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### CITY, COUNTRYSIDE AND NATURE AS DISCURSIVE DEVICES USED TO STRENGTHEN THE NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ICELANDIC CINEMATOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception the Icelandic film industry has used the strategy of combining telluric elements with nationalistic narratives. In many films one may also find visual structures that can be linked with the ‘tourist gaze’ – the term as we know it from the texts of John Urry. Despite a focus on some unique qualities of Icelandic nature and its cultural heritage (that can be attractive to foreign viewers) the specificity of cinematic production processes on the island belong to the structure of local, national cinema. Moreover, the 1980s, considered as the time of the rebirth of the Icelandic film industry and its rapid modernization, are full of films containing conservative or leftist telluric topics which are difficult for foreign audiences to understand. A new, transnational quality of Icelandic film features began with the film debut of Friðrik Þór Friðriksson in 1987. His fusion of modernist and postmodernist plots has encouraged other filmmakers to start the process of re-interpretation of the classic narrative structures, and to render the ironic demystification of some nationalistic themes.

Key words: city, countryside, nationalism, national identity, Iceland

#### INTRODUCTION: IDEOLOGISED LANDSCAPE

Idealization of countryside images and their juxtaposition with a vision of foreign threats and the motif of corrupted urban culture constitute elements of national discourse often evoked in important moments of Icelandic history, related to the attempts of defining or redefining the notion of national identity<sup>2</sup>. Obviously, such a strategy is not uncommon in European

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<sup>2</sup> I am not a sociologist who tries to determine “what came first, the nations or the nationalism”, nor am I an anthropologist of nationalism, but a film expert who studies the cultural constructs in cinema. In my opinion, the most simple definition of a nation was provided by Ernest Gellner, who claimed that “nations maketh man; nations are the artefacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities” (Gellner 2009, 16). However, when I use the term “national identity”, I tend to adapt the definition of Zbigniew Boksański, who stated that

culture. It was successfully used in many other countries in order to resurrect or (recalling the famous concepts of Erich Hobsbawm) to invent national identities<sup>3</sup> (Hobsbawm 2008: 9–22). The homeland of sagas is also a country that was until very recently ethnically homogeneous, despite seven centuries of control by foreign powers (first by Norway, later by Denmark). The foundations for the “nation-building” rhetoric can be found already in the writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals, who supported the ideas of “awakening and resurrection of the nation’s spirit”, as known from the works of Johann Gottfried von Herder. As noticed by Colin Williams and Anthony D. Smith, in the case of such imagery, the category of the homeland includes “the distinctive, a unique territory; the identity of the nation is bound up with memory, and this memory is rooted in a homeland. Its mountains are sacred, its rivers are full of memories, its lakes recall distant oaths and battles, all of which have been commemorated in national epics and ballads, and attracted countless legends” (Williams, Smith 1983: 509). The imperative to cultivate the language that has not changed for hundreds of years and respect towards the distinguished products of this language, such as “Poetic Edda”, will be passed down to the next generations that will live to witness the return of medieval manuscripts, which since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been gradually handed over from Denmark (Karlsson 2000: 160).

After more than eighty years of nostalgic recollection of the past in poetry, paintings and literature, the dream of Icelandic romanticists about a free, independent country did finally come true. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1944, their descendants gathered in the centre of Reykjavik to celebrate the obtainment of complete independence from Denmark<sup>4</sup>. The rally organized in front of the office of the Icelandic prime minister was merely a continuation of the official celebration held a day before in Þingvellir (*Thing Fields* from Icelandic þing – “parliament”, vellir – “field”) – the traditional place of meetings of medieval clans, which had for several hundred years debated in Althing (Alþingi) – one of the world’s first proto-parliaments. This time, the situation was unusual, because an extraordinary sitting of the Icelandic parliament in Þingvellir

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“national identity of national community is a collective self-knowledge, its self-determination, creation of its own image and all its contents, the substance of this self-knowledge. It is not an externally constructed image of the nation’s character” (Bokszanski 2005: 108).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that European film scholars often treat the nation as an “imaginary community”. Benedict Anderson claims that it is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign ... – It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1997: 7, 19). This theory constitutes a perfect basis for the analysis of film constructs that represent any national community on the screen. However, its postmodern orientation does not fully correspond with the cultural heritage of countries like Iceland, which managed to preserve the medieval texts of culture to this very day, which possess a deeply rooted system of beliefs that was not completely eliminated by Christianity and which display a sense of community, consolidated by references to the so-called negative identity. Nevertheless, as Tim Edensor justly notices, despite the fact that the “national elites try to construct culturally an ancient national lineage” and its cultural goods, the invented traditions evoked in the nationalistic discourse “rather than being ossified and archaic ... are continually reinvented in a range of different contexts” (Edensor 2004: 18, 19). Recalling Michael Billig’s book *Banal Nationalism*, it is also worth pointing out that these traditions are often (if not usually) received and created by people from beyond the intellectual grounds, who “flag the homeland daily” (Billing 2008: 178–181) – taking part in various mass events (cinema included) or co-creating social media. After all, a “nation’s existence... is a daily plebiscite” (Billing 2008: 179).

<sup>4</sup> The meeting was held in front of a building with quite symbolic connotations. It was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Danish authorities to serve as the first prison on the island.

was ratifying the constitution of the Republic of Iceland and choosing the first president of the new country (Karlsson 2000: 322–323). During the meeting in Reykjavík, the leaders of the four political parties that had their representatives in the parliament expressed their opinions on this important event. In his speech, Ólafur Thors, the chairman of the Independence Party and first prime minister of Iceland, compared the establishment of the republic to the end of a long journey. Concluding his talk, he said: “Icelanders, we are at home. We are a free nation” (Hálfðanarson 2004: 131). As noticed by Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, co-author of an analysis of the perspective of Iceland’s accession to the European Union: “In his opinion, the new republic was the Promised Land, a place that the Icelandic nation had searched for during almost seven centuries of foreign rule” (Hálfðanarson 2004: 131). Interestingly enough, the egalitarian Icelandic society, composed mainly of farmers and fishermen, uncritically accepted the vision of their newly regained homeland, praised in passionate speeches as a reservoir of virtue. People had already known this country from literature, poetry and paintings. These works of art, along with the texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, presented natural monuments and rural landscapes inhabited by hard-working Icelandic farmers and fishermen as the “cradles” of true Nordic attitude. The antinomic juxtaposition of idealized images of the countryside with hedonistic visions of urban life became one of the most typical elements of the national discourse in Icelandic cinema. Even today, it is variously interpreted in feature movies and documentaries produced on the island.

In his *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, Tim Edensor analyses the “rural rhetoric”, inscribing it into the wider concept of *genius loci* of a nation (Edensor 2004: 59). Edensor discusses the creation of “national ideologies of the landscape”, evoking the strategies of romantic idealization of the English countryside presented by David Loventhal. These elements can be inscribed in the rhetorical devices of Icelandic nationalists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in at least three categories. The first feature common to both narrative forms is reference to the secluded location of both countries. According to Loventhal, the “island character” should guarantee the given community a line of defence against “foreign (in this case continental) corruption”<sup>5</sup>. Another distinctive device is the narrative of the everlasting improvement of nature, perceived in Iceland from a perspective of respect and fear of its power and untamed character (Konefał 2013: 24). Finally, the emphasis put on “countryside stability” constitutes the third element of the national discourse. It materializes the historic memory and connection of rustic spaces with a sense of order, which, according to Loventhal, was a product of the mythical era when stability was provided by an awareness of one’s place in the world (Edensor 2004: 60). Edensor also proves that the presence of the attributes discussed by Loventhal is related to the rehabilitation and reappearance of the figures of fathers and hosts in the discourse, figures that were once used to create the vision

<sup>5</sup> It is important that Icelanders, as a small community (even today there are no more than three hundred thousand people with Icelandic citizenship), frequently used the elements of negative identity in their national discourse, trying to define themselves as a nation different than the others, for example through highlighting the distinctness of their landscape. As Smith and Williams legitimately notice “In many ways, a distinctive terrain, islands, mountainous areas, peripheries, has helped to emphasize differences and secure recognition of that difference, if not independence” (Williams, Smith 1981: 506). The notion of negative identity itself is considered by Yoonmi Lee as the simplest form of self-definition of a collectivity: “an awareness of difference [...] a feeling and recognition of *we* and *they*” (Lee 2012: 29).

of an apparently harmonious world (Edensor 2004: 61). This element is also related to the strategy of nostalgic references to nature, unspoiled by civilization, or (especially in visual arts) to the elimination of modern elements from the images of the countryside. According to Edensor and Loventhal, such elements protect the conservative values through ideologised criticism of “the fall of morality” (Edensor 2004: 62)<sup>6</sup>.

All aforementioned elements of the national discourse can be found in Icelandic movies created at important moments in the history of this country. Björn Norðfjörð claims that at the beginning of Icelandic cinematography, its most characteristic genre was the *heritage film*, a term coined by Charles Barr and used for example by Andrew Higson in his studies of British national cinema (Norðfjörð 2005: 62). Higson defines the term as:

A genre of films which reinvents and reproduces, and in some cases simply invents, a national heritage for the screen. [...] One central representational strategy of the heritage film is the reproduction of literary texts, artefacts, and landscapes which already have a privileged status within the accepted definition of the national heritage. Another strategy is the reconstruction of a historical moment which is assumed to be of a national significance<sup>7</sup> (Higson 1995: 26–27; Norðfjörð 2005: 62).

Unfortunately, Icelandic cinematography has never possessed the financial means that would allow the directors to faithfully re-create the historical realities or to focus on the most important events in the history of Iceland, as critically analysed in the writings of Higson and Hill. Therefore, the images depicting the power of wild landscapes and emphasizing the nostalgia for idyllic country life became the dominant devices of the discourse used both in Icelandic cinema in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (when the pioneers of “moving pictures” became active on the northern island) and in the times of officially established national cinematography in the 1980s. The following part of this article will present an analysis of the methods used to juxtapose the orders of the city and the countryside during the most important periods of Icelandic history in cinema.

## PART ONE: CITY, COUNTRYSIDE AND NATURE IN THE MOVIES OF THE PIONEERS OF ICELANDIC CINEMATOGRAPHY AND IN THE PRODUCTIONS OF THE ICELANDIC FILM SPRING

Monographers of Icelandic cinematography symbolically consider the year 1901 as the beginning of the Icelanders’ adventure with film arts. That was when the first takes of Icelandic nature and the customs of native inhabitants of the island were documented on film. The

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<sup>6</sup> Characters of the honest farmers and fathers closely related to the soil, presented in the great novels of Gunnar Gunnarson and Halldor Laxness, appear in Icelandic cinematography as personifications of the ideologized visions of antinomic division between the city and the countryside. This theme will be discussed in more detail in the chapter devoted to the movies from the 1980s.

<sup>7</sup> The aim of this article is not to prove that the phenomenon of Icelandic national cinematography constitutes an original product of the given society, but to investigate how it uses and reinterprets the conventions invented and popularized by the system of “global Hollywood”. The profound analysis of the dispute between Higson and Hill can be found for example in Björn Norðfjörð’s aforementioned dissertation, along with numerous attempts at defining the notion of “national cinematography”.

project of filming the landscapes, flora, fauna and people of the island was sponsored by the British company Gibbons & Co, which later screened the material in many other countries. However, these films were not made by an Icelander, but by Franz Anton Nöggerath, born in Germany (Norðfjörð 2005: 27). The first pioneering project of filming the national heritage of Iceland was initiated a little bit later by Icelandic photographer Loftur Guðmundsson, creator of the movie *Iceland in Living Pictures – Ísland í lifandi myndum*, produced in 1925. Even though it was a documentary movie, the film was equally as popular as a Danish adaptation of the classic Icelandic novel *The Family from Borg* by Gunnar Gunnarson, which was filmed in 1921 and depicted the life on a countryside farm. Watching the six reels of Loftur Guðmundsson's movie that have been preserved to this very day, we may learn much about the reality of life on the island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author of *Iceland in Living Pictures* takes us on a cinematic trip around the country, beginning his visual journey with an approval of the modern spirit of Reykjavík, passing on to show the beauty of Icelandic landscapes. The following segments of the movie present the toil of the work on the sea and the charm of life on the farm. We may also adore the beauty of Icelandic girls, who bid farewell to us at the end of the screening.

Guðmundsson's documentary may be treated as a pioneering, feature-length "moving postcard" from Iceland, one that gracefully invites us to visit the island. At the same time however, it contains a powerful "ideological load", identifying the life in the country with beautiful but ruthless nature. The movie integrates the "tourist gaze" (Urry 2007: 236), that creates a utopian vision of the island, with visual and textual<sup>8</sup> portrayals of the positive features of its inhabitants. It is telling that after the presentation of important state institutions and related symbols, a panorama of developing Reykjavík is shown. On the symmetrical streets of the city we may notice a symbol of the progress: a proud automobile (that due to an editing error suddenly disappears for a while). However, most of the movie is focused on the advantages of everyday life in harmony with nature. We are taken to the small fishing town of Ísafjörður, where a panoramic take presents us with the specific location of the settlement, stuck between two majestic fjords. Such a strategy of comparing the orders of culture and nature is used throughout the whole structure of the movie. The documentary often contrasts the elements of nature with the evidence of heroic work of Icelanders, such as fishing among great waves or huge ice floats. Other fragments show us idyllic countryside landscapes of haymaking-time or images of small cats warming themselves in the sun, that do not often show themselves on the island.

The characteristic Icelandic motif of generational conflict and compelling the young to stay in the countryside appears for the first time in the aforementioned film *Family from Borg* from 1921, directed by an Icelander, Gunnar Sommerfeldt. This movie is one of the first feature films set on the island of sagas to be focused, in accordance with Icelandic poetics, on stormy relations among the members of a family. Peter Cowie emphasizes how the themes used in this movie will later return in numerous Icelandic productions:

Filming took place in a small town just 10 km outside the capital, and excellent use was made of a local wool market, as well as the craggy rock formations. Based on a popular novel by Icelander

<sup>8</sup> The textual layer is obviously represented by the cinematic intertitles.

Gunnar Gunnarsson and starring an Icelandic actor, the story adumbrated one of the themes that has percolated Icelandic cinema itself in recent years: the conflict between a desire to travel abroad in search of fame and fortune, and the need to remain home to tend the ancestral estate (Cowie 2000: 6).

Unfortunately, the economic situation caused by the great crisis of the 1930's made it extremely difficult to produce movies for the next twenty years. In the 1940's, however, as mentioned in the introduction, the island obtained independence. Four years later in 1948 Loftur Guðmundsson created the first Icelandic sound feature film. The movie is focused on the protection of the countryside life against foreign influences. *Between Mountain and Shore* (*Milli fjalls og fjöru*) is a love story about an innocent "country boy", who falls in love with a rich girl and is accused of theft. Richard Peña, one of the curators of the Icelandic movies festival in New York, describes this work of cinematic art:

The first Icelandic sound feature is this charming tale of star-crossed lovers shot against the stunning backgrounds of central Iceland. Gunnar Eyjólfsson, later one of the country's most popular actors, plays the son of an impoverished farmer who falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy merchant. Said to be based on an actual incident, the film was the culmination of the life-long efforts of its director, Loftur Guðmundsson – who had made some silent short films – to create a genuinely Icelandic cinema (Peña 2012: 4).

Such a description shows how even contemporary movie scholars perceive "Between Mountain and Shore" as only a charming love story (Peña 2012: 4), neglecting an important fact that the movie displays elements of a xenophobic nature also present in later Icelandic productions. At the end of the story, it turns out that the sheep (as jokingly noticed by Peter Cowie: "apart from fish and horses, these animals were closest to the Icelandic heart") were stolen by foreigners (Cowie 2000: 6). Watching Guðmundsson's movie today, it is hard to believe that it was made in 1948. The overly expressive acting and poor technical production more resemble the productions of the 1920's, only with sound and in colour.

Three years later, another feature movie appears, directed by Gíslason and titled "The Reykjavík Adventure of the Bakka-Brothers" (*Reykjavíkuraævintýri Bakka-bræðra*). This time, the film comically confronts the elements of countryside folklore with urban reality (Cowie 2000: 7). The eponymous brothers arrive in the centre of Reykjavík driving a tractor. Every one of their actions initiates a series of slapstick gags. The contrast between the less-favoured countryside mentality with urban elegance and modernity is featured in most of the scenes of the movie. During their stay in the capital city, the boisterous *Icelandic Marx brothers* not only enrage the local police and desecrate the National Theatre, but also meet girls from the city and visit the most important places of the "metropolis". It is significant that Reykjavík is again presented from the "tourist gaze" and shown to the audience mainly as a place of numerous attractions. The plot interestingly clashes social contexts that can be perceived in terms of Marxist and Freudian ideology. In two scenes the protagonists are presented with a ladder that they first use to climb up and peek in on a rich man drinking expensive liquor in his villa, and then to watch the girls who live nearby practicing their roles for a theatrical performance full of erotic undertones. Unfortunately, the mischievous brothers may become part of this better city life only in their imagination. The real confrontation with the urban



reality always results in situations that ridicule their rural origins. Even the conclusion of the movie, accumulating all the misdemeanours of the protagonists, distinctly determines that they belong to a different world than the modernist inhabitants of Reykjavík. It comes as no surprise then, that in the last scene, our affable heroes are forced to flee the city and to return with their tractor to a much more simple country existence.

The 1950s also saw the beginning of the Edda Company, established in 1949 (Ásgeirsson 2009: 219). In accordance with the eponymous reference to the oldest Icelandic literary text, Edda was intended to create and promote movies that cultivate national values, are set on the island, tell stories closely related to the important moments in the history of the country and linked with its literary heritage. The first production made in accordance with the idea of national cinematography was an adaptation of Halldór Laxnes' novel set in the countryside. *Salka Valka* (1954) was directed by Arne Mattson, paradoxically born in Sweden. Interestingly enough, the movie was also the debut of Sven Nykvist, the camera operator who would later become famous for his work on Ingmar Bergman's movies. Norðfjörð claims that the movie about "the love in the countryside" was watched by approximately 60,000 people (Norðfjörð 2005: 40). Another important production of Edda, also a spectacular success gathering an audience of 70,000, was a film directed by a Dane, Erik Balling, titled *The Girl GoGo* (*79 af stöðinni*) from 1962 (Cowie 2000: 8). Contrary to *Salka Valka*, the actors starring in this movie were Icelanders and spoke their native language. The film turned out to be an important, albeit controversial, cultural work. It tells the story of an international erotic triangle, simultaneously reinterpreting the theme of a clash between rural morality and urban values. The new morality is represented by the eponymous GoGo, wife of a Dane, who has concurrent affairs with an American soldier and the protagonist, a country boy who comes to Reykjavík to make his living as a taxi driver. As in the case of *The Family from Borg* or *Salka Valka*, even though it had significant influence on later productions describing the degenerating influence of the city, due to its complex production structures the film cannot be completely inscribed into the current of national cinematography (Higson 2001: 10). What is worse, despite of the success of both of Edda's motion pictures, the company was unable to obtain resources for the production of any more titles. Therefore, the 1960s and 70s became a time when movies in Iceland were created directly for television. It was not until 1979, the year when the National Film Fund was established, that Icelandic cinemas were flooded with domestic productions directed towards Icelanders. But movies made in the homeland of sagas would need another decade to become noticed in the European market and arouse the interest of investors from abroad.

European academic study assumes that the beginning of the modern Icelandic cinema should be traced back to the 1980s and the so-called Icelandic Film Spring<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, as many as ten of the most popular movies in the history of Icelandic cinema were produced during this period of premieres and commercial successes (Norðfjörð 2005: 49). The most ground-breaking films from that time include the successful *Land and Sons* (*Land og synir*)

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<sup>9</sup> The term was coined by Ólafur M. Johannesson, a critic who in one of his reviews on "Land and Sons" wrote that "And now spring has arrived to Iceland, a new art-form is being born in Iceland no less". cf. Norðfjörð 2005: 47.

by Ágúst Guðmundsson and *Father's Estate* (*Óðal feðranna*), directed by Hrafn Gunnlaugsson (Ásgeirsson 2009: 222). Screenings of the movies created in the homeland of Haldór Laxness in the early 1980s became such an important cultural event that Icelanders, happy for the revival of their cinematography, were willing to pay twice as much for tickets to see their domestic productions than for the films from abroad. We need only highlight the fact that *Land and Sons* was watched by one hundred thousand people in a country with a population of 229,187 (Cowie 2000: 12), which even today is an impressive result. Both productions were directly supported by the Icelandic Film Fund, established in 1979, and by two related institutions, the National Film Library and the Reykjavík International Film Festival. However, the unfavourable national economic situation and reluctance of the government to support filmmaking projects forced the founders of the national cinematography to mortgage their own houses or to take risky bank loans in order to be able to implement their ideas (Ásgeirsson 2009: 223). It is believed that this financial struggle is the main reason behind the poor technical quality of the movies produced in the 1980s. The cinematic language used to create movies in this period is of lower quality than that of movies from Hollywood or Europe – from the 1950s. This situation was caused mainly by a lack of professional education for the directors, screenwriters, camera operators and technical assistants.

The best way to analyse the attempts at creating a foundation for modern national cinematography is to focus on two pioneering movies that had so much influence on the works of other Icelandic movie makers. The first of them, *Land and Sons* by Ágúst Guðmundsson, emphasizes the charm of life in accordance with nature to an even larger extent than the equally popular *Father's Estate* (by Hrafn Gunnlaugsson), connecting the apologies of countryside life with ideas related to national identity. Writing about the background of this movie, Peter Cowie notes that “almost half the attendance came from the provinces; old folks’ homes emptied as the pensioners turned out to see Ágúst’s work” (Cowie 2000: 12). The interest of the older generation is not surprising. The plot of the film focuses on the aversion of young people to the farming duties of their parents, and touches on the motif of migration from the countryside in the search for an easier life in the city. Numerous scenes depict the protagonists as carefree, nature-loving cowboys, who ride their horses and look after their sheep. However, the plot in general is full of metaphorical, albeit straightforward features, such as the scene related to the migration to the city, when the protagonist pointlessly kills his white horse, or when he gives away his beloved dog to his neighbour. *Land and Sons* also clearly operates from the local, national perspective<sup>10</sup>. The story is constructed in such a way to make the audience identify with the hard-working, ailing father and his opinions. The scene where the old man suffers from a heart attack may be rooted in the poetics of the realistic novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The man falls on the ground while working in his field. The film highlights the positive aspects related to the attachment to the land and nature, lavishing attention on the beauty of the Icelandic landscapes. The young protagonists begin and consummate their romantic relations outdoors. A thesis to support the conservative approach of the movie can be also supported by the fact that the protagonist’s lover unsuccessfully tries to convince him

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<sup>10</sup> More details about the features of national and transnational cinematography and their relations with the moviemaking system can be found in: Nestingen, Elkington 2005.



to stay on the “land of his ancestors” and in the end refuses to go with him to the city. The film can feel surprisingly contemporary when watched after the financial crash that occurred in Iceland in 2008. Its story takes place in the 1930s, the time of the great crisis, when the economy on the island was collapsing. Considering the problems of contemporary Icelanders, the grim utterances of the movie’s characters, such as: “economic crisis and sick sheep, that’s our legacy”, “we are the nation of debtors” or “everything collapses here, it’s an arid land” sound disturbingly topical<sup>11</sup>.

Just like “Land and Sons”, the other important movie of the period, *Father’s Estate*, directed by Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, uses the “young-old”, “countryside-city” and “nature-culture” juxtapositions. However, it also distances itself from the ideologised devices of national discourse. Gunnlaugsson’s movie begins at a wake, with a speech by a man who praises the civil virtues of the deceased – “he could fully understand the importance of life in the countryside”. This portentous oratorical performance is observed by the two bored sons of the late man, who we later see outside, arguing over the obliqueness of the authorities and the rich. The older son, Helgi, claims that their father was a “romantic fool who allowed others to exploit him”. He thinks that their father would not want them to stay on the farm. The protagonists decide to convince their mother to sell the indebted farm and to move to Reykjavík with them. She, however, does not want to lose “the land of the ancestors”. Due to an unfortunate accident, Helgi becomes paralyzed. His younger sibling, Stefán, does his will and takes a bus to Reykjavík. In the capital, the protagonist becomes a student and starts to enjoy the life of the city. However, his carefree life does not last long. A contract worker employed at his family’s farm sexually abuses his impaired sister, while his mother signs an unfavourable agreement on the lease of the lands that belong to her. The youngest brother returns home, but instead of sorting out his family matters, he gets into trouble with the law and is forced to spend the winter on the farm. In the last minutes of the movie, we see him resigned to his fate, standing on a ladder and looking at the bus on its way to Reykjavík.

It is telling that contrary to *Land and Sons*, where there are no scenes depicting the advantages or disadvantages of urban life, Gunnlaugsson’s movie does not idealize the countryside nor does it favour an easier existence in the capital city. In this case, unlike in the Guðmundsson’s production, an ambiguous attitude towards the country life is proposed. Countryside order, closely related to nature, does not offer any opportunities for the development of the younger generation. Farming is not a promising sector of the economy, as the farmers are indebted to politicians and businessmen who have learned how to exploit their gullibility. The countryside is also a place that is losing its character. At the end of the movie, we see Stefán driving his tractor along a new asphalt road. With sadness, he observes the adaptation of the countryside landscape for the needs of tourism. The land of the ancestors is no longer used pastorally and is divided and built-up by the rich, who purchased it by illegal methods.

The flaws of the richer strata of the society is represented by Gunnar, the owner of a Mercedes and the only shop in the area. This unpleasant man has become rich by buying

<sup>11</sup> The crisis of 2008 will become another important motif of contemporary Icelandic documentaries and feature movies (Björnsdóttir 2012: 24–25).

horses from poor farmers and selling them to Germany. His daughter, brought up abroad, is a devoted follower of the urban lifestyle. She thinks only about her own pleasure and cruelly flirts with Stefán, innocent and uncorrupted by any foreign influence. In the scene when three characters meet each other, we may notice some traces of the left-wing perspective very popular in the Icelandic cinema of the 1980s. When the shy boy enters Gunnar's house, he is received like a peasant who wants to speak with his master. He not only has to wait for an audience with a man who exploited his mother's naivety, but is also taunted and impudently courted by the barely clothed daughter of the businessman. Left-wing features are also highlighted at the end of the movie, when Hagi speaks about the folks that have to pay for the cars of their elected representatives. The passionate utterance of the young man is contrasted with scenes of a hedonistic party thrown by Gunnar's daughter.

Here, however, we need to emphasize the fact that Gunnlaugsson's movie cannot be simply ascribed to the straightforward perspective of depreciation of the city, well known from *Land and Sons* and the movies of the pioneers of Icelandic cinema. The reality of life in Reykjavík is likewise depicted in a quite ambiguous manner. On the one hand, the capital city of Iceland flabbergasts the young provincial with its charm. It is a modern city, where young girls do not hesitate to pick up men for a night and where one can study or find a well-paid job. On the other hand, Stefán lives in a cellar rented from a lonely, single mother with alcohol problems and he has to pay off the debts of his older brother, who developed a taste for the "sin city" glamour and was severely punished by cruel fate for his misdeeds. Such an equivocal approach towards urban culture will later become a popular rhetorical device, often employed in Icelandic cinema of the 1990s and 2000s.

Let us now return to analysis of ideological devices of movies produced during the Icelandic Film Spring. A left-wing attitude towards telluric themes and zealous criticism of cultural-political colonization of the country can also be found in *Inter Nos* (*Okkar á milli: Í hita og þunga dagsins*, 1982), another movie directed by Hrafn Gunnlaugsson<sup>12</sup>. It is the story of an engineer working as a designer of thermal power plants and undergoing a midlife crisis. The screenplay connects the fate of the protagonist with unclear meditations on the influence of politics on a discourse that utilizes new telluric themes. In one of the numerous fantastic scenes, the hero goes to a play. During the performance his daughter, playing the role of mother-Iceland, removes her clothes. This act is accompanied by the words of the narrator, who tells the audience to comprehend the true image of their country, unromanticised by the poets and summarized with the words: "We live in Iceland, naive mother-Iceland. We are the last generation on Earth. Let's fuck her. Let's have fun and fuck everything we can"<sup>13</sup>. After these vulgar words, various references to turbines and atomic energy appear on the screen. Such themes can be associated not only with the trade of the main character, but also with discussion of foreign investors, willing to build natural power plants on the island. In the course of the plot, Benjamin, living in a half-real world, falls into a sexual and patriotic

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<sup>12</sup> Latin title of the movie was supposedly used to highlight the patriotic message of the film.

<sup>13</sup> When he watches the theatrical striptease of his own daughter, Benjamin daydreams about seducing Edda, daughter of his late friend.

obsession with thermal energy. In his visions, the erotic fascination with the corporeality of his daughter's friend, tellingly named Edda<sup>14</sup>, is mixed with an irresistible will to return to nature. Female attributes are symbolized by the hot springs and geysers the scientist visits, as he tries to tame the forces of nature in his visions. However, the movie identifies the energy of the Earth with the natural resources of the country. According to the author of the movie, the foreign powers, represented here by a Japanese corporation<sup>15</sup>, try to capture and control these resources. References to left-wing opinions are also apparent in a scene at a punk concert. The lyrics of the songs vacillate between the two urges to copulate with young girls and to criticize politicians, who have sold themselves to the foreign capital which is raping mother Iceland<sup>16</sup>. Unfortunately, the constant and unclear mixing of psychoanalytical connotations with political allusions did not make the film popular among Icelanders, while the foreign audience may perceive the movie as graphomaniac.

Explicit communistic sympathies, less hermetic criticism of foreign influence and dark satire of urban life can be found in the film adaptation of Halldór Laxness' 1948 novel *The Atom Station (Atómstöðin)* (1984). Just like its literary archetype, Þorsteinn Jónsson's movie is a satirical vision of corrupted politicians "selling" the country to Americans. The movie depicts two parties. The first is represented by a group of American diplomats and their pro-American supporters who do not oppose the construction of an "atom station" (their name for the US military base) on the island. The other group are communist students. It is significant that the complexity of Iceland-USA relations is presented not only within the political macro-scale US Army occupation of the military base in Keflavik, but also within the micro-scale of human drama. The motif of the romance between the prime minister's daughter and a married American is explicitly political, as he uses the "village girl" only to neglect her and deny any relation with her when she becomes pregnant. Unfortunately, the adaptation is not a good one and much of the rapacious satire of the novel is lost. Still, it revives the postulate to fight against foreign influence present also in *Inter Nos*, placing much emphasis on the uniqueness of Icelandic nature, language and culture, the purity of which is under threat from external powers. The more modern form of discourse in both movies does not differ much from the language used by the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalists, who in their romanticized writings wished to bolster the national identity of Icelanders living under Danish jurisdiction (Björnsdóttir 1996: 109).

<sup>14</sup> The motif of raping the uncorrupted nature of the homeland, often personified as an innocent virgin, is a popular element of nationalistic narrations (Rose 1993: 70–71, 108–109), often used in Icelandic national discourse. It is related to the symbolic figure of Lady of the Mountainfjallkonan, created by Erikurr Magnusson, professor of Nordic studies, who had a prophetic vision in 1864. The manuscript held by the creature he drew is symbolizing the intellectual individuality of Iceland, where linguistic traditions and original mythology which, passed down from generation to generation, managed to survive under foreign jurisdiction. *Purity and uniqueness* of the female personification of Iceland will become a rhetorical device used first in poetry and painting, and later in literature and film (Björnsdóttir 1996: 106–111).

<sup>15</sup> The theme constitutes a reinterpretation of the elements of a satirical novel written by Halldór Laxness, "The Atom Station". The film adaptation of this novel is briefly discussed in the following part of the article.

<sup>16</sup> One of the stanzas goes as follows: "I want to love my country, I want to make my country rich, I want to boost its sales, I want to keep its NATO base".

PART TWO: COUNTRYSIDE, CITY AND COLONIZATION OF TRADITION  
IN THE WORKS OF FRÍÐRIK ÞÓR FRÍÐRIKSSON

Fríðrik Þór Fríðriksson's *White Whales (Skytturarnar)* (1987) is a movie that continues the discussion about the changes in Icelandic national identity, but in a much more ambiguous manner. Even though it was created during the Icelandic Film Spring, it displays some transnational elements. The plot is less hermetic, and the screenplay is less focused on local reality and historic contexts. Many literary tropes, once comprehensible only to Icelanders, were made more universal. Moreover, the syntactic-semiotic layer of the film contains references to popular movie genres that can be easily identified by audiences from other countries. Therefore *White Whales* can be perceived as a movie of transnational character. Björn Norðfjörð notices that this is the first feature movie in which the director begins to argue with American culture, Hollywood cinema in particular. Fríðriksson will go along this path in his future films. In interspecific references and in the use of Anglo-Saxon songs, Norðfjörð looks for the announcement of the transcendence of Icelandic cinematography from its local dimension to a transnational level open for international standards (Norðfjörð 2010: 40–41). The antisocial message of the movie is related not only to the director's fascination with the history of American cinema, but also with local stories about the "trappers of the north", which became popular in Iceland in the 1940s (Schram 2009: 253). It was a time of freshly obtained independence, social changes and rapid development of the industry. In her text *Iceland and the Images of the North*, Kristinn Schram notices that it was a time when Icelandic texts of culture began to connect the remote, wild landscapes of the country with stories of extravagant, independent and rebellious protagonists, whose nonconformist personalities contrasted with social organization displayed by the inhabitants of the city (Schram 2009: 253). Schram also proves that even though their actions are often blameworthy, such characters very rarely induce negative emotions, because they are perceived by Icelanders as a symbol of struggle against foreign cultural influence (Schram 2009: 253). The question is: are the protagonists of *White Whales* presented in such a way? The main characters of the movie rather resemble a *Scandinavian version of Laurel and Hardy*. The irascible and slightly more sensible Grímur and the good-natured but extremely childish Bubbi are a pair of whalers who lose their jobs and begin their "taxi odyssey" along the gloomy and dark streets of Reykjavík, concluding in a tragic fight with the police.

It is easy to notice that the choice of whalers for the protagonists of the movie contains a clear social context. However, statistics tell us that whaling is not and has never been an important sector of the Icelandic economy. The meat of whales killed in Icelandic waters is sold only in Japan. It constitutes only 1.3% of all fish exports – an industry that generates 75% of the income of the national economy. Moreover, in contrast to Norway, Iceland has never been a "whaling tycoon" (Brydon 1996: 26–27). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century these animals were rarely hunted. After the Second World War, ten water mammal hunt centres were created and this number did not change until 1986, when the International Whaling Commission forbade hunting of these animals for commercial purposes. After three years, Icelanders started to ignore these restrictions. That is when the question of whaling became a subject of national importance. The prohibition and radical protests organized by Greenpeace members agitating to boycott fish products made in Iceland, enraged the authorities and public opinion (Brydon 1996: 35).

International discussion (joined also by the USA and New Zealand) revived the old rhetorical devices used in the times of nationalistic propaganda against the presence of American soldiers in the country or to highlight the differences between Iceland and Denmark in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brydon 1996: 27). Media that supported the government emphasized the contrast between the romanticized, sentimental opinion of the defenders of the whales, perceived as representatives of foreign political forces, and the scientific approach of the Icelanders, supported by the tradition of living in harmony with nature. In the opinion of local media, Icelandic society was unjustly and insultingly compared to butchers or even fascists guilty of a “holocaust of the whales” (Brydon 1996: 29–30). The countrywide feeling of external pressure was also supported by the TV broadcast of a documentary movie, which presented the defenders of the whales as people looking out for their own financial interests and willing to destroy the Icelandic economy. In this way the fight for the right to hunt whales became a media battle for a national identity represented by the fishermen (Brydon 1996: 30). Cinema also had its voice in this argument. Very quickly, a year after the ban was imposed, Friðriksson understood the gravity of the subject and decided to precariously compare unemployed Icelanders with helpless animals. One of the main advantages of *White Whales* is that it does not present the opinion of its creator in a straightforward manner. Friðriksson created neither a paean for the protectors of the whales, nor a film glorifying the figures of unemployed whalers. The movie is focused on the upsetting results of the hunting ban. Simultaneously, however, we see that the protagonists are socially ill-adapted. Their grotesque behaviour and flaws are highlighted in numerous scenes.

Most importantly, however, Bubby and Grímur die because of their occupation, which is symbolically bonded with the order of nature. Even though the urban environment seems to be attractive, it is not their “ecological niche”. After all, Reykjavík is presented from quite a dystopian perspective. The sinful dimension of urban life is most visible in a scene of the aftermath of a brawl initiated by the protagonists in a sports shop. In a single long shot, the camera shows the chaotically scattered artefacts of the consumer’s world. The image of destruction is accompanied by a radio broadcast of the speech of the bishop of Reykjavík, who calls the believers to trust in their hope for a better tomorrow. The absurdity of the unemployed whalers’ fate is also highlighted by the fact that immediately after we hear the words “Jesus Christ promised us salvation”, police officers shoot tear gas in the direction of the protagonists and kill the unarmed Bubby, who was trying to surrender. The metaphorical message of the title is clearly emphasized in the penultimate scene. A wounded Grímur hides from the police in an abandoned swimming pool. He smokes his last cigarette and lets the officers kill him. In the last seconds of his life, the protagonist crawls at the bottom of the pool, covered in his own blood like the hunted whale whose dead body was seen early in the movie.

Left-wing inspirations, popular in the 1980’s, and attempts to settle the score with foreign political-cultural forces return in Friðriksson’s movies produced ten years after *Inter Nos* and *The Atom Station*<sup>17</sup>. *Movie Days* (1994) is a homage to the magic of the cinema and a nostalgic

<sup>17</sup> The article does not analyse Friðriksson’s second feature. The Academy Award nominated *Children of Nature* (*Börn náttúrunnar*) (1991) also presents some interesting references to telluric themes, reinterprets the clash between “the young and the old” characteristic of the Icelandic Film Spring, and analyses the social results of cultural colonization by the US Army. This movie is analysed in another paper. cf. Konefal 2013.

reflection on the magnetic force of American pop culture. This movie also takes the left-wing perspective and features telluric themes. Not without reason, the story takes place in the early 1960s. It is not only the time of Friðriksson's childhood, but also when Iceland was still "learning" how to be politically independent from Denmark. It is also the decade when citizens of Reykjavík were slowly becoming accustomed to the presence of the US Army in their country. The "occupation" of the US forces is nowadays perceived as a strategy of cultural colonialism, which gave Icelanders access to various cultural goods, like whiskey (a competitor to the local moonshine) and TV and cinematic genres. The movie's protagonist constitutes the most important element emphasizing the initiational character of the plot. The film tells a story of a daydreaming boy fascinated with cinema. The first scene already highlights the central role of cinephilia in the plot. This motif is not only closely related to Friðriksson's own life, but refers to a change in the cultural paradigm as well. Subsequent scenes in *Movie Days* present a utopian series of memories, raising various everyday events to the rank of small, profane epiphanies. Take the scene in the cinema, where children watch a Roy Rogers western: their level of excitement is so high, that they start screaming various comments at the cowboy and sing a song together with the hero. It ironically evidences the "multiple reading" of the film and its "cult" reception. The relationship between childlike sensitivity and the figure of the cowboy is an important symbol of the cultural colonization of Iceland by the USA. As one of the early Hollywood actors, Roy Rogers signed an agreement that guaranteed him remuneration for reproduction of his image in various mass cultural products, such as action figures, posters, photos and comic books. This fact turns our attention to the impurity of marketing strategies adapted by big concerns, such as the Walt Disney Company, which since their very beginnings has been turning children's fantasies into profit. Obviously, it is not the only evidence of Friðriksson's ambiguous attitude towards America. Another ironic comment on the strategy of merging democratic ideas with marketing is hidden in the minor rebellion of one of the students, who brings a bottle of Pepsi instead of milk to his classroom. When confronted by a teacher who declares that sweet food is forbidden at the school lunch, the boy replies that "he is a free person and he is able to choose his food himself".

The motif of TV is also worth noticing. TV is a medium that was brought to Iceland by the Americans (Karlsson 2000: 339–341)<sup>18</sup>. The children in Friðriksson's movie do not only observe their neighbour's existence through the window (he is the only person with the TV set in the neighbourhood), but also, encouraged by the voyeuristic shiver of technological novelty, they follow the erotic life of another neighbour who flirts with an American soldier. The scopophilic character of these entertainments is contrasted with radio broadcasts. Until the TV was introduced, radio constituted the primary source of intellectual entertainment for Icelanders. It should come as no surprise then, that the next scene depicts Tómas' family gathered around the radio, listening to one of the popular radio theatre broadcasts. In a postmodern flirtation with Neil Postman's theses<sup>19</sup> (Postman 2002), Friðriksson's radio

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<sup>18</sup> First TV auditions were broadcasted by the US Army for the soldiers deployed to Keflavik. These broadcasts acknowledged Icelanders with classic American movies and... Elvis Presley's songs. cf. Karlsson 2000: 339–341.

<sup>19</sup> In his text, Postman compares the differences between the reception of TV broadcasts and written text cf. Postman 2002.



is perceived as a local medium, integrating the family and developing the imagination. On the other hand, TV not only informs them on foreign matters, but the older crowd also consider it boring, as in one scene where they doze off during a wearisome broadcast of *The Last Days of Adolf Hitler*. The younger generation, however, seems to be addicted to the novelties of the “great world”, such as Tómas’s brother’s beloved rock’n’roll or Danish comic books about the adventures of Donald Duck’s nephews. Another theme that needs to be discussed separately is the ambivalent status of Tómas’ cinephilia. The boy seems to be equally fascinated by the biblical figure of Jesus, noble cowboys, Adolf Hitler and a murderous hand from space, featured in a B-movie by Herbert L. Strock. In *Movie Days*, the signs of homogenizing culture, that make all texts equal, have a bitter-sweet taste. On the one hand, this phenomenon is related to the idyll of childhood memories and dreams, on the other, it constitutes a tool for the colonization and corruption of Icelandic culture, destroying traditions and making the younger generation lazy.

Such an ambiguous approach towards the pop-culture invasion is revised in the second part of the movie. If the first part of Friðriksson’s film makes its way between subtle discussion with mass culture and equivocal apology and does not contain any serious criticism of urban life, the second part presents values that contrast with Tómas’s urban fascinations and is located much closer to the perspective known from, for example, *Land and Sons*. The protagonist is sent to the countryside for holidays. Deprived of access to cinema and television, he learns how to spend his free time more productively. Apart from the work on the farm and lessons of fishing, little Tómas listens to evening stories full of folklore legends with scary accents, appropriately endowed by the narrator. In the universe of Friðriksson’s memories, the countryside is a space of tradition and life in harmony with nature, full of oral stories that are much closer to a “spiritual perception of the world” (Gogacz-Sowińska 2002: 215). While the boy perceives the city as an area of unreal, pop-cultural games, the countryside is not only a place of utilitarian work, but also an oasis of marvel. Here we may meet a scary demon, a herald of death, that is perceived only by the elder. The order of the countryside will also become helpful in facing two traumatic events: the embarrassing discovery of the protagonist’s own sexuality and even more difficult need to deal with his father’s premature death. The country is also a place resistant to foreign influences. Mormons from remote Utah are treated as a harmless curiosity, while products from abroad such as whiskey and cigarettes are perceived as an attractive but not really important diversion in country life.

The juxtaposition of differences between rural nature and the city (where Tómas returns in the end) is another trope of meditation on the sociological and political changes of a country where two superpowers are fighting for the souls of its inhabitants. It is telling that both the military and cultural invasion by America and attempts at Soviet infiltration are presented as covert actions. Even though the movie depicts a romantic affair between one of the neighbours and an American soldier, a fight between communist Úlfar and a fan of scouting nicknamed *Mr. Dollar*, and a story about three Soviet spies, the real effects of Cold War influence may be seen at the cinema, where fragments of Eisenstein’s movies compete with a capitalistic flood of Hollywood films. It is a battle that was eventually concluded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the period when Icelandic cinema began to draw inspiration from external sources and transnational storytelling structures.

The next of Friðriksson's movies is much more homogenous in its political message and is deprived of utopian perspective. Produced in 1996, *Devil's Island (Djöflaeyjan)* seems to be much closer to the left-wing perspective characteristic of some films of the Icelandic Film Spring. Friðriksson's work tries to faithfully present the historical reality of 1950s and 1960s Iceland, struggling against poverty and alcoholism. This costly approach made production run for over four years and earned it the title of the most expensive Icelandic film of all time. The film is based on a popular book by Einar Kárason. It is a story of a family that lives in a settlement for the poor, created on the site of the former military base, in brass barracks left behind by the US Army deployed to Iceland during the Second World War. The place is a metaphorical representation of the suspended identity of the country. The first frame of the film, consisting of an ironical chart, informs us about an uneasy relation between Icelanders and their guests: "Icelandic Vikings discovered America, but, like Oscar Wilde said, they had enough sophisticated taste to leave it be. A thousand years later, during the Second World War, the Americans occupied Iceland. And had no intention of leaving".

It is significant that the beginning of the movie discredits the migration of Icelanders to the urban areas. The first take seems to present a sea shore. Unfortunately, it quickly turns out that the frame does not show us an endless ocean, but a pond of rainwater full of empty bottles. After a while, a quick motion of the camera introduces us to the scene of the action: muddy, gloomy barracks that are approached by a newlywed couple, driven there in a car. They are followed by a tractor that carries the rest of the bride's family. "Something is wrong, I can feel it in the air", we hear the first words of a grandmother endowed with the sixth sense. These words will soon turn out to be prophetic. In the course of time, the dingy settlement full of alcoholic men wasting their time becomes a metaphor for hell, juxtaposed against America, adored by the protagonist. Baltazar Kormákur plays the role of Baddi, a young man who is in love with the USA. When he returns to his homeland, he becomes an introverted outsider, suspended between the lazy vegetation in the slums and nostalgia for his former life in the States. The lost protagonist cannot find a place for himself in Icelandic society, so he drowns in its pathologies. The fatalism of his lot, presented as his inability to leave the slums representing post-war Iceland, is suggestively used in the story of life and death of Baddi's younger brother, who apparently managed to make his dream of escaping the prison of the "devil's island" come true. Insouciant as a child, Danni becomes a pilot, so each day he is able to leave the muddy barracks and observe his homeland from the "divine perspective". Unfortunately, his happiness does not last long. One day, like Icarus fleeing the ancient island-prison, Danni dies. At the end of the movie there is a scene that presents a broken Baddi lying down on his brother's grave and cursing the country and his own life. After everything, fate writes the last gloomy chapter of the protagonist's story. Bobó á Holtinu, an Icelander whose life served as the basis for Baddi's character, suffered from alcoholism and eventually committed suicide by setting himself on fire in his own house. Wounds reopening, *Devil's Island* has obtained the status of a classic in Iceland. A solid screenplay and great camera takes made it a movie seen by 80 thousand people – statistically, every other adult Icelander. Thus Friðriksson's movie recaptured the success of movies made in the 1980's.

## CONCLUSION: NATIONAL IDENTITY ON THE CROSSROADS OF LATE POSTMODERNISM

*Devil's Island* can be also perceived as a production that symbolically concludes the period of modernist approach to the elements of national identity, characteristic of the Icelandic Film Spring. The film is also a virtuosic display of acting, with a splendid performance by Baltasar Kormákur, an actor and director who five years later made one of the most famous Icelandic movies, an adaptation of Hallgrímur Helgason's novel *101 Reykjavík*, an exaggerated apology of urban life and a "manifest of the worldview" of the new generation of Icelanders. The movie depicts rich citizens who belong to the consumption-oriented society and feel a cultural bond not only with their homeland, but also with their peers living in Europe and America. The works of the representatives of the new generation of filmmakers, inspired by the subcultures and American cinema, are democratically critical of the countryside and urban lifestyle alike. It is telling that the pessimistic perspective of Icelandic images of modernity, displayed in movies created after the year 2000, would scare the pioneers of Icelandic cinematography and the coryphaeuses of the Icelandic Film Spring. The passage from an ideologised admiration of the island's nature presented from a postmodern perspective was replaced with dystopian colours. Critical deconstruction of national identity and related ideologised rhetorical devices is a significant proof of sociological change that took place in the homeland of Halldor Laxness and a recognizable cultural sign of attachment of contemporary Icelandic cinematography to the postmodern current of questioning all discourses and narrations.

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#### MIASTO, WIEŚ I PRZYRODA JAKO FIGURY DYSKURSYWNE KINEMATOGRAFII ISLANDZKIEJ UMACNIAJĄCE TOŻSAMOŚĆ NARODOWĄ

Kinematografia islandzka od swoich początków wykorzystywała strategię łączenia motywów tellurycznych z metaforyzowanymi elementami narracji o wydźwięku nacjonalistycznym. W wielu filmach z ojczyzny skandynawskich sag można odnaleźć także struktury wizualne dające się wpisać w ramy spojrzenia turystycznego – terminu znanego między innymi z tekstów Johna Urry’ego. Pomimo akcentowania w nich atrakcyjnej dla zagranicznych odbiorców wizji unikalnego ukształtowania i przyrody wyspy oraz podkreślenia wyjątkowości jej kulturowego dziedzictwa, specyfika procesów produkcji kinowej w Islandii lokowała większość powstałych tam filmów w ramach kina narodowego. Co ciekawe, również lata 80. XX wieku, uważane za okres odrodzenia islandzkiej kinematografii i jej unowocześnienia, charakteryzuje nasycenie wątków tellurycznych trudną do zrozumienia za granicą konserwatywną lub lewicową perspektywą. Dopiero korzystająca z modernistycznych i postmodernistycznych zabiegów twórczość debiutującego fabularnie w roku 1987 Friðrika Þóra Friðrikssona stanie się drogowskazem dla innych filmowców do poddawania reinterpretacji klasycznych struktur narracyjnych, ironicznej reinterpretacji wątków nacjonalistycznych i kręcenia produkcji o charakterze transnarodowym.

Słowa kluczowe: miasto, wieś, nacjonalizm, tożsamość narodowa, Islandia