important projects were being produced and attention was suddenly being focused on them. Smithson’s Spiral Jetty had been built less than a year before Conaway’s initial pronouncement. And in the year after his declaration of authorship, Conaway sojourned to the Great Salt Lake to see the seminal work (Conaway 2004). He may or may not have been aware that in 1967, Smithson had expressed an interest in building a monument in the Alaskan or Canadian Arctic (Flam 1996, p. 46). Smithson’s mention of this desire occurred well before the pipeline had been imagined, but only one year prior to the 1968 North Slope oil discovery. Given these synchronicities with Smithson, Conaway’s gesture seems a partly-logical and at least semi-conscious extension of Smithson’s practice still within a Freudian dynamic. He understood the pipeline as realizing the Earthworks movement’s values, goals and consequences, one of them being monumentality, and that it served a better effect perhaps than those artists themselves could have produced. So in addition to staying off the pipeline’s phallic threat, he out-competed Smithson by authoring an arctic monument that could never be outstripped in size. Duchamp served Conaway as the means to this end, but the gesture of appropriation and co-optation was something which Smithson himself never would have performed given his professed distaste for the transcendental mythmaking that it presupposed, and the false/artificial distance that Duchamp’s
stance inserted between the artist and something that he exemplified or was emulating (Flam 1996, p. 310). As Smithson’s critique of Duchamp suggests, Conaway’s claim to authorship actually left the artist ontologically, but disingenuously, close to the corporation that was responsible for conceiving of and financing the pipeline, and it was his false transcendence vis-à-vis the corporation that made him so attractive (making him an object possible to be co-opted) in return. The oil man at the barbeque had felt the allure of validation, as did a number of other Alyeska executives who tried to court Conaway once construction had ended. Drawn to him in part because of his famed declaration, their intent was to have him sign a section of the pipeline and to commission a commemorative statue that was to be sited at the pipeline’s terminus in Valdez (Conaway 2004). Ultimately Conaway wasn’t willing to be co-opted in return, or to relinquish his authorial voice over the pipeline by agreeing to the subject matter that the pipeline owner’s requested, which, incidentally, was to be the nameless, archetypal pipeline workers who truly were the silent authors of the industrial structure.

One of the primary visual means by which the conflicts over the pipeline’s anticipated-monumentality were acted out was photography. In the very early 70s, as the pipeline was being planned and contested, photography was both a vehicle for and an active producer of such conflict. Because a photograph’s framing of its subject inevitably imparts scale, one image might render a subject small while another could render it large. Additionally, the medium’s documentary authority lends itself to rendering that scale as reality, to heightening the legitimacy and veracity of the representation. It was thus an effective tool in conveying both pro- and anti-development sentiments. However, by 1974, it had perhaps been more strategically used by anti-development interests, who created five years of legislative and court-ordered delays to construction, that put Alyeska—the consortium of companies trying to build the pipeline—on the defensive. The tension was so great that in contexts where neutrality was desired or expected, images were interpreted as (intentionally) representing their subject in ways that were anything but neutral, i.e., most often from an environmentalist point of view. A well-known example was a nationally circulated press photo of a seemingly infinite number of pipe sections languishing in Fairbanks during the delays.
As construction on the pipeline was just about to begin in 1974, photographer Joe Sonneman found himself about to be drowned by the tension surrounding scale. His choice of medium was at least partly responsible for placing him in such a precarious position. In pursuit of his project—the documentation of the pipeline as a return to the Gold Rush era, a reinvention of the past—he found a solution to the problem of scale that was raging around him (Sonneman 2004). Sonneman both wanted and needed his images to step outside the politics he saw emblazoned in images such as of the Fairbanks pipe yard, and he had at least two reasons. One was that he desired his images to be read according to his intention, as pictures of a past which was being relived in the present. If he were unable to extricate his work from the conflict, he would run the risk of having his content be subsumed by it. Politically charged images were the norm, and a deeply divided audience was predisposed to find politics in any image with a pipeline or wilderness subject. But his way around the problem ultimately helped him access important points along the northern section of the pipeline. Reaching that portion of the line had to be negotiated through Alyeska. Initially, he sought permission from company officials, persisting for nearly a year without a response. Insofar as photography had furthered an environmentalist agenda and delayed the start of construction, Alyeska considered noncommercial photographers suspect, and the potential for the medium to continue to make things difficult once work was underway might well have been deemed all too great. Sonneman himself stated that the corporation was “gun-shy” (ibid.). Finally he began to gain access to northern points along the pipeline by being dispatched to them as a union laborer.

His solution for the problem of scale was to assert neutrality by refusing to grant neither the industrial subject nor the environment greater scale within the frame of the photograph (ibid.). The resulting balance between industry and environment distinguishes his images from others of the region dating from any period—despite his use of Gold Rush era compositional conventions and his intention to create a *déjà vu* experience for the viewer (fig. 1).

His strategy allowed him to further develop his series and to enjoy a measure of success. Sonneman was not forbidden to take photos once he had started taking them in the context of the workplace, and eventually Alyeska began inviting him along on press flights as a photographer.
(Sonneman 2004). By balancing both the industrial and wilderness subjects, causing them to mutually reinforce each other’s size, Sonneman became a producer of the mutually reinforcing excess of monumentality that characterized the region. The broader and more general culture thereby enjoyed a distinct and distanced vantage point from which the conflict is not directly experienced or even readily apparent. This effect was, in some respects, imparted by the view camera that he shot with, for it required a distanced vantage point. His work was exhibited nationally at the time, reaching audiences who shared such viewpoints themselves. One accomplishment in his work is how it suggests that monumentality between the industrial subject and its wilderness context could be equitable and provide a plausible, effective method for overcoming the trauma and conflict that had been occurring during the pipeline’s earliest phases. His project, after all, depended on a balanced scale for its continued existence.

*Visual Culture Post-Construction*

Photographic projects not unlike Sonneman’s dominated site-specific practice throughout the construction period until the pipeline’s completion in 1977, when they yielded primarily to sculptural works. The increase in site-specific sculpture was in part an outgrowth of the state’s oil-driven economic boom. Generous funding and a newly expanded art infrastructure provided resources substantial enough to support an unrivalled diversity of sculptural works, many site-specific ones among them.
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The participation of this artwork in the discourse of scale acts significantly differently from that of the construction-era photography, though less due to the difference in media than one might expect. Whereas photography earlier bore the consequences of the process of contestation over scale, the sculpture of the post-construction period contended with the fait accompli; the economic success, the engineering triumph of the pipeline and its now fully realized monumentality.

In 1978, at the outset of this new sculptural activity immediately following the pipeline’s completion in 1977, Tom Doyle received a General Services Administration commission for a public work to be sited outside the Federal Building in Fairbanks. Titled Map of Alaska (fig. 2), Doyle conceived the piece as an example of basic, functional, built form—the kind that has no deep aesthetic orientation in contrast to architecture, but is the result of a haptic, phenomenological experience of a site by the structure’s builders (Ratcliff 1990, p. 16; Doyle 2006). Such built form is characteristic of 19th-century American bridges, for example, and is evidence of human passage or presence. Doyle describes his chosen structural form as decking, and several distinct planes of it met at odd angles in the piece, which was destroyed within a few years of its 1980 installation. In keeping with its symbolism, Doyle intended human interaction with the sculpture so that it would function as a literal ground for human activity (Doyle 2006). Represented as a locus of action, the sculpture could serve as a metaphor for the state and the spectators’ movement as a metaphor for the industry conducted within it. The spectator’s participation, as a kind of industry, was also what effected the completion of the work. People climbing onto

Figure 2:  
Map of Alaska (1980) 
Sculpture by Tom Doyle.
the sculpture obtained a higher point of view, where the intersecting forms would coalesce for them into a map of the state. Alaska thus became legible. The movement of viewers or—rather, the shift in scale that occurred as a result of their interaction with the piece—enabled them to perceive the whole and realize its iconic form. The sculpture duplicated the pipeline in this respect, informing it as a functional structure, as the ground for industry and activity, one that necessarily allowed the place to be navigable, mapped, comprehended, and metaphorically reduced in size.

In giving viewers an elevated vantage point, the piece also replicated one of the common phenomenological experiences of Alaska, a place seen much more commonly than others from the air. Due to its scale and isolation, people tend to fly to get around the state and to enter and exit the roads are few and those that do go anywhere are often too long or too arduous to drive. The moving aerial view, though it involves a reduction of the terrestrial, allows the viewer to take more in and therewith enables a full realization and comprehension of monumentality in both the object and context. It was this very type of view, and the mutually reinforcing enormity between the pipeline and the environment that it fostered, which dominated television images of the late- and post-construction period. It was this view that so commonly mediated the pipeline and its context for people who lived outside the state.

By the 80s, the excess of scale that artists physically faced did indeed elicit reactions in terms reminiscent of oedipal narrative. This was the decade that marked a surge in the production of large-scale sculptures in general, which in many cases might well have been a way of standing up to or negotiating the big. Bill Fitzgibbons, a sculptor and art administrator who was active in Anchorage during the 80s, described the situation as a challenge of how to carve out your own identity and maintain it in the midst of such great scale, so much space (Fitzgibbons 2004). These were the circumstances that Gerry Conaway’s earlier apotropaic gesture had anticipated in the hope of protecting him from the enormity that threatens to eclipse, silence, and swallow an artist whole.

Nonetheless, the conflict over scale gave way to a celebration of monumentality during the period of monumentality’s overwhelming excess. For two days each summer from 1985–1989, the Visual Arts Center of Alaska in co-operation with the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at M.I.T. held
Sky Art festivals in downtown Anchorage. The excess of monumentality made Alaska the perfect location for these events, according to the artists themselves. And the monumentality associated with the place was the very factor attracting the participation of some of the most important practitioners of the genre along with a number of other well known land and environmental artists. It was the function of Sky Art to proliferate monumentality as well.

Writing about Alaska, Stephen Westfall, a New York-based critic and observer of the second festival, extolled the ideal conditions, exclaiming, “The sky is everywhere here” (Visual Arts Center of Alaska 1986). Renowned Sky artist, Otto Piene, who was a regular participant, similarly remarked, “The sky seemed to touch the ground closely much of the time…Alaska is a place where it is most evident that the sky begins an inch above the earth” (ibid.).

Not only did they claim the Alaskan sky was bigger, the ground was, too. For Piene, the scale of Alaska was “closest to ocean scale which is closest to sky scale” (ibid.). Big sky consequently had a corollary in big earth. These practitioners found parity between the Alaskan earth and sky, and found themselves perfectly positioned to create the circumstances by which the viewing subjects could experience the overwhelming size of both the earth and sky in relation to their own smallness. Sky artists were often conscious and articulate about this intention to create a phenomenological experience of atmospheric monumentality for their viewers.

Monumentality in the context of Sky Art always had an inviting, celebratory tone. As festivals, they were widely publicized at the local level and were well attended by a cross-section of the art community. Monumentality was consequently not just an experience for the individual but a communal bond; individuals could come together in experiencing the “big” that encompassed them all. The created works were temporary, but often extremely large. The grandest of all Sky Art works, such as the one pictured in figure 3, were helium-inflated pieces by Otto Piene. They were possibly over 150 feet high and among the largest sculptures ever to have been made in the state.

Although Sky Art did not reference the pipeline at all, I would like to suggest its construction of place is very much an artifact of the dialogue between the large and the small that came into being in relation to the pipeline.
Moreover, the production of Sky Art in Alaska occurred at a moment when the bigness of the pipeline enjoyed the greatest degree of celebration, when oil companies were possibly less threatened by representation of the pipeline in large scale, when anyone—artists or corporations—could afford to mirror or generate monumentality without fear of reprise. Its monumentality was good enough even for the oil companies who could at that time use its representation in larger scale as an achievement redeeming their own public image. Sky Art also arrived concurrent to other challenges, when threats to the wilderness were more likely than at any other time to be obscured by the pipeline’s achievement as well as by its financial impact, which was remarkably palpable within the art community.

Insofar as Sky Art sculptures were themselves big subjects in the landscape, they also did not conflict with monumental man-made objects such as the pipeline (though we do have to acknowledge that their works were for the most part temporary, indicating an advocacy of gentler footprints). At the same time, insofar as their emphasis on the expansiveness of context and atmosphere contributed to a minimization of subjects in the landscape, Sky Art also constituted a subtle reinforcement of notions regarding the pipeline’s smallness in relation to big place. It might also be understood as reaching to uncharted space, fueled by the energy and hubris of the pipeline’s accomplishment and the charting of unknown territory that this feat
required. But, in its emphasis on the atmospheric and celestial, it could just as easily be read conversely, as a way of fleeing from the terrestrial conflict and trouble, either raised or thrown into relief by the pipeline.

Other large works from the 1980s were visible and direct in their entanglement with or commentary about the pipeline and its monumentality. For example, Dennis Oppenheim designed and built a series of public sculptures, the size and technical requirements of which were achieved with welding technology associated with the pipeline. Jo Going’s sizeable outdoor installation, The Giving Back, spanned the length of a forest path and was intended to be an offering or penance, compensation for the extractive relationship of humans to the environment. The pipeline’s proximity and otherwise inescapable presence made it one of the most immediate referents. The magnitude of extraction that it represented dwarfed all the other examples that Jo Going’s work raised. Only a few sculptors ever made the pipeline a primary subject during this period—or any other, for that matter—but in each of those cases monumentality and scale was at the heart of the address. In the 80s, Gerry Conaway was still at work with his pipeline(s) oedipal enormity. For Nancy Holt and Ken Gray, other formulations of monumentality in relation to the pipeline were in play.

In 1986, when Nancy Holt came to Alaska on the second of two trips there, she was no more willing to establish false distance than her deceased husband, Robert Smithson, would have been. Her project, which she titled Pipeline, did not just demonstrate deep-seated proximity, it revealed invisibility; her pipeline was inseparable from the rest of the place and its art community. At the Visual Arts Center in Anchorage she constructed a conduit of aluminum ducting that emerged from the ground at a remove from the Center’s property. The structure took a circuitous route toward the building, first arching over railroad tracks and then appearing to descend below ground in order to traverse the parking lot. It reappeared near one of the building’s exterior walls, which it skirted, climbed and finally penetrated. The conduit continued on the interior side of the same wall, in the Center’s gallery, and tortuously made its way through, ascending and descending the space with the support of intermittent armature just as it had done outside the building (fig. 4). Inside the gallery, however, a slow drip of what appeared to be crude oil came from one of the segments. It formed a slick, a spill.
Holt’s work didn’t visually resemble the oil pipeline in terms of physical dimensions, material, or aesthetics. Those qualities were much too closely keyed to the light industrial context of the Center’s building and its ventilation system for that to have been the case. But the work did mirror much of the pipeline’s behavior: its negotiation of diverse terrains and radically different spatial zones—as well as its loss of integrity through her inclusion of a fault in the line. This leak might well seem political and prescient on Holt’s part, but there was no overt intention of either sort at the time (Holt 2004). Her goal for constructing it into the piece seems more likely to have been primarily descriptive of the pipeline and its history up until that time. There had been a number of oil spills from the line itself prior to the Exxon Valdez event—a particularly substantial one in 1978.

Insofar as the actions of her piece evoked the pipeline, she offered a miniaturized or condensed replica of it. This smaller scale allowed her to situate the pipeline into zones that do not host the original’s physical form, in this case urban, industrial and art spaces. The pipeline and its presumed contents could be seen existing in the parking lot, in the asphalt, in the tanks of the cars that parked there. It was, furthermore, in the gallery’s walls, its floor, and by extension its budget. These were all places where its operations could easily go unnoticed or had been occluded and repressed. Once the industrial object could be witnessed and understood as permeating such spaces, once it had been reterritorialized by Holt’s pipeline in miniature, its scale could be understood to be that much greater. Through Holt’s lens, the pipeline reached a degree of enormity well beyond that of the physical object through the penetration of spaces that were either physically remote or altogether immaterial. And the farther those spaces were from the physical, industrial object either geographically, conceptually, or functionally, the bigger the scale could become.

In the same year that Holt installed Pipeline, sculptor and performance artist Ken Gray built his own thousands of miles away from Alaska high up
in the Texas Commerce Tower in downtown Houston. The venue was also urban, though of a different order than Holt’s, and was just as inextricable from Alaskan oil. Houston is the corporate pinnacle of the oil industry and the Tower houses its financial seat. Designed by I.M. Pei, the skyscraper was not only that city’s tallest building but was, until 1990, the tallest building west of the Mississippi. It offers spectacular, panoramic views of the city, and it registers the economic, civic, and architectural might of both corporate oil and the urban metropolis.

Titled The Great Alaskan Pipeline Organ, the work occupied the building’s sky lobby on the sixtieth floor in front of massive windows that extend from floor to ceiling and wrap around the space. Its placement followed the horizontal movement of the panorama. However, its scale was great enough to fully bisect and rupture the commanding view that people would otherwise consume as they arrived by elevator. In order to take in an uninterrupted view of the city, viewers had to walk around the organ at either end of the lobby. With this use of placement and scale, Gray created an intervention in which spectators were physically confronted and their perception of the panorama controlled at the outset by the instrument.

The organ, its point of reference the pipeline, the skyscraper, and the expansive view were each monumental in their own right. The organ’s fanfares triggered by the arrival of elevator passengers were also larger-than-life musical forms. The fusion of these components generated a kind of super-monumentality; monumentality so great, so omnipotent that it could be perceived not only as constructing the world but as framing and thereby controlling it.

Figure 5: The Great Alaskan Pipeline Organ (1986) at the Texas Commerce Tower, Installation by Ken Gray.
Unlike Holt, Gray had a political agenda. Clotheslines of crisp, clean dollar bills bedizened the horizontal pipe. While spoofing festive decorations, they were references to the alleged money-laundering activities of the E.F. Hutton Bank, which was housed on that very floor of the building (Gray 1993). They also pointed to celebrations going on all around: the Texas Centennial, the New Music America festival, the general merriment over monumentality. In addition, these swags of decorative but real money referred to corporate excess and to the siphoning of wealth from Alaska (ibid.). It was at the opening reception, however, that Gray’s political content became direct and insistent in its confrontation and provocation of corporate power.

His announced plan for the opening was to dispose of the money down the nearest toilet in a performance to be titled “Flush for Freedom.” Participating in the event at Gray’s invitation was a group known as the Urban Animals. Its members, who wore conventional clothing by day, were known for donning radical, counter-culture garb and roller skating through the inner city at night, when it was vacant (Galbreth 2006). Though they had no history of criminal or threatening behavior, their antics at the opening, like their nighttime actions, sought to reclaim a monolithic, inner city corporate space through the insertion of their own human scale and extreme subjectivity. The cumulative disruption of the public space by these participants and the trajectory of affronts which was to culminate in the flush were so troublesome to the bank that their security forces intervened. The reception event was called to a halt before any money was plunged (ibid.).

It is important to recognize that the power which Gray provoked and thereby demonstrated was no less a site than any of the other objects and spaces he enlisted in this multifarious project. Power like anything else could be understood as a location of activity or object for incorporation (Meyer 2000, p. 25). It could also be just as massive and pervasive, if not more so.

By joining these various mega-sites/sights together, Gray pointed to and generated a kind of another super-monumentality. However, alongside super-monumentality came the possibility that the components comprising it could be minimized, meaning the pipeline and its context especially. The pipeline could be seen as merely a component of a much more substantial machine that allowed petroleum culture and corporate power to reach new, unprecedented heights. It was hence at these oil-based sites that monumentality could be most decidedly anchored and would continue to grow.
References:


The Wild Wild North: The Narrative Cultures of Image Construction in Media and Everyday Life

Kristinn Schram

An archaic, bearded and weatherworn farmer in rustic garb sees the last of his sheep; burly seal hunters draw their prey from the midst of a menacing sea; sullen fleece-clad Icelanders with ‘Nordic’ features stand defiantly in adverse weather amid barren landscapes; wool-clad ancients explore the boundaries of past and present, nature and the supernatural. These are among the images of Icelanders represented through media, literature, film and art in recent years. I have focused on exploring images such as these in the context of Icelandic expressive culture or folklore in conjunction with the research project Iceland and the Images of the North. While presenting some ideas and underlying approaches utilized in my study, this paper retraces the first steps in researching the intertextual features of image construction through visual texts and narratives on the one hand and oral narrative in everyday life on the other. My specific interest is furthermore how images of a wild and primitive North are instrumental in the shaping of identities. What I find most interesting are recent visual representations with an—often ironic—accent on eccentricity, the rural and the wild. Although some of these features have indeed been attributed to narrated local ‘characters,’ and some traditional folk narratives share similar motifs, a closer comparison may be made with contemporary legends, oral narra-
tives and anecdotes. This paper focuses on examples of humorous stories shared on film sets and locations which depict isolated rural characters and folk heroes, ironically clashing with the contemporary world. Drawing from the expressive culture of both oral and visual narrative, I examine the dynamics of such representations in relation to the shaping of identity and everyday practices.

Having ventured into the territory where visual culture and oral narratives meet, one quickly discovers two distinct although not incompatible methodologies. My starting point being the former (followed by visual texts and further ethnographic research) a few words are in order for those not acquainted with oral narrative research. In recent decades, studies of oral narrative in the fields of folkloristic, anthropology, literary theory and psychology have advanced; albeit not always on parallel tracks, at times there has been significant cross-over. Innovative research, particularly within folkloristics, has tended to move beyond the text to collective performances, and researchers have devoted at least some attention to social context, dynamics of performance, and the processes of production and transmission (Ben-Amos 1975, Finnegran 1977, Abrahams 1982, and Briggs 1985). Richard Bauman has for example stressed the relationship between narrated events and the narrative event itself (where and when a story is told) and the significance of the narrator’s performance in the interpretation of narratives, defining performance in part as “a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content” (Baumann 1986, p. 3). To the participants of the narration, performance is open to evaluation, not only of the performer’s skill and effectiveness of display (form), but also of the enhancement of experience (function). In turn the evaluation of the form, meaning and function of oral narrative is situated in culturally defined scenes or events where behaviour and experience constitute meaningful contexts.

Interesting approaches to narrative in everyday life are also to be found within multi-disciplinary cultural studies. They may centre on power, knowledge, gender or class and aspects of folklore. Everyday cultural practices have commonly been approached as popular culture and often in association with high and low parameters, parallel to Western class structure (Benet et al 1986, Bourdieu 1984). There are on the other hand those that have avoided such clear distinctions. Among them is a pioneer of the study of
everyday practices, Michel de Certeau (1988). He places much emphasis on narration in everyday practice, in its low-level politics and constructions. By narrating one’s environment, one puts it into being. A space is not a place in itself but it is narration that gives people the means to inhabit it. In analyzing these everyday narratives de Certeau distinguishes between everyday strategies and tactics. The former is defined as being the calculus of force-relationships possible when a subject of will and power can be separated from an environment. The latter is the calculus that does not work on a spatial or institutional localization and therefore fragmentarily insinuates itself into ‘the others’ place. Ever reaching towards a theory of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances, these tactics can only be understood in the context of locality. This line of thinking is especially interesting when attempting to look at narratives in relation to identity, as I will come to later.

Oral Narratives

The oral narratives that constitute my starting point in this research project are a corpus of anecdotes and contemporary legends I have documented in recent years. They revolve around modern day rural wild men of sorts, comparable with the outlaws of Icelandic folktales or—to use a more mainstream parallel—the cowboys or frontiersmen of the North American ‘Wild West’. In the inner world of these narratives the eccentricities of these wild men and close interaction with a rugged northern nature is pitted against the encroaching modern world around them. Many of these narratives were told on film sets throughout rural Iceland, during extended coffee breaks or during the long winding pauses between takes, waiting periods that cast and crew felt driven to fill with stories as one of my informant puts it. The varying levels of irony and earnestness are evident in my fieldwork observations and qualitative interviews wherein the storytellers give a short review or opinion on the stories such as: “this is a ridiculous

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1 Iceland’s film industry includes many Icelandic film makers, portraying local stories as well as international film crews where Iceland stands in for other Nordic lands. Advertisements, especially car commercials, are also regularly shot in Iceland.

story” or “this story explains what it’s like up there”. The reflexive features of multiple participants in each storytelling session and my presence as a folklorist are also quite evident not least in the artful responses of the active storytellers. Active storytellers generally integrate performance and imagination with personal experience narratives and supposedly fact-based legends; they also commonly collect and elaborate on stories from other storytellers.

The context of this collection of narratives was, more often than not, a depiction either of the local culture (i.e. where filming was taking place) or the place of origin of a visiting storyteller. Although varying themes were covered in the repertoires of these more active narrators, the stories commonly centred on incidents from the recent past or as far back as the 1940s, a turning point in Iceland’s social and cultural history and the dawn of rapid urbanization. The protagonists in these stories were entirely of rural origin although these archaic characters were sometimes juxtaposed into the more modern town or city with resultant cultural clashes. More often than not the narrative events (where and when the storytelling took place) was in the vicinity of the narrated events (where and when the events of the story allegedly took place). The more remote settings of the narratives—mostly in the furthest and barely inhabited north-west parts of Iceland or remote farms bordering with the highland interior—were sometimes described in rather unclear terms and had, particularly among younger narrators, a mythical air.

The focus on the strange acts and remarks of the protagonists puts those tales in the popular and traditional narrative genre of “odd character stories”, an actual search category in Icelandic folklore databases.\(^3\) Odd character anecdotes often revolve around quick-witted blowhards, grand liars, strongmen and sharpshooters. Their main characters are in many ways consistent with folklorist Richard Dorson’s description of a folk hero as a “local character, a wag, an eccentric, talked about in close-knit circles for feats of strength or of eating or drinking or for knavish tricks and clever sayings.” (1973, p. 170). But what defines the particular corpus of anecdotes in question here, and sets them apart from traditional Icelandic outlaw narratives, is how these heroic or anti-heroic protagonists comically

\(^3\) See e.g. the Folklore Database of The Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland.
react to their liminal experience of being in between the archaic and the modern; culture and nature; the mundane and the supernatural.

One group of these tale-types was narrated in various documented events but perhaps most notably at an outdoor film set during an extended coffee break which lasted most of the day. They tell of man, or in some cases a band of men, from a remote part of the Westfjords where the closest town is Ísafjörður (where many inhabitants are familiar with the individuals portrayed). The main protagonist is described as a horseskin-clad hunter who lived outdoors all summer and generally sustained himself in the wild by, among other things, hunting seal. One story relates how a tour bus on a cultural excursion from Reykjavík stumbles upon him in the act of dragging a seal ashore. But just as the tour guide directs attention to this charming remnant of an archaic hunting method, the protagonist cuts the seals throat and proceeds to drink his blood, causing half of the civilised tourists on board to discharge their lunch. This ironic quality intensifies as the protagonist enters the more urban areas. In one such case he is in fact hired to exterminate wild cats that have become a problem in the town of Ísafjörður. He arrives in his pelt, rifle in one hand, shotgun in the other, bowie knife on his belt, and performs his duty so vehemently that he clears the town of all cats, both wild and domestic.

When the setting is moved to Reykjavík the clashes are even more severe. In one such tale a band of ‘outlaws’, seeking work in the city, raise a calf in the loft of their comfortable flat. Eventually he becomes too big to fit through the door so they go ahead and slaughter him in the loft. City flats are not uncommon settings for modern legends about rural people or immigrants moving into urban areas. They often involve the new inhabitants growing potatoes beneath the floorboards, cooking indoors over an open fire or keeping cattle on the balcony. Interestingly in Sweden, before an increase in immigration in the 1960s, these motifs were applied to rural Sami people moving into the city but they were later appropriated to immigrants. The Swedish folklorist Bengt af Klintberg points out how these legends have more to do with prejudices than any social reality.

Whether these particular anecdotes and tales have roots in an urban prejudice is of course an open question but the ethnographic data, particularly of the performance contexts (e.g. the coda), points to other meanings. Indeed it suggests no such singularly negative representation. Although
these archaic and wild characters are albeit ironically presented, they are also admired as rebels reacting in their own way to everyday rules of modern society and, as I will come to, foreign influence. And while these narrated cultural regions have aspects of an othering, which could perhaps be referred to as Nordic Orientalism, these modern (or dare I say post-modern) tales are also in discourse with a romanticized past of which the characters seem to symbolize.

This signification is even clearer in a group of narratives focusing on the relations between remote farmers and hunters and the WWII combatants struggling off the north-west Icelandic coast. These regional and familial tales were also narrated to storytelling participants as a representation of the characteristics of the people populating the now mostly-abandoned area in the north-west, Hornstrandir. One tale begins with a German-speaking worker on the farm suspiciously surveying the movement of ships on the horizon. Come morning, flashes of light are seen in the skyline followed by faint blasts, and two days later the corpses of soldiers wash up on the shore along with various supplies. Among these supplies were nutritious biscuits and pills that my informant laughingly assured me had come to good use for all-night egg-picking and bird hunting on steep cliffs. They were in fact amphetamines.

But the bodies of German soldiers are left alone in fear of their ghosts, particularly the dead navel captain, who is deemed a dangerous spectre. When the British hear of the incident, they deputize the reluctant Icelanders to collect the captain’s remains. In their fear and haste, they instead collect a heap of whalebones causing great mirth on assembly and surprise as to how well the Germans had adapted to marine life. Humiliated by this, a chieftain of sorts ensures that all the earthly remains are collected. As he proceeds to bury them he is interrupted by the appearance of a German naval ship in the bay. An admiral comes ashore and claims the bodies but the Icelandic leader claims that by law all that washes ashore in his land is his own property. And indeed under threat of a whole navel fleet the chief does not flinch until he has been paid the equivalent of numerous farmsteads. These humorous characters, which a local narrator called with some warmth ‘these wild beasts’, could of course be perceived as something other than a representation of region or nation. But the context of representation is already within the storytelling situation. In that light these
‘wild’ archaic masculine heroes or antiheroes can be seen as representations of a traditional and proud nation in control of, or rather in communion with, their wild northern nature.

**Visual Texts**

Moving on to the visual texts, and why I think they are relevant. Newspapers, tourist literature on Iceland and advertisers have of course long published photos of the country that have a strong association with Icelandic national identity. To take a few examples, photo captions often state the historical function of a given landscape in the much romanticised Commonwealth Period or Golden Age, the time of the Icelandic sagas. The so-called pearls of Icelandic nature are a recurring theme and the vast ‘untouched’ wilderness of the highland interior is showcased and considered by Icelanders as their common land and responsibility. Indeed when I was growing up, the Sunday television broadcast always ended with a showcase of Icelandic landscape images with the soundtrack of the national anthem. Some people even regarded it as improper to turn off the television before the segment had played out. These same images are presented to tourists in pamphlets, travel books and postcards and no less in Icelandic film.

One question that quickly comes to mind is whether this almost sublime image of Iceland reflects at all how Icelanders see themselves as a whole and wish to be seen, or if it is simply some prefabricated market image in little connection with the identity. A step to answering that question may be found in the study of the relationship between repeated images such as these and national identity. Working within Charles Hagen’s notion of **static images** Sigurjón Hafsteinsson concludes that the static wide shot of Icelandic nature conveys the notion of the purity, timelessness, the ancient and the sublime (1993). He also points out the correlation in how the photographic image itself was considered true, honest, real and objective and how landscape is assigned with these qualities as well.

Looking into the history of these images one may mention Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744-1803) romantic and influential ideas on the nature of national identity, since he put nature in a central position in the forming of the characteristics of individuals and nations. This emphasis on the interdependency of nature and culture can still be considered a common feature of discourse today whether we come across it in a presidential address to the
nation or a magazine interview with Björk. The image of the primitive survival of the Icelandic nation in a harsh and barren land, while preserving an ancient culture of language and literature, is commonly conjured up to get to the heart of what being an Icelander is. The image of raw nature can be seen as a symbol of this. The idea of synergy of Icelandic nature and nation on the one hand and wide angle landscape footage on the other share the connotations of the ancient, the authentic, sublime and pure. All of these have featured prominently in representations of Icelandic national identity and indeed in the selection of what many consider their heritage.

Emerging Visual Images

This can be said for much of the visual imagery in the post-war era and even today, particularly in the tourist industry. But what is more interesting is how in recent years or even decades nature and those who are seen as living in closer contact with it have been increasingly presented in an ironic light. What I set forth as emergent visual texts (e.g. advertisements, film and art) are those that centre on and manipulate images of the North in association with national, local and traditional traits and symbols. A common trend in the production of these visual texts is the emphasis on people in the midst of a challenging ‘northern’ nature represented by rugged and barren Icelandic landscapes—a contrast to the more subtle aesthetics and sublime representations of Icelandic nature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Another common aspect of these representations is the often ironic accent on eccentricity, the rural and the wild.

Recent examples may be found in an advertisement campaign for fleece clothing depicting Icelanders against the backdrop of desolate landscapes and small towns across the country. Their interchangeable Icelandic and English texts often contain ironic messages such as the following, which refers to a remote airport (fig. 1): ‘Welcome to Kaldárbotnsflugvöllur, only one of many airports in Iceland. Expect delays.’4 The advertising agency stated that these advertisements are meant to create the companies unique profile as part of Icelandic history and the national spirit or þjóðarsál—a common concept in everyday speech. Their slogan “Dress well” is said to

have “obvious references to the past and is above all very Icelandic. The advertisements show Icelanders in a cold almost hostile environment. And there is much drama in the facial expressions as well as in the landscape.”

Other representations, such as two recent publications and exhibitions of text and photography, *Icelanders* and *Faces of the North* directly evoke images of perceived Arctic and Nordic culture, particularly among those who apparently have not fully crossed the threshold to modernity. As another example, the Icelandic Photopress Society has in recent years awarded the most “national” photo. 2007 the motif was Icelanders bathing in the freezing sea and 2006 it depicted the last farmer of a valley in the Westfjords, as his last sheep are taken to slaughter (fig. 2). The jury’s appraisal was as follows: “The Icelandic sheep, a farm, steep slopes, rough landscape, dark clouds and farmers who have lived in close communion with harsh natural forces. Can it be more Icelandic?”

The Icelandic art world has also long been preoccupied with the eccentric image of Iceland. Birgir Andrésson, for example, reflects on the eccentricity of Icelandic identity, nature, tradition and folklore with old objects, texts and photographs as a source. Among his exhibitions is an assortment of old photographs of famed town drunks and vagabonds, which can indeed be considered ‘odd characters’. Another case in point are various Icelandic films,

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1 http://www.j1.is/verkefni/ar/8/(Last viewed in Feb. 2006)


7 Exhibited at the Hoffmansgalleri, The Reykjavik Academy.
such as those of Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, depicting rural Iceland as a wonderland of colourful characters, archaic customs and mannerisms, traditional ghosts and magic. Friðrik had early on in his career ironically depicted a rural country-western festival in north Iceland, complete with drunken, wild and silly behavior. The name of the film was *Cowboys of the North*.

Do these representations have a national significance? In approaching the idea of a national visual narrative, one can perhaps make use of Graeme Turner’s study of national fictions where he argues that a country’s narratives are produced by the indigenous culture and these narratives serve a reflexive role in that a culture uses them in order to understand its own signification and meaning (1986). Narratives are therefore a nation’s way of making sense to itself. While building on this premise film theorist Susan Hayward has stressed the importance of specific articulation, or what folklorists would call variation. Nations may have narratives in common but the specificity of their articulation is determined by the particular culture: “It is in its specificity, therefore, that a filmic narrative can be perceived as a reflection of the nation” (Hayward, p. 95). In line with this theory one may ask if a common specificity of Icelandic filmic narrative is this emphasis on close interaction with rural life and wild nature.

**Conclusion**

To sum up and connect these narrative cultures I believe what we are presented with is a correlation and a significant intertextuality of narrative motifs and images of the wild northern man. They are in turn set forth through oral and visual narrative in the context of representation and the negotiation of national identity. In both the oral and the visual, narration calls upon the available discourses and myths of its perceived ‘own culture’. And furthermore, these cultural and national myths are not pure and simple reflections of history or contemporary times but dynamic contemporary transformations of them. But can film sets and advertising agencies be seen as generators of national or regional identities? And why the ironic turn? Can I perhaps apply de Certeau’s notion of strategy and tactics? Are these ironic representations in some way a local tactic against a larger strategy of

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tourism and national authority appropriating an iconography of the North? Is this what happens when the simulacra of national representations is no longer viewed as ‘true’, when the image itself is no longer perceived as being believable but is still meaningful in the negotiation of identity? Are they meaningful? Are Icelanders indeed identifying with this marginal representation? Are the narrators appropriating these eccentricities as Icelandic artists and performers may do when finding their footing in the transnational arena and marketplace and so attract attention in the global village?

Answering these questions will require more ethnographic study, which in part will involve research into the reception of these images but also the communal expressive culture and oral narratives of their producers and the locality and contexts from which they draw. But at this point one may perhaps offer the hypothesis, based on textual research and limited field work, that these images of the wild north are part of an emergent oral and visual iconography. The ironic turn can perhaps be perceived as a tactic in the negotiation of identity through everyday expressive culture under the gaze of a perceived cultural centre but identifying with the margins: this northern periphery of the so-called global village.

References:


Welcome to Anaktuvuk Pass!

Sarah S. McConnell & Debbie Mekiana Toopetlook

A significant change in the human dimension of the Arctic Region is the capacity of traditional communities to self-represent. In the past, the Nunamiut people of Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska were represented to the world outside the Brooks Range by the writings, talks and teachings of adventurers, anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scientists such as Helge Ingstad, John Martin Campbell, Lewis Binford, and many others. The Nunamiut have a substantial history of welcoming these guests, who have contributed to the images of Anaktuvuk Pass held around the world—for instance, Helge Ingstad’s volumes of informative, engaging, and renowned representations of the people, their stories, culture and history. Valuable written preservation of local traditions, wisdom, scientific observation and humor has been achieved in exchange for the extreme hospitality shown to these visitors. Changes in access to higher education, collaborative balanced business partnerships, and pure motivation have resulted in the Nunamiut understanding the importance of representation to the outside world, and developing the skills to do it themselves. The evolving partnership between the Northern Alaska Tour Company (NATC) and the Anaktuvuk Pass community is an example of the move toward self-representation.

The best relationships are rooted in respect. It has been the observa-
tion and experience of the community members of Anaktuvuk Pass that a relationship between Anglo-American entities and themselves has, at times, lacked a positive outcome. The recent establishment of a relationship with an Anglo-American business that began with respect has impacted the community in a positive manner. The community members of Anaktuvuk Pass continue to grow. The growth of their relationship with NATC rises from the powerful foundation of trust. It was apparent to the Anaktuvuk Pass community members from the inception of this collaboration that this Anglo-American entity was present in the village with permission from the City Council and they expected community members to be involved with the process of educating visitors about the Nunamiut ways. Being involved in the process of representing the culture and educating those that visit the community is an empowering experience. It was the intention of NATC to continue the ways of the community through local hire, enhancing empowerment of community members, and continuing to support the community as they shaped their public image. The establishment of Community Hosts and, within the last few years, local hire of the Community Coordinator realized these goals. Empowerment was also achieved as community members became comfortable setting limits to pictures taken of individuals, expecting to be asked permission by a visitor before pictures are taken of people or personal property, and knowing the visitors in the community would not be intruding in their personal space. These stipulations were put into place by the City Council, while the respect and enforcement by NATC supported the community members in their achievement of self-determination as well as shaping the image of their community. Within this balanced partnership, NATC embraces honesty and proactive communication, while encouraging community members to feel comfortable sharing their concerns with this Fairbanks-based business.

Communication was emphasized from the beginning in the relationship between NATC and the community of Anaktuvuk Pass. The Community Coordinator attended monthly City Council meetings and provided statistics. In the best interest of the community, the City Council requested accounting of helpful information such as: how much money was spent in the village by the visitors, how many Community Hosts were employed, how many cultural sharing and dance demonstrations occurred, and the number of visitors for the month. In an effort to maximize and enhance
community participation, the community was invited to incorporate cultural sharing and dance demonstrations in the tour.

Now let’s get on with the tour!

Say you have visited one of the websites about Anaktuvuk Pass, the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum, or the Nunamiut people and viewed images of dazzling mountains, traditional caribou skin garments, or sod houses. Maybe you picked up a rack card depicting mountains, a small seven-passenger plane, a caribou skin drying, or a Nunamiut woman’s face. You have decided to sign up for the “Native Cultures Tour”, because the brochure promises “adventure”, to “experience the majestic Brooks Range”, “fly the wilderness airways”, and “visit a Nunamiut village”. While every effort is made to set expectations at a level we hope to exceed in the actual tour, this paper gives you only a virtual look at the adventure.

Following a scenic flight through the mountains, you are greeted at the gravel airstrip by NATC Community Hosts and the Community Coordinator, who may be accompanied by children, dogs, bicycles, or residents wondering where the “afternoon plane” is. The visiting begins! Heading on to an orientation, you make the short walk with Community Hosts, sometimes braving bad weather, dust, and/or mosquitoes! Several community-generated displays may be seen at the Community Center—photos commemorating the 50th Anniversary of settlement, information about the Western Arctic caribou herd, or grade school drawings from an Inupiaq class. There may be more informal visiting with Community Hosts, village children, and adults who are at the Community Center for work, recreation, or the “bottomless” coffee pot.

Paglagivsi! Welcome to Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska! Some of you have just made the short hop by plane over from the nearest road at Coldfoot, 63 miles away. As visitors, most of you have had a very long day, starting from Fairbanks in the wee hours under the midnight sun. You left the traditional home of the Athabaskan Indians in the boreal forest. You are now 220 air miles north and a bit west of Fairbanks in the traditional home of the Inupiat Nunamiut in the alpine tundra, spanning the Continental Divide. You left Alaska’s second largest city, with Fairbanks North Star Borough population of 85,000, on one of four highways leaving town and arrived by airplane in a community of 300, 88% of whom are Alaska Native. A majority of residents are descendants of the seven founding fathers of the
village. If you didn't care for the flight, your alternative is to walk out, or wait for winter to dogsled or snow-machine to one of the nearest, smaller settlements 60 to 75 miles away—through the mountains. A hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle, there are no roads to Anaktuvuk Pass.

The “Inland Eskimo” Nunamiut, or literally translated “people of the land”, lived a nomadic, subsistence lifestyle for hundreds of years throughout the splendor of the Brooks Range Mountains. They have depended primarily on caribou for nutrition and, traditionally, for clothing and shelter. Their culture and traditions are preserved and communicated in many ways, including local traditional dance groups, the Simon Panek Memorial Museum, and within the households, 100% of which participate in ongoing subsistence activities. Anaktuvuk has a strong tradition of welcoming people to their community.

The first contact with non-Natives in their homeland is said to be in the late 1800s. The Nunamiut then went relatively undisturbed by the outside world until the mid-1940s when bush pilots made contact, setting up trading relationships. Life changed rapidly for the Nunamiut over the next fifty years. Settlement at the current town-site began in 1949 and the last family reportedly moved into the village in the early 1960s. There is now daily air service, including cargo planes, a modern school—complete with swimming pool—a museum, two stores run by the local tribal corporation, satellite TV, and some seven miles of village road. Anaktuvuk is a community where ancient traditions exist alongside modern conveniences in a remote and extreme environment. While experiencing effects of climate change, the average temperature here is still above freezing only in June, July, and August, though it is not uncommon to have snow during those months. Winter temperatures reach -50° F, and are additionally chilled by the arctic winds. The sun is not seen for months in winter, while it traces graceful circles over the village during the summer months.

This snapshot of the orientation provided at the beginning of each tour yields a brief glimpse of Nunamiut identity. Distinctions made about the diverse Alaska Native groupings guide visitors to dispelling images of Eskimos rubbing noses outside their igloo—though this is a persistent image many visitors continue to seek. NATC has partnered with the people of Anaktuvuk Pass since 1991 to provide a community driven representation of their culture and identity. A flight service partner’s enthusiasm for the
village hospitality and natural beauty drew NATC to initiate this partnership with the community of Anaktuvuk Pass.

NATC is a homegrown Fairbanks company, started by four young men when they drove their first company van up the Dalton Highway to the Arctic Circle in 1987. They wanted to share their love of the arctic landscape, environment, and cultures with Alaska's visitors. After arriving in a C-130 Hercules cargo plane in 1997, the first van continued to provide tours in Anaktuvuk Pass until 2005. The NATC philosophy continues to serve the community as they support a strong sense of collaboration, self-determination, integrity, respect, good communication and broad-based local participation. In addition to their good will, the tour company contributes a business infrastructure and international advertising to the partnership. NATC and the people of Anaktuvuk Pass are jointly invested in offering visitors a memorable Alaska experience that accurately reflects the richness of cultural traditions as well as an introduction to the very real complexities of contemporary life in a rural, remote Alaska Native community.

Early years of the partnership began with a village resident outfitting the back of his pick-up truck with benches, driving visitors around town, entertaining them with local information and jokes about gigantic mosquitoes. Then NATC and the community set a course toward more extensive community input and involvement when they hired local residents as Community Hosts. In 1997 a pilot project began with the hire of NATC Community Coordinators, given a job description designed to enhance community communication; provide youth of the community an introduction to the tourism industry; work with local residents, the grandchildren of the original founders of the village, employed as Community Hosts; and respond to community concerns in a timely manner. Community Hosts serve as both ambassadors and guides, making a valued contribution to the cultural image visitors develop during their time in the village. Their training is multifaceted, including intensive sessions with Nunamiut Elders. A memorable highlight of training was a simulated tour for community volunteers. Elders were our most precious volunteers, as they role-played visitors from Chicago, California, or Australia. They expanded the host's knowledge about the culture and heritage of their community, encouraging them to feel good about being Nunamiut, to speak up and tell the visitors about Nunamiut life. Preparing for tourism provided a unique opportunity for all to reflect
on community and cultural identity, and how they wanted to communicate this identity to visitors.

Tour schedules are widely posted and available to community members, a newsletter was developed, and there is an open invitation to all community members to join a real “Native Cultures” tour. Several people have taken advantage of the offer and were able to provide first-hand evaluation of the tour experience. In collaboration with the local museum, a tourism survey was offered to the community as a formal tool to document community attitudes, concerns, and suggestions. By far the most effective element of forging the partnership has been the accessibility of the Coordinator in the community: hearing concerns about the tours while shopping for groceries; learning Elders’ perspectives while drinking tea after a birthday party; listening to a community member’s suggestions during “break time” at the Community Center. The informal contacts and daily living in the community serve to strengthen the collaboration.

Important to the success of this partnership is the attitude that people on the tours are “visitors” not “tourists”. Not all rural, remote Alaska Native communities welcome outsiders, especially when they arrive by the planeload. Anaktuvuk has made a conscious choice to maintain as part of their identity a welcome to outsiders, inviting them to come but also asserting their concerns. “It is like when you are an invited guest in someone’s house, there are things you do or don’t do,” explained one community member. The list of “Community Requests” developed by residents is provided to all visitors prior to landing or at the orientation. In addition to the requests, visitors are reminded that photos are for personal use only. Respect for these requests maintains the community’s strong voice and influence on the photo images visitors take home with them.

Over time the tours have evolved to include not only a short informative orientation, visit to the museum, and driving tour when the van is working, but also the unexpected. No two tours are ever alike! The flexibility of the tours communicates the unique identity of the Nunamiut, and allows the visitor to leave with a rich image rooted in reality. The village tour program attempts to give visitors an introduction to contemporary life in a remote, Nunamiut community where wilderness exists side-by-side with civilization and ancient ways intermingle with modern technology and pressures. Tours remain small (maximum size of 21) to avoid disruption and minimize feel-
ings of intrusion in the community. Visitors may learn about family and community life, modern education in rural Alaska, how goods and services come to the village, missionary involvement, mountains, rivers, permafrost, airplanes, health care, wild flowers, Gates of the Arctic National Park, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and more. The Community Hosts teach much of this by telling stories of their daily life—winter sliding, camping with their family, or school experiences. Sometimes our “off-duty” Community Hosts may show up with a prized catch of grayling to display to the visitors. We sometimes have the good fortune to see traditional dance group practices, which usually happen right when people are getting off work. It is not uncommon to see someone take off their work boots to pull on the traditional kamiks (skin boots). Some have changed into traditional dance clothes while others are in t-shirts and jeans, but no matter what they wear the dancing and drumming have a powerful influence on the visitors. On these occasions, guests have an opportunity to be welcomed to the village just as visitors have been for centuries, and may join in the invitational dances before returning to their planes and life beyond the mountains.

Broad-based community participation grows through “cultural sharing” as community members educate groups of visitors about: the traditional and contemporary clothing needed to keep warm in freezing temperatures; the structure of traditional sod houses and skin tents; how skin masks originated and are made today; or the types of subsistence foods that are consumed and how they have been prepared. Local craftspeople share a sales table and frequently meet with visitors who purchase their work. It is fun for the crafts-person to know their beadwork is headed for Germany or their skin mask will be displayed in New York City. Caribou skin masks originated in Anaktuvuk Pass, and continue to be a frequently-used symbol of the village, along with the amagug (wolf) that is the local school mascot. There are motion dances to represent both. Visitors are able to transform their impression of the skin mask as ceremonial implement to the reality of it’s origin: a trap line version of Halloween masks invented to make the village laugh at a Christmas Eskimo dance in the 1950s. During the tours community members are welcome to “just visit” with people on the tour, providing a personal example of the Alaska Native identity, which is often described by visitors as the “highlight of my entire trip!” In the end, fond farewells and email addresses are exchanged before the planes load up and
give an aerial wave reminiscent of early bush pilots. On the ground, we wave, laugh, and tell stories of people we met, what we learned, and faraway places. NATC co-workers, dancers, and children are just as enthusiastic about the last visiting group of the season as they are when they greet the first group in May.

**Lessons Learned**

Among the accomplishments of the collaborative efforts of NATC and the community of Anaktuvuk Pass was receiving the Alaska Land Managers Forum Outstanding Enhancement of Cultural Tourism Award in both 2000 and 2001. In summary, these words of the community speak to the partnership that has supported self-representation of the identity and image of the Nunamiut people:

A unique bond between the tour company and community of Anaktuvuk Pass has evolved over the years. Residents and establishments of the Anaktuvuk Pass community have accepted NATC with open arms. In the early years, residents viewed the NATC employees as outside employees. Today children, community leaders, dance group members, and residents accept the company’s employees as members of our community. The coordinator has participated in our holiday festivities and is a great friend to residents. The coordinator is viewed as a vital person for outside opinions. We value the coordinator’s friendship and companionship.

Community Hosts are also an important factor in the uniqueness of NATC’s tours to Anaktuvuk Pass.... Since these youth hosts have lived in Anaktuvuk Pass their entire lives, they have been great informants to the visitors. NATC does a great job in training these youth hosts. Training consists of going to the museum, having elders or adults tell them stories, or just having the youth hosts observe regularly scheduled tours. Youth hosts are often enthusiastic and outgoing. As a result of NATC’s training, the youth hosts have honorably portrayed our village’s pride in our culture and how we, as Nunamiut Inupiat, have evolved over the years.

There are no scripted tours. The tours depend on the day of the week, time of day, length of tour, and residents’ schedules.
NATC has done a good job of being flexible and adapting to residents’ needs and wishes. Elders, adults, and children who sell crafts or demonstrate traditional dancing, singing, tool making, mask making, and games usually attend the tours right after work. Community members who participate in the cultural sharing presentations such as dancers or craft persons take time out of their busy lives of subsistence and jobs to attend the tours.

Youth of Anaktuvuk Pass look forward to working with NATC and spending each week with visitors. … Visitors value the youth that work as hosts. Many youth have received gifts or postcards from the visitors after they have returned home. This is one unique part of the tour. The hosts and visitors become friends. Tours outside NATC rarely allow or feature youth hosts.

We are happy to allow Northern Alaska Tour Company to come into our village. They have respected our wishes, culture, and tradition. The village of Anaktuvuk Pass has continued its northern hospitality each year, and will continue to do so.

In conclusion, we hope we have both described a successful inter-cultural collaborative process and encouraged businesses, scholars, researchers, and all visitors to join with communities in the goal of self-representation. As the model above describes, much is to be gained by both partners when the community is respected as an authority on what they live, observe and experience. There exists an absolute necessity for outsiders who enter the community with the purpose of gaining information to have that information verified not only by the informants but by the larger community via a transparent process that is culturally competent in language, rhythm, and communication process congruent to local culture. To nurture optimal partnerships, the verification must occur prior to passing such material on to the world outside of the community. While there has been some information accurately passed on, there exist many inaccuracies about indigenous cultures that have been put forth in writing or scholarly presentation as absolutely true.

Sincere, balanced collaborative ventures, guided by respect, between outside individuals or entities with the local community will support mutually productive partnerships, as the NATC and Anaktuvuk Pass Nunamiut teamwork has demonstrated.
Remote, Rough and Romantic: 
Contemporary Images of Iceland in Visual, Oral and Textual Narrations 

Katla Kjartansdóttir

What comes to mind when thinking about the “little remote island far away in the North”? As this popular and well-known description of Iceland indicates, the country has somewhat gained an exotic, idyllic and dreamy image. And interestingly, words such as cold, harsh and wild—along with authenticity, purity and uniqueness—constantly seem to pop-up whether it is to describe the nature, the culture or even the inhabitants. But who creates, sustains and gives meaning to images of this kind? And can they still be seen as relevant? Here I will be focusing on how various themes and images, such as these, are constantly being formed, maintained or their meaning re-negotiated through a variety of visual, oral and textual narrations. Such narrations are constantly taking place within, through and between various social spheres and spaces such as media, film, arts, everyday-life, tourism, museums, etc.

In that relation one should keep in mind that spaces have increasingly become viewed as an ongoing and ever-changing social and cultural construction rather than simply bounded geography (Massey 1991; Urry 1990; Lowenthal 1990). That is to say it is mainly through a constellation of social and cultural practices and performances that spaces, their boundaries, images and meanings are continually being formed and re-formed. The no-
tion of these concepts can in other words no longer be seen as fixed in any sense but rather as dynamic, fluid and ever-changing. And for this reason the set of personal, local and national identities that are formed within such spaces are therefore also bound to be continually re-constructed as well; thus, their meaning varies inevitably from one time, individual or context to another.

The formation of spaces, boundaries, meanings, images and identities has, however, for a long time been seen as some sort of hegemonic ‘delivery’ that could be handed down by the elite, the state or other dominant social factors and then received by rather passive receivers, often referred to as the public or the unnamed ‘masses’. Theories of this sort have for instance been emphasized in the work of Foucault (and his followers) along with other social and cultural analysts such as Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1991), John Huthchinson (1994), Anthony Smith (1986, 1991) and many others. In recent years however these theories have been under attack and the formation of national identities and images have increasingly been depicted as a complex, fluid and diverse process of an ongoing and interactive dialogue. That is to say the elitist and hegemonic view or the focus on the centre has to a point been shifting more towards the masses, the everyday and the periphery. One can for instance mention theorists such as Orvar Löfgren, Homi Bhabha, Michel de Certau and Anthony Cohen that mostly agree that the shaping of national images and identities is an inter-active dialogue and a constant negotiation of meanings that we all can take our part in, not the least through the various activities of our everyday lives (Löfgren 1989; Cohen 1985; de Certau 1989; Babha 1990). To emphasize even further, their construction should indeed not be seen as an essence but rather a dynamic process that constantly is open to change and development according to the needs of the moment.

So in line with these theories I have chosen to focus on how the various meanings of Icelandic national image and identity are constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated through an ongoing discourse that we can see reflected in various social and cultural performances and practices. Here I will mainly be focusing on how such a process of meaning-making is repeatedly being conducted for instance through a variety of visual, textual and oral narration. I have also chosen to focus mainly on contemporary
matters because I feel there is currently an interesting dialogue, or perhaps even a debate, going on regarding Icelandic image and identity constructions and its “exact” or “true” meaning—as if only one true meaning can exists at a time. This debate is taking place between generations perhaps or simply between those who want to endorse and maintain the somewhat traditional and in a way romantic image on one hand and the ones who perhaps want a more realistic, fluid and open interpretation of what it means to be ‘Icelandic’ on the other. A dilemma of this sort is however of course far from being something unique to Iceland; most European nations have indeed been in a very similar dialogue or even what one could call identity crisis that perhaps can be seen as an inescapable effect of the so-called “globalization”, “internationalisation”, “trans-nationalization” or some-such term.

Most Icelandic theorists, such as Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðmundur Hálfdánarson, Gunnar Karlson and Sigríður Matthíasdóttir (to name just a very few), that have examined the features and meanings of Icelandic image and identity have all emphasized the role of three major elements: nature, language and cultural heritage. And they have all stated as well that it was mainly around the struggles for independence, from the late 19th century to around the mid 20th century, that these particular elements became fundamental for the Icelandic image and identity construction, as can be seen reflected in the various writings of politicians, intellectuals and poets of the time. It is known that Icelandic nationalists around this period were much influenced by Romantic ideologies and German national theorists such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte—both emphasised similar themes and elements in their writings on nation formation and the nature of national identities. According to their ideas, in short, nature, language and nation were linked in almost biological ways and thus the heart of every nation was mainly to be found among fishermen and peasants that were working and living in a constant relation to nature. Thus it was within their culture and especially their stories, the so-called folk tales and legends, that the true soul of every nation was to be found (Sigurðsson 1996; Hálfdánarson 1996, 1997, 2001; Karlson 1985; Matthíasdóttir 2004).

So when the Icelandic elite of the time tried its best to form a collective sense and a cohesive meaning of Icelandic identity, they often referred to
the common folk, the peasants and the fishermen, as some sort of role models in national matters. It was in other words especially within their culture, their language, their beliefs and their traditions that the true essence of the Icelandic nation were to be found. A clear example of this can for instance be seen in the name-giving of the Icelandic collections of folk literature that were not called peasant stories or priest stories, which they were, but rather “stories of the nation” or þjóðsögu. This image of the so-called “folk” and “folk culture” as something particularly authentic and genuine in relation to national identity formation is of course widely known elsewhere as well perhaps especially so among many of the other Nordic nations that also were much influenced by romantic ideologies during their nation building processes.

Another well known and very common theme that the Icelandic elite also utilized in order to fuse national cohesion was as an emphasis on the so-called “Golden-Age”, the period before foreign rule. This engendered a strong emphasis on the cultural heritage deriving from that period: the Sagas. So in the national image construction of the late 19th and early 20th century, these were among the most popular themes and threads. And interestingly enough many of them still seem to be employed to weave a collective national sense in contemporary Iceland. That is to say a very similar emphasis on the nature, the language and the cultural heritage deriving from the Golden Age as the most important parts of the national image and identity can certainly quite often be seen when examining various contemporary visual, textual and oral narrations.

Firstly an emphasis of this sort is of course very well-known within the Icelandic tourist industry. That is to say in their promotions and representations it is not the least the purity and the uniqueness of the Icelandic nature and its “special relationship” to the nation that mainly is being stressed. For instance, whether focusing on the visual side or the texts in tourist brochures and websites, it is obvious that nature is the supposed main attraction for tourists visiting Iceland. To take just one example from the Iceland Air website and its presentation of the national park Thingvellir:

Here is a great half day option for those who love history and geology: an afternoon visit to world-famous Thingvellir National Park, now a UNESCO World Heritage site! Thingvellir is a very
special place to Icelanders, the very symbol of what it means to be an Icelander. (http://www.icelandairholidays.com).

And another quote from the same website that expresses similar views but perhaps even more clearly:

Iceland’s culture has been determined by nature as much as by history. Its geography, geology and even its position on the planet have influenced the development of its people. Strong and proud, they have kept the land much as it has been since the beginning. Exotic. Pure and simply awesome. You will see. (http://www.icelandairholidays.com).

What then about other visual narrations of Iceland such as films that do as well of course play a vital role when imagining a nation and creating a shared sense of cultural boundaries and identity? Can we perhaps see an emphasis there on the same themes and threads as mentioned above? That is to say do we perhaps also find within films a similar focus or emphasis that can be traced back to the Herderian brand of ideology? With just a quick examination of Icelandic films through the years, one soon notes that representing Icelandic nature as a wild, harsh and exotic space is almost iconic and indeed a popular and repeated theme alongside a frequent usage of cultural heritage—mainly the sagas and the Icelandic folk-tales. In the three films made by Friðrik Dór—Falcons, Cold Fever and Children of Nature—that I have examined in this relation, along with Nói Albinói by Dagur Kári and Cold Lights by Hilmar Oddsson, we certainly do see that both nature and various themes stemming from the cultural heritage play very important roles.

In addition these films all seem to echo a very common representation of nature that can often be seen reflected within the Icelandic folklore tradition. That is to say nature is—both in such stories and in the movies—depicted as having a kind of magical or mysterious power. It is, in other words, seen as a powerful force that both gives and takes and the atmosphere or the undertone is frequently of the exotic “anything can happen” sort. This image of nature, as with the image of North, conjures themes such as freedom, roots, authenticity and purity along with masculinity, the
wild and the rough, in a certain opposition to the various restrains and coldness of the foreign or the city.

In *Falcons* for instance we can see how the American ex-con Simon comes to a remote Icelandic village in search for answers and perhaps even the meaning of his life. There he meets the loner and nature-loving wild-child Dua who he is instantly drawn to. In her we have a very interesting, and indeed a rather common, link being made between Icelandic female film characters and nature. Their image is frequently related to natural elements and they are often depicted as somewhat mystical or childlike figures but at the same time they are also seen as strong, wild and crazy or simply not quite of this world. An image of this kind in relation to some stereotypical representations of the “women of the North” is indeed quite widespread and has been popping up, not just in films, but on various other occasions such as in tourist advertisements and other image making contexts.

The main female character Dua\(^1\) is as mentioned an outsider and a nature loving artist that seems to be more in sync with animals rather than other people in the village. We have here the common representation of a “Nordic” woman that seems to be on the edge of human society, logical senses, and the rational. Her heart is big, her characteristics are childlike and her actions are primarily driven by her emotions. To add further to this effect, she is constantly talking about horoscopes and astrology. But mainly she has this strong connection with nature that is for instance stressed in the way she talks to animals and plays with swirling leaves in a wood.

In the other two films made by Friðrik Þór, *The Children of Nature* and *Cold Fever*, we can also see this rather romantic and in a way typical engagement with nature. The first mentioned, *Children of Nature*, is a film about two old friends, Þorgeir and Stella, who meet again in an elderly home and share a dream of escaping together to the village where they both grew up. Determined not to die in the city, Þorgeir and Stella steal a jeep and start their journey. As in many of Friðrik Þór’s films, he focuses here not just on human relationships but also on the relationship between man and nature. And as in *Falcons*, nature both plays an important role in the film and has a certain mystical tone to it; one of the major themes of both films is the question of finding or turning back to one’s roots to find inner peace. The

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\(^1\) This character was interestingly actually written for the Icelandic singer Björk Guðmundsdóttir who is indeed quite well known for her natural/elfish/childlike image.
old couple, Þorgeir and Stella, in *The Children of Nature* are obviously, as is Simon in *Falcons*, on such a voyage. The main characters of both films are thus in a way turning from, or even escaping, the “crazyness” of the city where they do not feel comfortable, towards nature or small villages in rural Iceland in search for inner peace as well as perhaps their roots.

Nature here, as so often happens, is depicted in a certain opposition to the city. It is to the wildness of nature, where anything can happen, that the main characters in both films turn in search for answers to their existential questions. And indeed in these films, and in *Cold Fever* as well, anything certainly can happen, even that which does not necessarily have any logical explanation. The image of nature here is much the same as the one that has been related to “the North” and “Nordic women”: something wild, untamed and exotic with a mystical undertone or even an obscure connection to another world. So in these films we can indeed see a connection to the romantic image of “the North” as an exotic, rough and mysterious space, an image that Icelandic artists, intellectuals, poets and politicians of the 19th century and the tourist and heritage industry of the 20th century have all used, maintained and in a way endorsed.

A similar emphasis on Icelandic nature, the nation and cultural heritage as a somewhat cohesive and almost biological entity can be seen in various other social and cultural contexts or narrations as well and here I will use as examples quotes from Icelandic President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson. In his second inaugural speech, in August of 2000, he stated that: “The identity of Icelanders and respect will increasingly be drawn from our devotion with Icelandic nature, the beautiful creation, which has made Iceland so unique in the world” (http://www.forseti.is). And in a more recent speech held in a public meeting of historians on the 10th of January 2006, the President tried to explain why a group of a few Icelandic businessmen—whom he called “new Icelandic Vikings”—have been so successful in their investments abroad. But his explanation simply stated 10 characteristics and qualities that contributed to their success, all of which, according to him, could be traced back to Icelandic cultural heritage, the foundations of Icelandic society or simply the “true” nature of Icelandic national identity. These were factors such as trust, dare and courage—characteristics that he claimed came from “our forefathers”, the Vikings, along with various other so-called “especially Icelandic” elements. Among others he stated
that “one could play with the idea that it all started in the settlement peri-
period and with our role-models from the Common Wealth period that were able
to enhance our spirits and ambitions” (ibid.). Then he goes on to state that “the Icelandic settlers were certainly a part of the whole Viking com-
community that indeed had a similar spirit of looking outward for new opportuni-
ties” (ibid.). Along similar lines he also emphasises that “it was not the least through the stories of these people that a shared sense of
Icelandic national identity was created and thus during the struggles for
national independence this particular period was given a somewhat idyllic
glow” (ibid.). And this idyllic glow, as indicated in the speech, the President
now wants to give the new Icelandic-Vikings, perhaps as a guiding light on
their various business journeys (or invasions as they have been called in the
Icelandic media).

It is indeed very interesting to look at these various images, themes and
elements that the President has chosen to depict as “especially Icelandic”.
The question of a collective memory or perhaps rather the creation of a
collective memory has certainly been seen as one of the fundamental mat-
ters when forming a collective sense or a shared meaning of any national
identity. And whether unconsciously or not the President seems to be well
aware of this factor, for he goes on to say that (and once again I quote) “it
is this collective experience that has created our thought and attitudes and that has given us a great advance to seize the various new opportuni-
ties of the global era” (ibid., emphasis mine). So obviously we are to understand, in a
very Herderian sense, that the reasons for this great success of a few Ice-
landic businessmen abroad is to be found in the nature of the Icelandic past
and in the lifestyle of “our forefathers” the Vikings. The President goes on
to state that “the key to this success is mainly to be found in the culture, in
the collective heritage and in the nature of the society that has been formed
by the struggles of preceding generations, their views and their traditions,
which are at the core of the Icelandic civilization” (ibid., emphasis mine).

I have only covered here around 3 pages out of ten of his speech but
I think these examples are quite enough to show its main themes. We can
connect these themes to the question of how Icelandic national discourse
and image-making has developed since the late 19th and early 20th century,
only to discover that it has indeed hardly developed at all. It is in other words
the same traditional themes and threads that constantly are being used in
order to fuse a collective sense of a national continuity and cohesion. So once again it seems that the most popular themes and threads that are being used, even today, are the classical ones that can be traced back to the highly exclusive ideology of Herder and Fichte, with great emphasis on nature, language and cultural heritage as being inherently part of the national soul. At the same time, it inherently downplays the visibility and values of cultural diversities that certainly are, to a growing extent, apparent in contemporary Iceland.

So to conclude: the various images of Iceland that can be seen reflected in these examples certainly do seem to fit very well within the traditional image-making of Iceland as part of “the North”, with a particular emphasis on various highly-exclusive themes such as masculinity, purity and cultural continuity along with a mixture of traditional “Herderian” themes such as the “natural/biological” entwining of man, heritage, and nature. Whether focusing on visual texts such as Icelandic films and tourist advertisement or other contemporary narrations, one can clearly see how these particular themes are constantly being revived and their meaning in a way endorsed through such social and cultural negotiations. But one of my starting questions however remains: whether this somewhat romantic, and in many ways highly exclusive image, of the Icelandic nation can still be seen as a relevant representation of the whole mixture of social and cultural diversities in contemporary Iceland.

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