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Rendering slow ecological crisis in a popular medium: Hyperobjects and Sámi resistance in the Swedish-French TV series Midnight Sun

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The article examines the ways in which the slowly evolving and invisible processes of the ongoing ecological crisis can be represented in the format of a contemporary serial television drama. The author argues that despite heavy reliance on spectacular and captivating character-born plots, the long-form storytelling of new television narratives can be well suited to representing the complex and unspectacular temporalities of the ecological crisis. With the Swedish-French Arctic noir TV series *Midnight Sun* as a case study, the analysis shows how a highly spectacular criminal plot is developed to reveal the invisible temporal action and nonhuman agency of a special kind of waste paradigmatic of the era of the Anthropocene, defined by Timothy Morton as a hyperobject (2013). This idea is established in *Midnight Sun* not only by placing radioactive waste at the center of the narrative but also by gradually foregrounding its nonhuman agency behind the events. The aim of the analysis is to demonstrate that by both using and reimagining the conventions of the television crime drama (Arctic noir), *Midnight Sun* translates into quotidian terms the unspectacular and long-term aspects of human-induced ecological destruction, which surpass the individual human scale and evade our cognition. An important strategy adopted in *Midnight Sun* is bringing together two levels of criticism: ecocritical and postcolonial. The slow ecological violence (R. Nixon, 2011) and nuclear colonialism (G. Schwab, 2020) exerted by the powerful against regions and people who are globally less visible are depicted as a continuation of the history of colonization, and more specifically, the systemic and longstanding ill-treatment of the indigenous Sámi people in Sweden.

Keywords: *Midnight Sun*, global trash, radioactive waste, nuclear colonialism, hyperobject, non-human agency, green TV series, Arctic noir, Sámi, Sápmi

When dealing with the subject of "slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes"[1] in the medium of a popular television drama, a crucial question arises regarding how to represent this kind of unspectacular slow toxicity narratively and aesthetically. As Rob Nixon puts it:

> how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and thus star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?[2]

[1] R. Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge, MA – London 2011, p. 3.

[2] Ibidem.

Nixon differentiates between the violence of "slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes" and violence understood as "immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility."[3] The author argues that we need to rethink imaginatively, as well as politically and theoretically, the slow (when considered in human terms) progression of ecological crises. These slow processes include "[c]limate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes."[4] Such processes often unimaginably exceed the scale of a single human life and therefore remain vast beyond mundane comprehension, thus presenting "formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilise and act decisively" – especially in the age "when media venerate the spectacular."[5]

Today, in view of the "growing category of green television drama,"[6] the pressing question is indeed whether the medium and format of television series, relying extensively on spectacle, character-led plots, and gripping drama, are capable of successfully depicting such unspectacular, long-term processes as those associated with the ongoing ecological crisis. Is rendering those mechanisms – without oversimplifying them or reducing their temporal operations to their immediate effects – at all possible in the popular and highly dramatic medium of serial television drama?

As I argue in this article, the Swedish-French television series *Midnight Sun* (*Midnattssol*, 2016) belongs to the group of contemporary television dramas that have been successful in this respect.[7] Despite the limitations inherent in the conventions and technology of the medium of television, there are nevertheless some significant advantages to contemporary long-form television narratives. These include, first of all, their capacity to create complex temporalities, which makes serial storytelling a well-suited format for representing the multiplex temporalities of the ecological crisis. The new era of the television narrative not only "produces a wider narrative experience by offering unlimited streaming to viewers who have absolute access to shows and paratexts,"[8] but also involves "complex net of narrative temporalities that these shows develop," suggesting "a much greater notion of time itself."[9] And, as eco-theorist Timothy Morton suggests, "the very

[3] Ibidem, p. 2.
[4] Ibidem.
[5] Ibidem.
[6] I. Souch, *Transformations of the evil forest in the Swedish TV series "Jordskott": An ecocritical reading*, "Nordicom Review" 2020, vol. 41, no. 1, p. 119.
[7] Other television dramas worth mentioning here are *Jordskott* (Sweden, 2015–), see Souch, op.cit., and *Dark* (Germany, 2017–2020), see A. Batori, *"Everything is connected". Narratives of temporal and spatialtransgression in* Dark, "VIEW. Journal of European Television History and Culture" 2021, vol. 10, no. 10, pp. 112–124. On *Dark*, see also Y. Komska, *Review of HBO's Chernobyl*, "American Historical Review", October 2019, pp. 1376–1378.
[8] A. Batori, op.cit. See J.P. Kelly, *Time, Technology and Narrative Form in Contemporary US Television Drama. Pause, Rewind, Record*, Cham 2017, pp. 184–185.
[9] A. Batori, op.cit.

things that ecological thought and politics require [are] nonhuman beings and *unfamiliar timescales*."[10]

In discussing the new modes of narration and audience engagement associated with the contemporary long-format television series, Babette B. Tischleder argues that

> [t]he modes of storytelling in contemporary television have the power of evoking imaginative worlds that extend beyond the diegesis in a narrow sense. […] Rather than evolving in linear fashion, […] narrative time gradually builds up, extends, and 'thickens,' especially if it interweaves a number of parallel plotlines. […] [T]he spatiotemporal coordinates […] shape and are shaped by the imagination of producers and audiences alike.[11]

I argue that in order to successfully conceive the long-term processes associated with the ecological crisis, a television series must not only draw on, but also expand our imagination towards dimensions that exceed the routines and time horizon of our own life worlds.

Midnight Sun closely aligns with this strategy. When it comes to temporality, the plot of *Midnight Sun* encompasses not just the span of the characters' lives, but stretches across larger timescales, including transgenerational and larger-than-human, "unfamiliar" (to use Morton's term) temporal frames. Closely tied to these intertangled temporal layers in *Midnight Sun* is the nonhuman agency of human-made waste, which functions, as I will show, as an invisible driving force behind the events. Thus, while captivating viewers by means of its highly spectacular criminal plot and psychologically complex characters, the series reveals the generally obscure long-term action and nonhuman agency of a special kind of waste paradigmatic of the era of the Anthropocene, labelled by Morton a "hyperobject."[12]

What is worth noting is how *Midnight Sun* brings together ecocriticism and a postcolonial perspective: it combines its non-anthropocentric approach with a deep concern for humans, especially those subjected to various forms of colonial oppression. Following the rule of the "double narrative" in Nordic noir,[13] this "Arctic noir" television series (that is, Nordic noir set in the Arctic)[14] uses the genre conventions of the police procedural to engage in strident social criticism.

[10] T. Morton, *Humankind. Solidarity with Nonhuman People*, London – Brooklyn, NY 2017, p. 6, emphasis added.

[11] B.B. Tischleder, *Thickening seriality: A chronotopic view of world building in contemporary television narrative*, "Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television" 2017, vol. 79, p. 120.

[12] Although *Midnight Sun* has been discussed by media scholars, see A.M. Waade, *Arctic Noir on Screen:* Midnight Sun *(2016–) as a Mix of Geopolitical Criticism and Spectacular, Mythical Landscapes*, [in:] *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation*, eds. L. Badley, A. Nestingen, J. Seppälä, Cham 2020, and R.A. Saunders, *Arctic Bodies. Sights/Sites of Necrocorporeality in Nordic Noir Television Series*, [in:] *Visual Representations of the Arctic: Imagining Shimmering Worlds in Culture, Literature and Politics*, eds. M. Lehtimäki, A. Rosenholm, V. Strukov, Milton 2021, and also defined as "a noteworthy piece of eco-criticism," see K.T. Hansen, A.M. Waade, *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to The Bridge*, Cham 2017, p. 285, the series has not been subjected to an in-depth ecocritical reading.

[13] See K.T. Hansen, A.M. Waade, op.cit., p. 284.

[14] For more on Arctic noir, see A.M. Waade, op.cit.

This criticism is two-fold: it encompasses both a strong ecocritical approach and engagement with the issue of the mistreatment of the indigenous Sámi people in Sweden. The series does so, first of all, by reflecting on the "slow violence" of ecological oppression[15] that the rich and powerful countries exert on the world's poorer or less represented – "out-of-sight" – areas, in this case, the Arctic regions of Sweden, and particularly, the cultural region of Sápmi, traditionally inhabited by the Sámi.

However *Midnight Sun* resists a narrative of pure victimhood in its depiction of the Sámi. As I will show, waste is incorporated in the plot both as a metaphor and in a very literal (even if not always material) sense. The metaphorical use of waste/trash relates primarily to the position of the Sámi within the oppressive frames of the dominant (in this case, Swedish) society and culture. The series' purpose is clearly to critically engage this metaphor – and thereby reality – by acknowledging those treated as trash as visible and dignified, and as possessing agency. At the same time, the series problematises the widespread stereotype of the Sámi as people associated with the domain of nature. I argue that the Sámi in *Midnight Sun* are not simply depicted as "*Naturfolk*," a common perception that excludes them from Sweden's wider social order and history. Instead, their traditional "connection to the land"[16] is portrayed as making many of them exceptionally aware of the ongoing man-made ecological crisis and its mechanisms.

Global trash and the nuclear colonization of the Arctic

The main parts of *Midnight Sun*'s plot are set in and around Kiruna, a town in northern Sweden, 145 km north of the Arctic Circle, where the sun never sets in summer. Kiruna is known for its mining industry, and indeed, the local iron mine is an important layer in the spatial, narrative and symbolic structure of the depicted universe. The criminal plot revolves around investigating several murders committed by a serial killer over eight episodes. Because the first victim discovered is a French citizen, police officer Kahina Zadi (Leila Bekhti) is invited from Paris to participate in the investigation. In line with the conventions of Nordic noir, where typically a male-female team of detective protagonists leads the investigation, Zadi starts working with a local prosecutor, Anders Harnesk (Carl Gustaf Hammarsten). Importantly, these investigators belong to two ethnically different cultures: although Kahina is a French citizen raised in Marseille, her origin is Berber-Algerian (the French actress is likewise of Berber-Algerian heritage), while Anders is half Sámi, half Swedish (Hammersten is a Swedish actor).

As their investigation proceeds, they discover that the series of murders is related to an ecological crime which has a transnational and geopolitical dimension: ten years earlier, twenty-two employees at the local mine, among them Ruttger Burlin (Peter Stormare), who

[15] R. Nixon, op.cit., p. 2.

[16] G. Kuhn, *Liberating Sápmi. Indigenous Resistance in Europe's Far North*, Oakland 2020, p. xiii.

later became chief prosecution officer, were bribed by a French citizen, killed in the opening scene, named Pierre Carnot (Denis Lavant), to hide highly toxic uranium in the massive iron mine in Kiruna. The uranium was waste resulting from the French government's production of "experimental weapons." Because one of the Swedes involved, Sparen (Göran Forsmark), incautiously reveals the secret to the Sámi activist and poet Evelina Geatki (Maxida Märak), the young woman is killed following a joint decision of all twenty-two accomplices involved in the operation. Evelina's brother, Eddie (Iggy Malmborg), learns about the circumstances of her murder (which was falsely identified in the police investigation report as suicide) and plans in revenge to kill all twenty-two people connected to the killing of Evelina.

The subject of a rich, powerful country dumping toxic waste in other (less rich and powerful, and globally less visible) parts of the world evokes the notion of global trash. As Kenneth W. Harrow notes in reference to the global position of twenty-first-century Africa, the notion of global trash "attests to the nature of a system generated by unequal relations of power, exacerbated under colonialism, and now under neoliberal globalisation."[17] Harrow draws on Achille Mbembe's reflections on Africa's position within a "regime determined by biopolitical power, the power to dispose of death and dispense with life," within which Africa is a "necropolis" (using Mbembe's term), a dumpsite for the rich parts of the globe.[18] The life of those who live on global dumpsites is perceived by those who dump the waste there as "barren life, life that doesn't count."[19] In this way, as Nixon observes, the recipient areas become "triply discounted:" as political agents, as long-term casualties of the dumping sites' toxicity and as "cultures possessing environmental practices and concerns of their own."[20] In the African context described by Harrow, toxic dumping in poorer areas of the world lays bare the power dynamics between the global north and global south:

> In grosser terms, the global north has been the locus of commodity capitalism, recently taking neoliberalism as its model, and Africa the site where the excretion or waste of that consumerism has been dumped.[21]

In *Midnight Sun*, these north/south dynamics in a sense appear reversed. The utmost northern peripheries of the globe, and more specifically, parts of the Arctic Sápmi region, become the site of "excretion." In both contexts, however, the areas and people that earlier in history were colonized and abused seem an exceptionally fertile ground for dumping waste, and thus for further abuse, which in this case can be called, again using Nixon's term, the "slow violence" of ecological oppression.[22] In the series, the north and the south are frequently juxtaposed through

[17] K.W. Harrow, *Trash: African Cinema from Below*, Bloomington 2013, p. 86.
[18] Ibidem; A. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Durham – London 2019.
[19] K.W. Harrow, op.cit., p. 87.
[20] R. Nixon, op.cit., p. 2.
[21] K.W. Harrow, op.cit., p. 84.
[22] R. Nixon, op.cit., p. 2.

editing, both visually and aurally (for instance, in Kahina's retrospectives about her life in Marseille and Algeria, or when she speaks on the phone with her superior in Paris). But rather than simply reversing the north/south power dynamics, the series – through the central Sámi plot and the subplot of Kahina's heritage – nuances them by highlighting hierarchical social structures and zones of exclusions in both Sweden and France and both north and south. At the same time, the series does not limit its perspective to local conflicts: because the French are the ones who dispose of the uranium in northern Sweden, it points to the Arctic as being a dumpsite for "global trash," or nuclear necropolis.

If waste is approached as a component of the production of wealth, then, as Harrow reminds us, it points to:

> a larger economic order in place, one in which the polluted waste has a place, in which the places of those "under-populated," low-density, under--radiated populations are affixed as surely as the privileges of those whose need to dispose of the waste takes priority.[23]

In *Midnight Sun*, this unequal economic order is reflected by the wealthy French political elites granting themselves the right to bribe the hard-working Swedish miners, already exposed to the destructive impact of the massive mining industry, living in the northern, seemingly out-of-sight peripheries of the globe, making them complicit in the nuclear contamination of Sápmi.

Therefore, the dominant cultures in *Midnight Sun* are also responsible for what can be called, using Gabriele Schwab's term, the "nuclear colonialism"[24] of the Sápmi. The topic of nuclear waste is undoubtedly one requiring a complex and multifaceted approach to the question of time. In her book *Radioactive Ghosts*, Gabriele Schwab opens a chapter devoted to nuclear colonialism in the US context (the building of the first nuclear bomb by the Manhattan Project group) with a quote (from Karen Barad) problematizing temporality: "Is there a sense of temporality that could provide a different way of positioning these markers of history and understand 1492 as living inside 1945, for example, and vice versa?".[25] In this quote, the first date evokes the beginnings of the European colonization of the Americas and the last refers to the first nuclear bomb test, the so-called Trinity Test, conducted in July 1945 in the indigenous sacred lands of Native American tribes in the New Mexico desert. As Schwab asserts, nuclear colonialism is a continuation of the history of colonialism,[26] albeit with a more lethal force – even if remaining invisible and latent for a long period of time.[27] Importantly, "[e]conomic dependency is at the core of nuclear colonization,"[28] making people vulnerable enough to accept – as the

[23] K.W. Harrow, op.cit., p. 22.
[24] G. Schwab, *Radioactive Ghosts*, Minneapolis 2020.
[25] Ibidem, p. 57.
[26] "These nuclear sacrifice zones are a manifestation of national sovereignty that continues the legacy of colonialism," G. Schwab, op.cit., p. 61.
[27] Ibidem, p. 63.
[28] Ibidem.

Swedish miners do in *Midnight Sun* – the storage of nuclear waste and other activities that pose nuclear perils.

Il. 1. The half-Sámi, half-Swedish prosecutor Anders Harnesk (Carl Gustaf Hammarsten) seen in a long shot as a tiny figure framed by a huge landfill, from which he appropriates a used stove (*Midnight Sun*, Episode One, screen shot)

Schwab points to the importance of understanding such nuclear perils – and the nuclear colonization of indigenous peoples and their lands – not just in relation to the people who were impacted by nuclear tests in the times of their operation, but, due to the long-term effects of radioactivity, which substantially exceeds the length of a human life, in relation to a transgenerational time. Transgenerational time, a notion Schwab adopts from indigenous thinking and prophecies,[29] "calculates not only the place of the present generation in the history of colonial fracture but also this generation's responsibility for future generations".[30] Therefore, the notion of transgenerational (human) time points towards both the past and future.

Midnight Sun also ties the ecological degradation of Sápmi to the history and transgenerational memory of Swedish-Sámi relations, or of "treating the Sámi for 400 years as trash" (episode two). The series establishes a strong connection between Sweden's (and implicitly other Nordic countries') colonial history and the ecological devastation of Sápmi caused by the Swedish mining industry, as well as by its nuclear colonization by Western powers. This strategy of tying the environmental history of Sápmi to the history of colonization makes this series particularly interesting in view of the fact that in the Nordic countries, unlike in the US, the history of colonization – including the centuries-long internal colonization of the indigenous peoples of the North – is still barely recognized in public awareness and not fully a component of official cultural narratives and national memory.[31]

Trash as metaphor

Trash functions in the series both metaphorically and literally. In the literal sense, its materiality is not always obvious or palpable. It includes garbage dumps, dirt in the streets, and above all, the destruction of the local ecosystem caused by the mining industry and the invisible radioactivity of the uranium.

As a metaphor, trash serves in *Midnight Sun* primarily as a trope to define the life of the socially marginalised, in this case, less-represented ethnic groups within Swedish and French societies. The Sámi

[29] See G. Schwab, op.cit., pp. 64 nn. Here, Schwab refers to idea of The Seventh Generation, playing "an important role in the prophecies of different Indigenous peoples, most prominently the Lakota and Mohawk" (Ibidem). However, Schwab refers to human generations only. From a posthumanist point of view, it would be desirable to include non-human generations, like animals, into discussing the effects of the nuclear age and nuclear colonialism. On including animals in representations of radioactivity, see B. Mills, *Chernobyl, Chornobyl and anthropocentric narrative*, "International Journal of TV Serial Narratives" 2021, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 5–18.

[30] G. Schwab, op.cit., p. 65.

[31] As Gabriel Kuhn sadly constated: "the majority of people in Sweden – as well as in Finland and, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree, in Norway – simply don't care about the Sámi," G. Kuhn, op.cit., p. VII.

Il. 2. Trash as a metaphor for those marginalized in different postcolonial contexts: Evelina (Maxida Märak), a Sámi woman expelled from the Swedish society, and Nadji (Jérémy Corallo), the son of the Berber-Algerian-French protagonist Kahina, juxtaposed in Kahina's dream (*Midnight Sun*, Episode Eight, screen shot)

are often referred to as trash in the series – mainly by Swedish characters, but also (partly self-ironically, partly as a form of self-flagellation) by the half-Sámi, half-Swedish prosecutor Anders Harnesk. The first time that viewers meet Anders Harnesk – a timid homosexual often scorned by his Swedish colleagues, even those of lower rank: he is seen in a long shot as a tiny figure framed by a huge landfill, from which he appropriates a used stove (Image 1). While he is thereby associated with trash, the series evokes this derogatory stereotype only to undermine it as viewers are increasingly prompted to sympathise with Anders and other Sámi characters. The sibling couple of Eddie and Evelina Geatki, in particular, embody the perception of Sámi as "trash" by the oppressive groups in society: Evelina is treated as if she were trash that can be removed/cleaned up (that is, "simply" killed when her knowledge of the hidden uranium makes the complicit Swedes feel uncomfortable), while Eddie works as a cleaner at a local restaurant and in the mine, and is verbally abused as "Lapp trash" by Swedes.

Trash as a metaphor for marginalized ethnic groups is also relevant to the French postcolonial context evoked in the series, embodied by Kahina and her son's Berber-Algerian origin and thus their hybrid ethnic identities. In one of the first scenes in the first episode, we see Kahina's rejected teenage son Nadji (Jérémy Corallo) searching for his mother in Paris; he enters the corridor of the tenement house where Kahina lives, and as he is shown in a long shot walking through the gate, he is juxtaposed in one frame (highlighted through an additional framing by the jambs) with garbage bins standing in the street. The use of trash as a metaphor for those who are marginalised and excluded – in different cultural contexts – is confirmed by the series' conclusion, in which Kahina dreams about Evelina (the Sámi woman expelled from society) and Nadji (the son Kahina rejected) standing next to each other (Image 2). Thus, trash also functions in the series to connote the suppressed, "thrown out" from consciousness – not only individual but also collective consciousness. Waste generated by the wealthy and powerful functions as the western world's id (in psychoanalytical terms), as excretion that must be disposed of somewhere else in order not to poison those who produce it.

As Harrow observes in his analysis of African cinema, "trashed lives" and "forgotten histories" are depicted in these films "only because of the belief that the depiction of it will serve to enable a change, an ascent, to become possible."[32] In other words, it is about "validating those people, those cultural artifacts, considered trash by dominant political and aesthetic discourses."[33] *Midnight Sun* undoubtedly has similar goals – both on the level of the plot and aesthetics, and on the

[32] K.W. Harrow, op.cit., p. 2.

[33] Ibidem, p. 3.

level of production, engaging several Sámi actors and shooting on location in Kiruna and other parts of Sápmi. In narrative and aesthetic terms, one scene is especially worth mentioning. When the female *noaidi* (shaman) played by the Sámi singer and activist Sofia Jannok stays at the police station for an interrogation, three elderly male *noaidi* come close to the building and, standing in front of it, begin chanting in the Sámi tradition of *yoik*, as if expressing their support for the woman (Episode Three). The men wear ordinary clothes, and we only know they are Sámi *noaidi* because Harnesk explains it to Kahina. This scene is shot in an almost documentary manner. The sequence is deliberately slow, interrupting action for nearly two minutes. The three *noaidi* (who never appear anywhere else in the plot) are shown together from the back in a long shot, after which each of them is framed frontally, with the camera slowly zooming in from full shots of their figures to close-ups of their clearly visible faces (Image 3). Sofia Jannok joins their singing, and viewers listen to – and watch – the Sámi *noaidis*' yoiking for about ninety seconds.

Il. 3. Emphasizing the visibility of the Sámi: one of the yoiking *noaidis*, framed frontally as the camera zooms in from a medium close-up to a close-up (*Midnight Sun*, Episode Three, screen shot)

As the example with the yoiking trio/quartet illustrates, *Midnight Sun* produces an aesthetic and narrative that strategically emphasizes the visibility of the Sámi. In this context, it is useful briefly to incorporate *Midnight Sun* into the history of representations of the Sámi on screen. Associating indigenous people with nature has a long tradition in various colonial discourses and also concerns the history of representations of the Sámi. The first Sámi representations date back to the silent film era. As film historian Gunnar Iversen shows, in the 1920s, the so-called "wilderness melodrama," depicting the life and culture of the Sámi people, became a popular genre in the Nordic countries.[34] These films set precedents for later representations of the Sámi in the Nordic cultural imaginations.

What I find important to single out here is that non-Sámi actors typically played the Sámi earlier in Nordic cinemas. The landscapes framing the portrayals of the Sámi were, although wild and majestic, and undoubtedly northern, not the Sápmi (that is, the Arctic and subarctic areas from which the Sámi people originate), but rather lands associated with the nationalized landscapes of the dominant Nordic populations. As Adriana Margareta Dancus argues, "Ethnic Nordics playing Sami people dressed in exotic costumes and living one with nature is […] indicative of the racialisation of the Sami."[35] Moreover, as noted by Dancus, even a film like Nils Gaup's *Pathfinder* (1987), the "first Sámi film" in film history, made by a Sámi director and with

[34] G. Iversen, *Norsk filmhistorie. Spillefilmen 1911–2011*, Oslo 2011, p. 61.

[35] A.M. Dancus, *Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and "The Kautokeino Rebellion"*, "Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media" 2014, vol. 55, no. 1, p. 126.

Il. 4. Challenging norientalist depictions of Sápmi. Despite stunning landscape panoramas, flora and fauna as well as inanimate elements (water, swamps, herbs) can be dangerous or even deadly up close (*Midnight Sun*, screen shot)

Sámi actors in lead roles, did not reflect directly on Sámi identity formation and the structures of racial discrimination.[36]

In recent decades, a process of redefining the landscapes of Sápmi can be observed in Nordic films – from the nationalized nature of the dominating culture to the tundra landscapes typical of Sápmi.[37] Also, an important transition is observed from outsider representations of the Sámi to ones where the Sámi perspective is that of an insider.[38] Both of these aspects apply to *Midnight Sun*. This series is among a group of more recent productions which address the boundaries between Nordic dominant populations and the Sámi directly, showing that stigmatisation and exclusion based on race is deep-rooted in Swedish (in this case) society, shaping the everyday lives of both "ethnic Swedes" and "ethnic others."

Sámi actors have important roles in *Midnight Sun*, including the central role of the murdered Evelina Geatki, played by Maxida Märak, a musician and activist engaged in the Sámi rights movement, whose song drawing on the Sámi *yoik* chanting tradition opens each episode. The series also casts the already mentioned Swedish-Sámi singer and activist Sofia Jannok as the *noaidi* (the wise teacher/local shaman). Moreover, the Sámi are depicted as a varied group – only some of them live close to nature and wear traditional Sámi dress. In contrast, others inhabit the town of Kiruna, have typical jobs and wear modern clothes (like Harnesk or the activist Kristoffer Hanki, played by Oscar Skagerberg).

It is also crucial that the landscape of Sápmi features centrally in the series. The series thus distances itself from the older tradition of disguising non-Sápmi areas of Sweden or Norway as "Lapland."[39] What is more, despite the series' beautiful panoramas and stunning long shots of nature, flora and fauna in *Midnight Sun*, as well as certain inanimate elements (swamps, herbs, water), can be dangerous and even deadly up close (Image 4). At the same time, the permanent daylight of the polar day (midnight sun) is, contrary to popular expectations, profoundly depressing for the female protagonist, Kahina. In this sense, the depiction of nature in *Midnight Sun* challenges idealizing romantic discourses on the Sápmi, typical of so-called "norientalist" discourse on northern nature and landscape in Nordic noir.[40]

[36] Ibidem, p. 127.

[37] To name a few cinematic examples of this transition: *The Kautokeino Rebellion* (*Kautokeino-opprøret*, dir. Nils Gaup, Norway 2009), *Sami blood* (*Sameblod*, dir. Amanda Kernell, Sweden 2016), *Aurora* (dir. Miia Tervo, Finland 2019).

[38] M.K. Mecsei, *Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema*, [in:] *Films on Ice. Cinemas of the Arctic*, eds. A. Westerstahl Stenport, S. MacKenzie, Edinburgh 2016, pp. 72–83.

[39] This term is considered derogatory if used for the whole Sápmi region. However, it is also the name of an administrative region in northern Finland.

[40] Cf. K.T. Hansen, A.M. Waade, op.cit., p. 286.

The strategy of *Midnight Sun* could be called a "politics of visibility:" the series ensures that (some of) the people and places that are invisible in society, on both a local, national and global scale, those things that remain "out-of-sight," are made visible. At the same time, the social invisibility of the Sámi is not simply translated into visibility but rather brought into focus and problematized, that is, the series both makes them visible and brings their invisibility to light.

Thus, *Midnight Sun* acknowledges the value of those perceived and treated like trash in society. This is despite the fact that the series establishes a Sámi character as a killer. It is clearly indicated that Eddie's desperate actions result from helplessness and abuse, the Swedish police having neglected the death of his sister. Eddie's cruel and spectacular murders can thus be seen as a deliberate act of resistance, and apparently the only way for him to be seen and treated seriously by others. The way in which the plot is structured also emphasizes Evelina's resistance: her invisible agency demonstrates itself in Eddie's murderous rampage, and in the end, in the truth about the hidden uranium being revealed. At the same time, Eddie's seeking revenge for Evelina's death can be perceived as a "cleaning activity:" a disposing of those who contaminated the Sápmi and who treated the Sámi as trash, and a cruel reversal of the stereotyping of the Sámi as trash ("it's very dirty here," Eddie says referring to the Swedish-owned mine). An interesting reversal of the clean/dirty dynamics takes place here. As Robert Saunders put it:

> Eddie's murder spree inverts the structural dynamics surrounding the "worth" of Sami and Swedish bodies, engaging in a form of necropolitics that contradict the power structures that make the former "trash" (as they are often referred to in the series), instead turning Swedish bodies into messy, polluting spectacles.[**41**]

Indeed, Swedish bodies are shown as being the first to indulge in consumption (the body as a site of pleasure) and later to cope with the pain of excretion and expenditure (trash, waste). This is quite literally illustrated by Harnesk's 18-year-old daughter, who first indulges in drinking alcohol with friends, and then suffers from violent vomiting the day after (Episode One). The employees of the mine get corrupted in an analogous way (the pleasure of receiving and consuming money), after which they go through the pain of hiding the secret (Sparen's son gets killed, they kill Evelina). Finally, they pay with their own bodies for what they did, the majority of them ending up dead.

Most importantly, the social position and identity of Eddie and Evelina, as well as other Sámi characters, is renegotiated concerning negative stereotypes about the Sámi (both as "*Naturfolk*" and as "trash"), against which *Midnight Sun* depicts them as humans whose lives are grossly impacted by these stereotypes and mistreatment by oppressive parts and structures of society.

[**41**] R.A. Saunders, op.cit., p. 203.

Translating hyperobjects into televisual crime storytelling

However, the function of trash in *Midnight Sun* is not limited to being a metaphor for neglected humans and discriminative power structures in human society. Waste also functions in very literal, although not necessarily material, ways. As I will now demonstrate, the series reveals the working and nonhuman agency of "hyperobjects."

In his book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013),[42] Morton presents his "speculative-realist" theory of hyperobjects, inspired by Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology.[43] The term "hyperobject" was coined to define a special kind of waste emblematic of the age of "the Great Acceleration," which (according to Morton and others[44]) started in 1945 with the first nuclear bomb test (Trinity test), and in which "the geological transformation of Earth by humans increased by vivid orders of magnitude."[45] This era is related to the concept of the Anthropocene, coined to mark "an intertwining of geological Earth time and human history," suggesting that "the ten to twelve millennia of the Holocene is followed up by the accelerated version of human impact on the planet."[46]

In *Midnight Sun*, the Anthropocene is literally envisioned as being connected to the human-induced destruction of the geological structures of the Earth, epitomized by the narratively central iron mine in Kiruna. Visually, the accelerated geological transformation of the terrain is illustrated in an intense scene when prosecutor Burlin hallucinates under the influence of poisonous herbs (Episode One). While walking in the streets of Kiruna, he suddenly sees and hears the ground around him cracking, and when he turns towards the mine, now visible in a long shot in the background, the Earth hastily collapses in front of him, opening up to form a huge cleft (Image 5). The opening movement of the ground comes from the direction of the mountain where the mine is located, and it also looks as if the large chimney atop it was exploding. When we consider this scene from the perspective of the series as a whole, it becomes clear that it implies an existing relationship between the mine, the hidden uranium and Burlin.

Il. 5. Visualizing the Anthropocene: geological Earth and human history intertwined as Kiruna's streets crack and the mine explodes in an intense hallucinatory scene (*Midnight Sun*, Episode One, screen shot)

In the following, I will show how the series illustrates both the mining industry and radioactive waste as hyperobjects. I will also argue that the position of the Sámi in Swedish society as depicted in the series, and how some of the murders are conducted by Eddie, reveal

[42] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis – London 2013.
[43] G. Harman, *Traktat o przedmiotach*, transl. M. Rychter, Warszawa 2013.
[44] See J. Parikka, *Anthropocene*, [in:] *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. R. Braidotti, M. Hlavajova, London – New York 2018, p. 52. Cf. J.R. McNeill, P. Engelke, *The Great Acceleration. An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*, Cambridge, MA – London, 2014.
[45] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 5.
[46] J. Parikka, op.cit., p. 51. The concept of the Anthropocene was first suggested by the chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000.

the working of hyperobjects. The Sámi are portrayed as exceptionally aware of the ways the slow (in human terms) ecological violence, such as carbon emissions or radioactivity, works because, as the series suggests, they have been exposed to the impact of a kind of a hyperobject for centuries – the oppression and "poisoning" of their lives and culture by the dominant Swedish culture.

It is striking that each of the murders committed by Eddie seems carefully designed to juxtapose the human victim with a nonhuman being or entity, be it a predatory animal (wolf, bear), a chemical substance (toxic plant, water) or a machine (helicopter, train, rescue shelter). For example, the victim of the murder opening Episode One dies attached to a helicopter's rotor blade; the next victim is chained naked to rocks in the tundra and killed by a pack of wolves; Burlin becomes seriously ill and dies having been poisoned by two rare herbs; a man named Elmén dies after being chained to railways and run over by a train; Sparen is killed in a manner that recalls the skinning of a bear. In the final episode, all the remaining accomplices to Evelina's killing die, together with Eddie, trapped in a rescue shelter inside a mine as rising waters fill the shelter through holes purposefully drilled by Eddie.

These murders, intentionally staged as a spectacle and thus addressing an audience, are an act of revenge for the mistreatment and brutal murder of Evelina. But they are more than just a means of retaliation. Eddie's murders also reveal a deeper structural injustice permeating society both on the human-to-human level (Swedish/Sámi relations) and on the level between the human and nonhuman. The murders communicate, both to their victims and to those who are meant to feel shocked upon discovering them (the police, the community of Kiruna and us, viewers), that people "have entered a new phase of history in which nonhumans are no longer excluded or merely decorative features of their social, psychic, and philosophical space."[47] The way Eddie's murders are staged represents a "flat ontology,"[48] according to which there is hardly any difference between an animal or a thing and a human being. Some of the murders even demonstrate that humans are only an element of the food chain (and therefore a natural victim for a predator), as well as that the technology that humans have created (like the helicopter or train) eventually leads to their own annihilation. This brings us to the role of the hyperobject in *Midnight Sun*.

By the end of Episode Three, the Sámi *noaidi* played by Jannok seems to be aware of a nonhuman agent behind the events; she gives the following hint to prosecutor Harnesk: "the one you're looking for is invisible, like a cleft. Look for an edge." On the level of human society, the invisibility she mentions refers to Eddie's and the Sámi's social erasure. However, at the centre of the story is an invisible object that, although hinted at in Episode One by the "cleft" opening up in front of the hallucinating Burlin, is only revealed to the investigators and

[47] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 22. [48] Ibidem, p. 14.

viewers near the end of the story (in the next to last episode): the hidden uranium. This radioactive waste is, in fact, the primary catalyst for the events that unfold in the series. This includes both the murders committed by Eddie and the circumstances that lead to Eddie's bloody acts, that is, Evelina's death one year earlier and the hiding of the uranium in the mine ten years earlier.

Thus, although on a basic level the criminal plot is about finding out "whodunit" (that is, which of the human characters is behind the murders), the investigation leads to deeper insights regarding both the Sámi's position in society and the workings of hyperobjects. Retrospectively, the scope of the harmful influence of the invisible uranium on ordinary people and their actions (receiving bribes, lying to and killing each other), social relations, bodies and mental state (lack of a sense of safety) becomes apparent. Importantly, as Morton argues, hyperobjects are agents: "they are demonic in that through them causalities flow like electricity."[49] Because uranium functions in the series as the primary catalyst of the causal course of events, it demonstrates its (invisible) agency.

Hyperobjects radically displace humans from their self-elevated (anthropocentric) position,[50] making us realize we are always already inside them, "like Jonah in the Whale."[51] Some of the qualities Morton regards as characteristic of hyperobjects, such as viscosity, nonlocality, and temporal undulation,[52] are foregrounded in *Midnight Sun*.

The viscosity of hyperobjects means that, like chemical toxins and radioactive waves, they not only tightly surround and stick to everything connected to them, they also penetrate our (as well as nonhuman) bodies: "They are all over me. They are me. […] I can see data on the mercury and other toxins in my blood."[53] This feature makes them both near and uncanny in relation to us as humans because it leads to a radical state of alienation caused by the loss of a sense of safety at home, in public spaces, and even in our own bodies.[54] In *Midnight Sun*, one of Eddie's first victims, police officer Burlin, dies due to poisoning from two toxic plants he was unconsciously exposed to over a longer period of time. As we later learn (Episode Four), Burlin consumed the toxins in his tea both at home and while at work. The poison thus slowly permeated his private space, the space of his professional occupation, and the realm of his body.

The viscosity of hyperobjects is invisible and undiscoverable: it only manifests itself through symptoms, like the effects of global warming or the damage to cells caused by exposure to radioactivity,

[49] Ibidem, p. 29.
[50] Ibidem, p. 17.
[51] Ibidem, p. 20.
[52] Two other features of hyperobjects Morton discusses are "phasing" and "interobjectivity." T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*
[53] Ibidem, p. 28.
[54] A. Barcz, *Przedmioty ekozagłady. Spekulatywna teoria hiperobiektów Timothy'ego Mortona i jej (możliwe) ślady w literaturze*, "Teksty Drugie" 2018, vol. 2, p. 78.

resulting in cancer. In *Midnight Sun*, the viscosity of the radioactive waste hidden in the mine can also be understood as something that permeates social relations in the local community – something that "haunts" the social and psychic sphere,[55] but remains invisible itself. It is thus indirectly a hyperobject – understood both as the hidden uranium and the poisoning treatment of the Sámi by the dominant culture – that prompts Eddie to commit the series of murders, depriving inhabitants of their sense of safety. At the same time, the series in no way absolves humans of accountability; on the contrary, it reveals human power and interests as the origins of violence, both against the Sámi and in terms of ecological violence.

Eddie's acts translate the invisible and long-standing workings of the hyperobject into something that is visible, spectacular and shocking, and immediate, and thus adjusted to human temporality and to the medium of television drama. Thereby, hyperobjects are made more understandable in quotidian human terms. But the story in *Midnight Sun* also reflects in more subtle ways on the temporality specific to hyperobjects. Apart from the already mentioned slow-motion toxicity,[56] the temporality of hyperobjects is, according to Morton, an "always-already" one: hyperobjects existed long before we realised, but because they are undiscoverable through human senses like sight or taste, we only discover them later through the symptoms their long-term operations may cause. In *Midnight Sun*, the always-already of the uranium manifests itself through its role as the primary catalyst for the events in the series, including those preceding the action. We could even think of all the radioactivity on Earth as a hyperobject of which the uranium is only a fractional manifestation. The *noaidi* played by Jannok seems to be aware of this kind of temporality. At one point, she says to Kahina, using characteristic metaphorical language (and answering Kahina's question if there is a storm on the way): "The storm has already come." The always-already of the hyperobject and its agency is also reflected in the structure of the plot: the uranium's existence is not discovered until near the end of the series.

The temporality of hyperobjects, like that of plastic, styrofoam or radioactivity, outlasts considerably the length of a human life. By the strategy of combining non-anthropocentric insights with reflections on the Sámi/Swedish boundary in *Midnight Sun*, the temporal working of the hyperobject outscaling the length of human life (at the end of the series we learn that the uranium will remain radioactive for the next 35,000 years) is paralleled with the century-long poisonous mistreatment of the Sámi by the dominant Swedish culture. This protracted poisoning of relations, and the transgenerational memory of them ("purges have been ongoing for 400 years" [Episode Eight, Eddie's manifesto]), is underscored several times in dialogues, for instance, when a man pretending to be a shaman explains to Kahina how the poisonous plants

[55] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 29. [56] R. Nixon, op.cit., p. 3.

that killed Burlin work: it "take[s] time. Like Swedes doing this against the Sámi. Poison them a little every day" (Episode Four).

According to Morton, capitalism, with its consumerist ideology (supposedly meeting the consumer's demands), only generates more hyperobjects.[57] In *Midnight Sun*, this capitalist logic is embodied by the French government and, more precisely, its security services (representing the political and military power of France), bribing Swedish miners into secretly hiding highly toxic waste, as well as by the various financial interests surrounding the iron mine in Kiruna. As revealed in an independent report from a geological investigation of the area, the scope of the planned relocation of the town is bigger than necessary because of the monetary interests that different companies have in moving Kiruna. In a fashion similar to the workings of a hyperobject as described by Morton, and following the hyperobject-generating logic of capitalism, the mine is referred to in the series as "Mother," that is, as a life-giver, because it creates workplaces in Kiruna, but in the end it also manifests itself a nonhuman life-taker,[58] as the scene with miners imprisoned in the inundating rescue shelter forcefully illustrates.

Televisual aesthetics of hyperobjects

Midnight Sun's aesthetic hallmarks are smooth aerial shots of stunning polar landscapes with vast tundra vegetation, lakes, giant mountains, and subarctic fauna. However, what is visible on the surface and in spectacular panoramic shots is undermined by what is invisible, or visible only upon closer inspection, represented by the corridors of the mine running under the streets of Kiruna and ultimately by the hidden uranium – the uncanny radioactive waste.

Reflecting on aesthetics in the age of hyperobjects, Morton observes:

> Recognition of the uncanny nonhuman must, by definition, first consist of a terrifying glimpse of ghosts, a glimpse that makes one's physicality resonate (suggesting the Latin *horreo*, I bristle): as Adorno says, the primordial aesthetic experience is goose bumps […]. Yet this is precisely the aesthetic experience of the hyperobject, which can only be detected as a ghostly spectrality that comes in and out of phase with normalised human spacetime.[59]

The experience of horror in *Midnight Sun* is delivered to viewers primarily through immediate and spectacular violence, in accordance with the conventions of the Nordic noir crime drama, through the extreme brutality of the murders committed by Eddie and the many macro-sounds and close-ups of details (like the sound of Carnot's head

[57] However, as Morton also observes, capitalism cannot be regarded as the only economic and political system responsible for the production of hyperobjects. Consider, for instance, Soviet and Chinese carbon emissions. See T. Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, New York 2016, p. 23.

[58] Cf. R.A. Saunders, op.cit., p. 204.

[59] T. Morton, 2013, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 169.

being torn off or the heavily mutilated hands and other body parts of Evelina's killer). The terrifying effect (and affect) of the atrocities is enhanced by editing, sound effects, non-diegetic music and other cinematic means. On the level of the crime plot, the recognition of the uncanny – induced in the inhabitants of Kiruna and viewers – derives from the knowledge that an unknown murderer is "among us." At the end, when the murderer is identified, and the mystery solved, viewers are offered a form of relief. However, in accordance with the logic of the hyperobject, the uncanny feeling does not disappear simply because the murderer has been identified. The uranium, as well as the spectralizing forces that have produced it, is still there and will remain radioactive for the next 35,000 years, whether it is moved somewhere else or not.

When discussing the role of the uncanny in *Midnight Sun*, it is significant to note that Evelina is depicted as a ghost. Apart from two retrospectives (in which she is still alive), viewers see her after her death as a product of Eddie's imagination. However, it is crucial that the first few times we see Evelina, we have no idea that she is a ghost; rather, we might believe that, despite what everyone in the community thinks, she is alive and hiding in Eddie's house. In this way, the uncanny in *Midnight Sun* serves not only to make us feel scared, but to reveal the processes behind the production of the hyperobjects and the spectralization of some groups and individuals in society (the long-lasting poisonous relations as a hyperobject). Thus, for viewers, Evelina is not uncanny – she is only uncanny from the perspective of those inhabitants who have neglected, marginalized, and eventually spectralized her (literally: made her a ghost). She haunts them, both as a guilty conscience and as an actual threat they cannot see, but the effects of whose actions they experience on, and inside, their own bodies through Eddie's revenge.

As Morton argues, hyperobjects are "changing human art and experience (the aesthetic dimension)." Our task is to "abolish the idea of the possibility of a metalanguage that could account for things while remaining uncontaminated by them."[60] Analysing examples of post-nuclear-catastrophe literature, Anna Barcz writes that "hyperobject escapes the subject of cognition, and is, therefore, an alien object that contaminates language."[61] Barcz outlines a certain type of postnuclear aesthetics. Some scholars investigating literature, visual arts and film thematizing nuclear catastrophes (Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Chernobyl, Fukushima) have postulated the emergence of a necessity to depict or write about these events in new ways, as if the old means were insufficient.[62]

Is there a special language or aesthetics in *Midnight Sun* produced by the subject of radioactive waste? A comparison with the

[60] Ibidem, p. 2.
[61] A. Barcz, op.cit., p. 80 (translation A.E.M.).
[62] Ibidem, p. 81. See I. Boruszkowska, K. Glinianowicz, A. Grzemska, P. Krupa (eds.), *Po Czarnobylu. Miejsce katastrofy w dyskursie współczesnej humanistyki*, Kraków 2017.

recent US-UK miniseries *Chernobyl* (2019), about the events leading to the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl in 1986 and the following clean-up efforts, could help us answer this question. One striking difference is that while *Chernobyl* highlights the spectacular, and thereby visible and immediate aspects of nuclear catastrophe and radioactivity (the explosion, the rescue, burnt skin, sickness, death, and the heroic clean-up efforts by ordinary people), *Midnight Sun* reveals, as my analysis has attempted to demonstrate, the complex, though much less spectacular ways in which hyperobjects operate, only indirectly translating their temporal working and effects into the crime plot. Also, as Yulija Komska observed, *Chernobyl* aims at strongly confining time, and as a result turns "what [Svetlana] Alexievich calls 'the catastrophe of time' (in reference to Chernobyl's defiance of simple event-type chronology) into a neat circle, from 1988 to 1986 and back."[63] *Midnight Sun*, on the contrary, combines human time (individual and transgenerational) with non-human, unfamiliar timescales. Moreover, *Chernobyl* is a historical drama and thereby the depicted events might seem like part of the distant past, especially to younger viewers. *Midnight Sun* makes the subject of radioactivity and ecological oppression highly topical by combining it with the socially realistic treatment of the Swedish-Sámi topic, as well as by highlighting transnational, global and planetary interconnections.

Importantly, *Midnight Sun* situates the current ecological destruction of Sápmi, and the planetary ecological crisis more generally, within longer socio-historical processes related to the colonial histories of the dominant and minoritized groups. While engaging viewers emotionally over many hours through its highly spectacular serial plot, the series reimagines human history and the environmental history of Sápmi from an eco-critical and non-anthropocentric perspective, showing that it is impossible to separate 'nature' from 'culture.' *Midnight Sun* narratively and aesthetically enmeshes the unspectacular (here even literally invisible) aspects of a human-induced ecological crisis with a high-octane crime plot, thereby bringing different kinds of invisibility (the social erasure of the Sámi; the invisible and long-term workings of hyperobjects) into focus and revealing their provenance, operating mechanisms and effects. It also encourages us to include an under-explored tradition of indigenous thinking and sensing when reflecting on ecological crisis.

However, there is yet another aspect crucial to *Midnight Sun* that positions this series as an outstanding work in the way it renders the slow processes of ecological crisis and the working of hyperobjects within the medium of serial television drama: its treatment of light. The importance of light, suggested by the very title of the series, rests upon the use of natural light as a crucial aesthetic, as well as a narrative and symbolic tool. As I have argued, this Arctic noir TV drama

[63] Y. Komska, op.cit., p. 1377.

insists on the impossibility of staying outside the hyperobject, and this impossibility is symbolized by the all-permeating and never-ending daylight. As Morton writes: "[l]ight itself is the most viscous thing of all since nothing can surpass its speed."[64] Depicted in *Midnight Sun* as viscous, penetrating bodies and minds, and obscuring rather than revealing things, its aesthetics embodies the qualities of a hyperobject.

Through its incorporation of light, *Midnight Sun* offers new aesthetic qualities if compared to the language of classical Nordic noir. As Waade and Hansen noted,

> [t]he settings and the landscapes in the series introduce new features to the locative vocabulary of Nordic noir. The darkness and gloomy settings of *The Killing* and *The Bridge* are appended with open, vast landscapes in bright colours and majestic mountains, altogether covering the treasure as well as the threat to the society and the mines.[65]

Aesthetically, *Midnight Sun* seems to combine two traditions in the treatment of light. On the one hand, its use of daylight situates it within the long tradition of the artistic use of natural light in Scandinavian cinema.[66] Aligning *Midnight Sun* with this tradition serves to brand this Arctic noir as 'Nordic.' However, another tradition is clearly at stake here as well: the tradition of what we may call "nuclear aesthetics."

As opposed to the local people, who are used to the midnight sun and no longer notice the permanent daylight, for Kahina, a visitor from outside (and from the south), this light exerts a deleterious influence on her mental condition. Instead of making things more visible for her, it only enhances their obscurity (such as when she gets exhausted and dizzy because the light makes it impossible for her to sleep, or when she cannot see anything on her computer screen because of the light). Light as something that obscures and blinds rather than reveals is a recurring trope in post-nuclear catastrophe literature and visual arts:

> A constant negotiation between light and darkness […] is specific to nuclear catastrophe. Nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki released the light hidden in the atom, which, once freed, instead of illuminating, was dazzling, making cognition impossible.[67]

In *Midnight Sun*, the invisible, or rather, the apparently transparent, light gains materiality and viscosity, revealing the hyperobject at work without us noticing it until we (or, Kahina) begin(s) to show symptoms, or, to reference its indexical relation, "like the footprints of

[64] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 32.
[65] K.T. Hansen, A.M. Waade, op.cit., p. 285.
[66] "The idea of natural Nordic light achieved a cultural and aesthetic high point in the celebrated luminescence of Sven Nykvist's cinematography for Ingmar Bergman, demonstrated in classics such as *Through a Glass Darkly* (*Såsom i en spegel,* 1961) and *Persona* (1966)," see A. Westertahl Stenport, *Lukas Moodysson's "Show Me Love"*, Seattle 2012, p. 26.
[67] A. Brylska, *Katastrofa, której (nie) zobaczysz. O wizualności nuklearnego kresu*, [in:] *Po Czarnobylu. Miejsce katastrofy w dyskursie współczesnej humanistyki*, eds. I. Boruszkowska, K. Glinianowicz, A. Grzemska, P. Krupa, Kraków 2017, p. 143 (translation A.E.M.).

an invisible person walking across the sand."[68] As the plot develops, the light sticks to Kahina and everything around her. She experiences growing confusion and alienation: she is no longer someone from "outside" who can remain separate from the world to retain distance and "objectivity" towards the reality she is investigating (the "cold blood" of a policewoman, or the impossible metaposition beyond the hyperobject[69]). She hallucinates and becomes physically and mentally drained, and, as she admits to Harnesk, she is scared of something invisible that she feels is surrounding her. Indeed, when we realize we live inside hyperobjects, our "situatedness is now a very uncanny place to be,"[70] and our feeling of safety is radically reduced.

Light is also a crucial idea in a poem Evelina writes after she learns about the ecological crime committed by the miners, and which after her death inspires Eddie's murders. The final episode of *Midnight Sun* opens with a quotation from the poem, its final lines saying: "You who are not yet killed – even the deepest darkness will not protect you from my light; you not yet killed who have poisoned the soul and hope of the nation" [translation A.E.M.]. Again, these lines can be read metaphorically (and anthropocentrically) – light as contrasted with darkness, the Sámi with the oppressive Swedes, good with evil, Evelina with her murderers. But they can also be read non-anthropocentrically, as if the hyperobject was speaking itself, putting words to its own viscosity and letting humans know that there is nothing outside of it, no rescue shelter, and that its poisonous light will penetrate all bodies to the bones. This all-penetrating quality of hyperobjects is implied by one of the final images, showing the obstetric sonogram of a foetus, the unborn child of the now drowned Kimmo, visible on his smartphone, and clenched in his hand in the scene showing the miners drowning in the rescue shelter.

Tidiness vs doing away with "away"

In *Midnight Sun*, the actions of the French authorities and Swedish miners (hiding the uranium in the mine located in Sápmi) represents an approach to ecology that Morton calls "tidiness," an approach that does not take into consideration the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things on the planet. However, the rich West's nuclear waste being disposed of in the Arctic town of Kiruna reveals not only the hierarchical global power structures involved but also exactly this interconnectedness.

Morton writes that the notion of tidiness is "as if ecology were about rearranging the furniture," "thinking in terms of living rooms."[71] Morton compares this attitude, exemplified in his analysis by Margaret Thatcher's "green" policies, to Hitler's way of thinking: "Hitler proposed that the destiny of Germany was to increase and purify its *Lebensraum*

[68] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 90.
[69] Ibidem, p. 2.
[70] Ibidem, p. 5.
[71] T. Morton, *Ecology Without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA 2007, pp. 109–110.

(«living space»)."[72] Just as separating races and ethnicities from one another is impossible (as embodied in *Midnight Sun* by both Kahina and Anders, as well as by the ethnically hybrid community living in and around Kiruna), so is dividing the globe into separate "living rooms," in one of which you can store life-threatening nuclear waste while keeping another safe and clean.

In the series' last episode, Kahina demands from the French intelligence agent Alain Gruard (Olivier Gourmet) that the uranium be removed from the mountain and taken away from Sweden, otherwise, she will disclose publicly that the French government was responsible for hiding the uranium in Kiruna. She implicitly suggests the toxic waste should be taken back to France and stored legally. However, is this even possible? Let me quote Morton again:

> A good example of viscosity would be radioactive materials. The more you try to get rid of them, the more you realise you can't get rid of them. They seriously undermine the notion of "away." Out of sight is no longer out of mind because if you bury them in Yucca Mountain, you know that they will leach into the water table. And where will that mountain be 24.1 thousand years from now?[73]

Kahina's demand remains without an answer. It is up to the viewer to choose either a comforting ending (the uranium will certainly be tidied up) or the uncertainty of an open ending. The series offers viewers a very condensed version – translated both into the human scale, that of everyday life and into the conventions of the crime drama – of the order of things described in the passage quoted above from Morton. As I have shown, it is exactly the viscosity of both uranium and of the toxic Swedish-Sámi relations the radioactivity metaphorically stands for, that propels the action. The hyperobject sticks to everyone and everything, leaching into the "water table," so to say, even if you encase it in concrete and bury it under a mountain. Its workings remind humans that they are deeply "embedded in earthly reality,"[74] a realization that, according to Morton, characterizes the age of the Great Acceleration.

This embeddedness is what the scene with Eddie drowning together with Evelina's murderers in the rescue shelter deep inside the mountain powerfully illustrates. The association with an ersatz motherly womb this scene evokes[75] can be seen literally in the light of the earthly embeddedness of humans the series illuminates and which the Sámi characters stand for. In Greek mythology, Gaia stands both for the Earth and the primordial Mother; she is also the mother of Uranus, the god of the sky (after which uranium is named). The drowning scene in the mine does not simply present "the power of nature;"[76] it foregrounds a human-nonhuman interconnectedness from which

[72] Ibidem, p. 110 (original emphasis).
[73] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 36.
[74] Ibidem.
[75] See R.A. Saunders, op.cit., p. 204.
[76] Cf. Ibidem.

humans cannot escape, as Kimmo's unrealised plan to escape with his partner the same evening suggests.

The realisation of our earthly embeddedness reaches us when hyperobjects "strike back." As Morton emphasizes, the realization, or discovery, that humans are firmly embedded in earthly reality "is made precisely through our advanced technology and measuring instruments, not through worn peasant shoes and back-to-Nature festivals."[77] In *Midnight Sun*, this technology is epitomised in the geological investigation of Kiruna mentioned earlier (making us realize what is invisible) and in the obstetric image of the foetus (making visible what would remain invisible without technology). In this context, it is telling that Eddie turns out not simply to be a cleaner and does not simply represent Sámi as "*Naturfolk*," but is also linked to technology: he demonstrates an advanced understanding of technology (he knows how to stop the pumps in the mine to flood it), and we learn that he studied engineering at the technological university in Luleå. Finally, the fact that the mine transforms from a life-giver (mother) to a life-taker (death)[78] is exactly what reveals the logic of the hyperobject.

Kimmo's last words as he is drowning, directed to Eddie, are "I apologize" – reflecting not only his shame and guilt for his participation in the murdering of Evelina and mistreatment of the Sámi but implicitly also for the ecological sin he committed. This points to yet another understanding of the hyperobject. As Barcz emphasizes with reference to Morton,[79] hidden beneath the surface of shame, the concept of hyperobject links the end of the world to the Anthropocene: the relationship of hyperobjects to humanity, itself a dangerous instrument of ecological destruction.

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[77] T. Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and…*, p. 36.
[78] Cf. R.A. Saunders, op.cit., p. 204.
[79] A. Barcz, op.cit., pp. 86–87.

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