From Acidified Groves to Virtual Mountains. The Continuum of Utopian Landscape Types in Twenty-First-Century Nordic Art.

Hilja Roivainen

I argue in this article that, firstly, a selected case of Nordic painters: Anna Tuori (FI, 1976), Petri Ala-Maunus (FI, 1970) and John Kørner (DK, 1967), problematise in their twenty-first-century paintings the historically utopian topoi of landscapes, such as the paradise and Arcadia. This is done by repeating the *topoi's* landscape iconography. Secondly, the paintings renew this iconography by mixing it with dystopian moods and elements, such as the emotive colour moods and visual signs from the contemporary living world. For example, painters use ironically intertextual references to various clichéd meanings and forms of consumption, that have been attached to the utopian landscape types, such as, the leisure industries' marketing imagery. The utopian Arcadian, pastoral or sublime landscape types are translated in these paintings into simulacra of imagined reality (Baudrillard 1994), and turned into mere aesthetic triggers, that formally compose the painting. Often abstract marks or patches and colour moods contrast the presented utopian landscape views, and thus dialectically confuse or distance the spectator from the utopian scene. Thirdly, the landscape paintings formulate a hermeneutical understanding of the global world and exemplify philosopher Ernst Bloch's (1986) concept of a wishful landscape. I claim that what makes these paintings, in a contradictory way, ecocriticism, is that they contemplate nature aesthetically and emotionally. Through an iconographical-intellectual historical analysis I define the aporic and ecocritical role that these painted utopian–dystopian landscapes take. I build my interpretation and analyse the ideas of utopian landscapes, from a Marxist perspective on landscape art, in the light of the research by human geographer Denis E. Cosgrove (1998), literary scholar Raymond Williams (2016), philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977; 1986) and cultural theorist Malcolm Miles (2014). The themes pointed out by Cosgrove (1998 and 2008): the individual perspective, the emotional understanding of the world or self, both in European colonialist and romantic thought, and "the landscape way of seeing" are visible in the discussed paintings.

1. Utopian Landscape for Consumers

The living world, surrounding geographical environments, and the societal changes caused by global capitalism are reflected in twenty-first-century Nordic art. These themes are visible in the works by the following Nordic painters: Anna Tuori (FI, 1976), Petri Ala-Maunus (FI, 1970) and John Kørner (DK, 1967). I have chosen paintings from the above artists, as the object of my study, because as native Nordic citizens, these painters have formed an emotional tie and narrative to their respective countries since childhood and have developed into actors in the global art world and globalised societies. Global capitalism can be understood according to the definition of Sociologist Ilkka Kauppinen (2012: 547) as the "Transnationalisation of production networks", a phenomenon that has rapidly changed the structures of twenty-first-century societies. Thus, these paintings from the 2000s

exemplify the discourse between the local and global regions (Jones and Olwig 2008; Eller 2008). Doreen Massey's sense of multilocal place-experience (Häyrynen 2020:7) is communicated in the paintings through atmospheric colour moods and landscape elements.

In the article, I first contextualise these contemporary landscapes, through recent art criticism, and other similar Nordic painters of the utopian landscape: Astrid Nondal, Andreas Eriksson and Eggert Pétursson. I evaluate the paint practices applied by these artists. I then discuss briefly in section 2, the history of utopian landscape types and their social criticism. I analyse the visual conception of dystopian-utopian landscapes presented by these painters in relation to the history. In section 3, I further evaluate the eco-critical tones these problematised utopian landscapes suggest. I examine the paintings in the context of the cultural theorist Malcolm Miles' (2014) concept of Eco-Aesthetic and Marxist nature philosophy, as discussed by Ernst Bloch (1986: vol. 1–3) in his utopian philosophy. Finally, in Section 4, I conclude the article with some further remarks about the relation of twenty-first-century utopian landscapes to Marxists societal critique and ecocriticism.

In my view, by repeating the traditional iconography of utopian landscape types, and through the colour moods, the paintings exemplify the idea that landscapes include utopian thought. The article evaluates, from the perspective of a Marxist critique of colonialism, in what ways the paintings problematise utopian landscapes and display an ecocritical, aesthetic appreciation of nature as something unknown or nostalgic. The article is based on my Ph.D. Art History dissertation project about utopian landscape in the twenty-first-century Nordic painting, that I am currently completing at the University of Turku, Finland.

In summary, I argue in this article that, firstly, the contemporary painters mentioned repeat the traditional iconography of utopian landscapes. Secondly, they renew the utopian types of landscape with dystopian and clichéd elements, such as emotive colour moods, abstract surfaces or gestural brush marks. Thirdly, I suggest that the paintings can be read as a form of ecocriticism that displays a hermeneutical understanding of the idea of a global landscape and an emotional relationship to the local environment. I specifically aim to show in the article, how the colour mood and utopian landscape elements build up this emotional relationship with nature in the studied paintings.

With mood, I mean an expression of an emotional state in the lines of the term *modus* that is based on musical theory and on Nicolas Poussin's writings (Poussin & Jouanny 1911:373–374; Barker 2000: 10–14 and McTighe 1996). *Modus* is the tone or scale of expression of emotions or psychological states (Kuusamo 1996: 218, 220–222). Mood as a word refers also the German term *Stimmung*, as described by Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl, meaning an atmosphere or an

emotional state. It includes the visual perception of space made from distance (*Fernsicht*). (Barasch 2000: 159–160). Drawing from these various definitions, I use the terms mood and colour mood. With the latter, I refer to an atmospheric landscape simplified on the surface of the painting into a colour plane. In my view, the colour areas suggest an atmospheric landscape that reminds real light conditions, such as the sunset yellow or grey light filtered through dark clouds. I see in the studied case the colour mood as one key element of the utopian landscape that displays an environmental emotion.

In her reference to architect Gernot Böhme's writings (2013), M. Christine Boyer in her essay in this volume remarks that the atmosphere in architecture reflect particular sources of imagination. Similarly, these painters depict the atmosphere of imagined or experienced places, or landscapes perceived from popular culture imaginary or history of art. I claim that the paintings reflect the atmosphere of societal change: the world of the Internet, fast opportunities for travel, such as aviation, and the digital revolution of landscape images.

Through an iconographical analysis and an intellectual thought history analysis I attempt to define below the aporic role taken by contemporary painted utopian–dystopian landscapes. I build my interpretation and analyse the ideas of utopian landscapes on the Marxist perspective on landscape art, in the light of the research by human geographer Denis E. Cosgrove (1998), literary scholar Raymond Williams (2016), philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977; 1986) and cultural theorist Malcolm Miles (2014). The themes pointed out by Cosgrove (1998 and 2008): the individual perspective, the emotional understanding of the world or self both in European colonialist and romantic thought and "the landscape way of seeing" are visible in the discussed paintings.

In this article, I use the term *topos* (*topoi* in the plural) to refer to a commonly understood and shared place or location in landscape art, such as the pastoral (Hesk 2007: 362). The term comes from the Greek word *tópos* (*topoi*) meaning a place or location. However, I use *topos* as synonymous with *type*, such as a commonly understood picturesque type, discussed in the history of art as a repeated form (see i.e. Gombrich 2002: 20, 262, 267; Kuusamo 1996: 115–116). *Topos* can also be understood as a habitual manner of presenting the surrounding environment (Curtius 2013: xvii, 242). In my view, the term topos is valid for the discussion of visual representations of utopia (*eu-tópos, ou-tópos* in Greek) and utopian landscapes. As utopian types, I define, for example, Arcadia, paradise, pastoral, sublime, picturesque and the utopian island. From the latter, pastoral and sublime are also modi (modus) and paradise a commonly used motif. These are marked by the iconography of, for example, grove, garden, park, meadow, verdant vegetation, distant blue mountains, and the view of a seascape

or sunlit sky on the horizon. Contemporary works especially depict sublime and picturesque types and mountains, oceans, shores, valleys, meadows and groves. The pictured landscapes are both local and global.

I find that from the perspective of utopian and landscape studies, it is worthwhile to emphasise the fact that the idea of a controlled and cultivated landscape is part of the geography of More's *Utopia*. Since Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), fictive utopias have expressed the desire for and models of a better society and human life. Thomas More's (1964) *Utopia,* a story about a fictive, good, non-existent place in the hemisphere of the Southern seas, is most of all an ideal city and society model, but it is also located in an ideal landscape. In *Utopia*'s cities, for example, every house has a garden (ibid.). Cultivation of nature appears often as a common theme for utopias. Whereas, in the modern twentieth-century anti-utopian novels, such as H.G. Wells' *The Sleeper Awakes* (2005) human invasion over nature is often highlighted. In anti-utopias and dystopias, in other words, stories about nightmarish places, which must also include the huge genre of science fiction novels, nature is often destroyed by human infrastructure or it is presented as being in the middle of the process of destruction (Kumar 2000: 261).

I examine the twenty-first-century paintings of the artists mentioned in relation to the historical ideas of utopian landscape and Cosgrove's (1998) notion of "the landscape as a way of seeing". "The landscape way of seeing" presents a view-based attitude to the world (Cosgrove 1998: xxvii, 1). As Cosgrove (2008: 109) states, "Wilderness, garden and city are repeatedly mapped into the imaginative geography of European nationalism." Here Cosgrove (2008) highlights the link between the idea of a utopian society, colonialism and a landscape way of seeing. Similarly, Williams (2016) and Bloch (1986) have recognised the utopian function of "the landscape as a way of seeing". The studied paintings problematise the historical and utopian "landscape as a way of seeing" by repeating the associated clichéd elements, such as, horizon, distant island, valley, mountains and grove, as well as their related colour moods.

In my view, Cosgrove's definition of utopian landscapes as Arcadia, the pastoral, the sublime and picturesque wildernesses are in line with Ernst Bloch's definition of utopian wishful landscapes. Bloch (1986: 800, 819, 820, 821) defines the elements of wishful utopian landscapes, in addition to the above mentioned, as, for example, Leonardo da Vinci's "[…] dream value of perspective", "[…] the painted gold ground of every moment: peace", a state of "repose" that appears in the background of the Mona Lisa, as the distant mountains of "eternity" in Dante's Paradiso or Giotto di Bondone's *The Flight into Egypt* (1304–06, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua), or as pictorial horizon perspective and

dawn light. As political scientist Vincent Geoghegan (1996: 144) states, Bloch is the foremost "philosopher of utopia" whose key concepts are utopian too. Geoghegan (1996: 145) sees Bloch's concepts as "free-flowing utopian energy" that can appear in multiple cultural forms.

1.1. Contemporary Tendencies in Nordic Landscape Painting

Recent art criticism proves that the artists I have selected for my study reformulate certain types of utopian landscapes, such as the mountain, the island and forest grove of paradise, the sublime or Arcadian landscape, and the horizon and skylight of the pastoral. In the following, I hope to provide some insights into these contemporary utopian landscapes by the three painters.

1.1.1. Petri Ala-Maunus

Art historian Hanna Johansson (2015) recognises the romantic landscape tradition in the paintings of the Finnish artist Petri Ala-Maunus, as depicting "the pure natural landscape beyond human time". Thus, nature as painted by Ala-Maunus is an objectified landscape in a dialogue with the "landscape way of seeing" (Cosgrove 1998).

Ala-Maunus was born in the flat land area of East Bothnia in Finland. He started his career, first by painting sunsets, and then mountainous valleys, seascapes and forests, all representing an idealised utopian landscape, and kitsch subject matter of popular culture, i.e. religious paradise imagery (Ala-Maunus, 2013). Furthermore, with their dialectical utopian–dystopian discourse, Ala-Maunus' landscapes comment on human-nature relationships and problematize the idyllic pastoral in a way that can be called ecocritical. The aesthetic appreciation of nature is questioned by Ala-Maunus as well as the religious kitsch or mass-produced paradise imagery that he refers to in his paintings. Ala-Maunus' semiabstract 2D paintings also recreate the mountainous Arcadia familiar from the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Dutch pastorals and world landscape types (Cosgrove 2008: 26), where different mountains from around the world are composed into one view. Ala-Maunus (2013) describes the reason for the utopian mountain motifs to be the longing for faraway places. Additionally, the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition is present in the paintings: the imagined view over mountains, as a picturesque, sublime, aesthetic, and uplifting vision of beauty. The former Finnish Ateneum Art Museum director Susanna Pettersson further states that Ala-Maunus' painting of the Finnish hill region ('Vaara-Suomi') brings to mind the European Romantic landscape painting, where nature is depicted as enormous in relation to man (Ateneum 2017).

Ala-Maunus (2013) states that the motifs for his paintings emerge from the Hudson River School, the German early nineteenth-century landscape painting of the Düsseldorf School, the kitsch mountainous paradise valley imagery from the Finnish Jehova's witnesses' Watchtower Magazine (*Vartiotorni*) and the paintings regarded as low value in the market, including landscape murals on pizzeria walls. Terrifying moods are combined to these conventional utopian landscape types that I shall analyse further in section 2.6.

1.1.2. John Kørner

Equally uplifting are the beach scenes of Denmark. Art critic Lars Bang Larsen (2013: 9) states that Danish John Kørner's work is a calculated play with a "[…]formal and chromatic naivism" that is more psychedelic than idyllic. On first glimpse, Kørner's paintings describe in joyful mood a horizontal view over a beach bathed in a Lorrainian golden pastoral sunshine in yellow, white, and orange hues. In Kørner's work, the sun light, seascape, and the mountains mark the pastoral and picturesque landscape types. The signature yellow colour, as a sky or as a background in Kørner's works, represents happiness and sun for the painter (Bjerggaard, Lindholdt Madsen and Rottensten 2016: 6). As Cosgrove (1998: 157) notes, the pastoral golden sunset mood is typical in Claude Lorrain's pastoral and picturesque landscape paintings (see, i.e. *Pastoral Landscape*, 1645 or *Ideal Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, 1663).

Kørner's paintings often contrast various styles and combine abstract, figurative, and fantastical elements (Bjerggaard, Lindholdt Madsen and Rottensten 2016: 24). For Kørner (2018), landscape acts in the main as an image tuner. In art critic Maria Kjær Themsen's (Bjerggaard, Lindholdt Madsen and Rottensten 2016: 9) words, the landscape, natural elements and animals in the paintings often represent an archaic reality. This utopian archaic landscape is contrasted with the dystopian human world symbolised by staffage figures and the elements of modern architecture, such as tunnels or skyscrapers, for example, in the series *Life Attacks You* (2016). Thus, the signs of contemporary culture combine with the pastoral sunlit mood to create a sense of degrading.

Fig.1.1. John Kørner. *Human Architecture.* 2015. Acrylic on Canvas. 150 x 180 cm.

These local landscapes maintain a nostalgic colour mood. Art critic Michael Bank Christoffersen (2013: 111) sees in the paintings' scenic elements a link to Caspar David Friedrich and the romantic landscape painting's concepts of "nature and love". For example, the series of landscapes in *Life Attacks You* (2016), including the painting *Human Architecture* (2015), contain picturesque or sublime landscape elements, such as, the sea, high mountains and a vast sky (Bjerggaard, Lindholdt Madsen and Rottensten 2016: 34).

Nevertheless, for Kørner, a "dialogue" with the community and people's lifestyles is more important than the personal nature sentiment. Kørner attempts to bring the social world to his landscapes instead of romantically merely picturing the self. He uses a variety of "[…]media, processes, and messages" (ibid.) to do so. Kørner describes his art as democratic in the way it "[…]generally appeals to all

people on an intellectual level, and on a basic human level" (ibid.: 112). Kørner's painting practice is in fact largely socially concerned and his paintings refer to contemporary society's problems, such as capitalist production. The landscape thus serves as a form of critique.

1.1.3. Anna Tuori

The seashore, island, and forest grove appear in Finnish painter Anna Tuori's works too. Art critics Saara Hacklin (2011), Mika Hannula (2015), Timo Valjakka (O'Brien: 2015), Barbara O'Brien (2015) and together with my interview with Anna Tuori (2014) have shown that Tuori has examined in her paintings the idea of a utopian landscape.

Art critic Mika Hannula (2015) interviewed Anna Tuori along with four other painters for his study that aimed to examine the various processes of contemporary Finnish painting. In the current economic times, regarding painting as being a way to be in the world, contrasts completely with the capitalist values of productivity (Hannula 2015: 8–9). Tuori responded to Hannula that for her: "[…]the painting also relates to the dream, both to escapism and utopia." (Hannula 2015: 150, transl. Roivainen).

Furthermore, Tuori's paintings connect to the romantic tradition of landscape painting, as the paintings utilise the metaphor of landscape as a mirror of human emotions similar to that implied by the late nineteenth-century Nordic painters. Moreover, Tuori explores the psychology of meeting the dystopian reality through a utopian painting process. The dystopian qualities embedded in Tuori's paintings are also noted by art critic Timo Valjakka (O'Brien: 2015). Valjakka (O'Brien: 2015) describes Tuori's paintings as a mixture of carefully considered expressionist marks constructing the background and the painted landscape space with "menacing or oppressive overtones" and "disjointed" narratives. In the same manner as Kørner, in order to create a psychological effect, Tuori utilises colour mood and places faceless staffage figures in the landscape. Similar use of figures in escapist dystopian-utopian Arcadias are also found, for example, in the Finnish painter Saara Piispa's landscapes.

1.1.4. Fairytale Forest and Meadows

I shall now further contextualise the above presented three painters to the wider phenomenon of utopian landscape painting that is also present in Nordic contemporary art. I analyse now shortly the works of Astrid Nondal, Eggert Pétursson and Andreas Eriksson.

Norwegian Astrid Nondal's paintings illustrate the classical Arcadian paradise in a similar manner than Anna Tuori's. Based on observations and memories, Arcadia is depicted, for example, through the iconography of mountainous valleys, forest groves, flowers, three trunks, and verdant vegetation or foliage. According to art historian Cecile Skeide (2006: 10, 19), Astrid Nondal's paintings suggest the Norwegian national romantic landscape painting of the early nineteenth-century. Nondal's major oeuvre consist of "fantastic forest landscapes" with "evergreen foliage" (2006: 19), such as in *Om Hundre År Er Allting Glemt (In Hundred Years Everything Will Be Forgotten)*. Paintings interpret reality and the known landscape types in an unconventional, even surreal manner, and represent landscape through a personal narrative (Skeide 2006: 10). As Skeide (2006: 19) states, Nondal's "pictorial world" is "fairy-tale" like and related to "storytelling".

Fig.1.2. Astrid Nondal. *Om Hundre År Er Allting Glemt.* 2003. Oil on Canvas. 160 x 230 cm.

Boyer (in this volume) describes how architect Alison Smithson's writings display the "secret garden" quality of fairytales and an Arcadian idyll. Similarly, Nondal's paintings reimagine childhood fairytale forests, such as those pictured by Theodor Severin Kittelsen (1857–1914). As a city dweller in Oslo, with her regular walks in nearby woods, Nondal (2016) discovered the forest as Arcadian source of pictorial imagination.

Nondal's paintings of the 2000s alter Arcadia using surreal and dystopian tones. The imagined illusory nature is combined with perceptible landscape elements that are highlighted with "artificial" colours and composition, such as an extremely verdant forest grove. Often the overly pink or yellow skies transform the otherwise classical landscape into an unusual and unnatural mood (Skeide 2006: 10, 19–20). Likewise, Anna Tuori's paintings alter in dystopian moods these fairy tale aspects of a nostalgic forest landscape that I analyse in the section 2.5.

The subject matter of Icelandic painter Eggert Pétursson's painting is the blossoming period of Icelandic flora, the experience of local environment and globally spread vegetation. Therefore, the paintings recreate the paradisiacal image of a wishful utopia as a verdant land in blossom. These paintings are worth of mentioning as another example of the contemporary Nordic utopian pastoral. Pétursson's floral canvases are a response to the 1980s neo-expressionism as well as conceptual art (Pétursson 2012). Pétursson (2012) considers himself more as a flower painter than a "utopian" landscape painter. Nonetheless, the works are a response to the tradition of western and Icelandic landscape painting. One of the influences on Pétursson is, for example, the Icelandic twentieth-century landscape painter Jóhannes Sveinsson Kjarval (1885–1972). The strong use of colours creates both a merry and threatening atmosphere in the paintings.

Pétursson (2012) states that the starting point for the paintings, that zoom down onto the ground of Iceland, is always a personal experience, and the particularities of a certain geographic topos, a meadow where the flowers grow. The works also observe the actual changes in the Icelandic climate and the delicate nature, such as, moss. With botanical expertise, Pétursson (2015) classifies the topography of Iceland's floral regions into fantastical floral landscapes. Pétursson, however, discusses the botanical idea of national species with irony towards the classification systems. As Pétursson (2012) notes, the Icelandic flowers he paints, are in fact found around the world. Yet his works are filtered with the personal sense and experiences of his local native environment.

Since childhood Pétursson's eyes have wandered along the ground in search of Icelandic flora species in the surroundings of Reykjavík. The botanical illustrations Pétursson has made of Icelandic flora (*Íslensk flora með litmyndum*, Bjarnason, Á.H. 1983 and gouache drawings reprinted in *Flora Islandica*, Pétursson and Bjarnason 2008) are the conceptual basis for the larger flower paintings. These he installs in the manner of minimalist conceptual practice, guiding the audience to look at the painted surface, in his exhibitions.

His art studies at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht and seven years spent in England further encouraged Pétursson to produce conceptual paintings on the botanical theme of Icelandic flora. Pétursson (2012) claims that human beings should learn to adjust to the perspective of flowers to understand their existence. The works of Pétursson that zoom in on the ground highlight this micro perspective and thus increase interest in their protection (Pétursson 2012). The flower-scapes build a painted surface of plants on a map of Iceland's territory that represents a utopian no-where.

Fig.1.3. Eggert Pétursson. *Untitled*. 2006–2007. Oil on Canvas. 195 x 285 cm.

The Swedish visual artist, Andreas Eriksson, pictures the idea of landscape and local environment, in the Pétursson's manner, that is, from the microscopic perspective. The paintings contrast the wide perspective landscapes of Ala-Maunus. Eriksson (2016) too is inspired by Kjarval's Icelandic landscapes. Eriksson translates the moss and soil structures into formal brush strokes (af Petersens 2011). He compares the aesthetic perception of nature with the perception of the paint material's

behaviour. The often dark paintings reflect his living world, observed in daily walks at the Southern Swedish agricultural village of Medelplana by Lake Vänern in Västergötland. Eriksson explores the relationship he builds with his living environment of Kinnekulle; latitude that is familiar to the painter from his childhood and that he has recaptured after a prolonged stay in Berlin.

The tradition of landscape painting is repeatedly mentioned in the critical reviews of Eriksson's work (Hahn Møller 2013, af Petersens 2011, Moderna Museet 2011, Obrist and Birnbaum 2011, Jantjes 2014, Elgin 2014, Badura-Triska 2007, Khan 2013 and Ramos 2014). For example, art critic Inger Marie Hahn Møller (2013, 2017) sees Eriksson's paintings as being successful in the way they unite the metaphorical and perceptional qualities of landscape. The elements of his landscapes are presented conceptually, as well as, formally and technically in the behaviour of the paint materials.

Hahn Møller (2013) claims that Andreas Eriksson's work describes his living sphere as a "bucolic environment with its surrounding nature and isolated relation to the outside world". The term bucolic apparently refers to Eriksson's reflections on the harmonic Arcadia of a peaceful forest.

Through colour moods, Eriksson's paintings transmit the emotions related to human relationship with nature. Art critic Tabish Khan (2013) describes Eriksson's use of light as fantastical. In art critic Eva Badura-Triska's (2007) words, the emotions of calmness are conveyed formally by verticals and/or horizontals in parallel, a reductive use of color often coming close to monochromy, a feeling of vastness of nature, of loneliness. The trees are "heroic" and offer a sense of communion with nature. His paintings represent natural objects as metaphors of human life (Lünsmann 2014).

As in the paintings of the nineteenth-century German romantic Caspar David Friedrich, trees are a recurrent landscape element in Eriksson's paintings too, and they are represented with empathy. In his daily walks, Eriksson reflects why certain branches attract him and why they are related to each other (Obrist and Birnbaum 2011). Eriksson's paintings thus display the nineteenth-century painters' empathetic responses towards the Nordic landscape, emotional moods, such as the aesthetic awe, and the self-reflection imposed by the landscape, yet without transcendental connotations.

Fig.1.4. Andreas Eriksson, *Trädstam (skugga) (Tree trunk, in the shadow)*, 2009. Acrylic and Oil on Canvas. 252 x 235 cm.

The above presented painters communicate emotional experiences of local places and Nordic nature. They picture the forest and meadows as a paradise and the paintings are based on real experiences of nature. I have, however, selected to focus the discussion in the article in the problematisation of the

contemporary environmental relationship. In my view, this comes particularly clearly across in the colour moods and repeated landscape elements in Tuori's, Ala-Maunus' and Kørner's paintings.

1.2. The Moods of Appreciation

In Tuori's, Ala-Maunus' and Kørner's paintings the utopian landscape types and natural elements are reinterpreted especially through colour moods, for example, as monochromatic paint areas. Culturally shared emotional moods are associated with the history of the landscape painting. These moods, as Cosgrove remarks, are familiar from the history of landscape painting, for example, the sublime emotions of awe and terror, the pastoral sensations of harmony, astonishment, an Arcadian tranquillity or the paradisiacal uplifting mood (1998: 86, 158, 160, 232–245; see also Gombrich 2002: 321–322, Rosenblum 1975:218). For instance, Aelbert Jacobsz Cuyp (1620–1691) integrated into his Dutch pastoral scenes the Italian soft sunlight of Claude Lorrain, as well as a crystal sky light in cerulean tones, and the cloud shine, that Bloch (1986) includes in his definition of wishful utopian landscape types.

The twenty-first-century paintings under discussion build a simulacrum of these moods related to Arcadia, the pastoral or the sublime. Painters transform these moods into aesthetic triggers that formally compose the painting. In my view, the dystopian reality is also depicted with colour moods and iconographical elements that point to the problems of contemporary society, such as, the brainwashing narratives of media images. These paintings present the idea of a utopian landscape, for example, as an emotional metaphor for both the imaginary and contemporary global world.

In all the painters' works discussed, the natural world has been pictorially appreciated by means of painting and utopian idealization. The paintings reflect upon the positively valued features in nature: the sense of human connection with the world, and the recognition in our lives that there is a part of nature that is unknowable. These paintings preserve the thought that human beings are part of nature, as in William Morris' utopian aesthetics, for example, as actualised in the garden city landscape in *News From Nowhere* (1890).

The utopian landscape types of pastoral, picturesque, sublime and paradise have become a cliché in art since the twentieth-century modernism and postmodernism. Further, in contemporary art, "landscape painting", does not solely exist on its own as a category as in the history of the landscape genre. Instead, it can be a mixture of abstractions that operate pictorially on several levels. In this case, the landscape paintings function in the manner of modern abstract art, where a single brush

stroke or a layer of colour are independently meaningful. The applied abstract splashes on top of the representational utopian landscape view, often distance the spectator from the viewed scene and create another contextual layer, often with a dystopian, meaning.

The case of these paintings also points out the fact, that landscape is always a linguistic construction. It is a human made concept, thus artificial. The Dutch word *Landschap* originally meant a shared use of land and a constructed idea of nature made by humans. Art historian E.H. Gombrich (2002: 53, 61, 64, 76, 99, 149, 308) reminds us that landscape painting consists of a learned vocabulary and a system of schemata for picturing the world. Art and the construction of an image are based on concepts. The learnt schema and "reactions to the world" guide what is seen in the landscape (Gombrich 2002: 76).

The aesthetic and emotional "landscape way of seeing" is characteristic of landscape art. In other words, the projection of feelings into the landscape by elements, such as mountains or trees, exemplifies the landscape way of seeing. For example, Ala-Maunus' contemporary paintings are a comment on the cultural, emotional, and symbolic meanings of mountains in the history of landscape painting. Even though presented as apocalyptic or dystopian, these twenty-first-century utopian landscapes contain a positive mood for the appreciation of nature. Yet, the idea of landscape is clearly problematized.

2. Utopias as Social Criticism

Landscape as a medium of expression has acted as a form of criticism in the past. Its origin lies in the Western imperialism. The critical approach to landscape painting displayed by the studied painters' acknowledges this dark past of the medium.

Together with Cosgrove (1998) and Williams (2016), Bloch (1986) argues that the concept of nature in the West has been largely formulated by the bourgeois class of capitalists. Or as art historian W.J.T. Mitchell (1994: 5, 7) declares: "[…]Landscape is a particular historical formation associated with European imperialism[…]" and not only the product of internal national ideologies. He refers to English literature scholar Philip Fisher's approach to look at "[…]the "hard facts" embedded in idealized settings" when studying the modern genre of landscape art that emerged in the seventeenth-century and lasted till the early twentieth-century (1994: 7). For example, the Dutch landscape paintings were at the same time possibly both, "[…]imperial and anticolonial". They both glorified the Dutch country with its wide skyscapes as well as the nation's southern colonialized possessions,

such as the flowers. Nineteenth-century European imperialism, especially, was closely related to the flourishing of landscape painting at the time (1994: 10).

Mitchell (1994: 13) further asks: "Is landscape painting the "sacred silent language" of Western imperialism, the medium in which it "emancipates", "naturalizes" and "unifies" the world for its own purposes"? This is linked to the fact that the concept of landscape already has symbolic cultural meanings emerging from the context where it is used. Mitchell notes:

> The familiar categories that divide the genre of landscape painting into subgenres – notions such as the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque – are all distinctions based[…]in the kinds of objects and visual spaces that may be represented by paint. (Mitchell 1994: 14)

Therefore, landscape is a "[…] physical and multisensory medium" that we signify with already existing cultural values and symbols through learned categories of landscape types (ibid.). Mitchells' statement aligns with Gombrich's (2002:76) notion of the learned landscape schemata.

Utopian thought is part of the progress of landscape painting and the idea of a landscape. With a historiographical approach, and through historical case studies, Cosgrove (1998) points out that the history of pictorial and literal depictions of utopia proves that a "landscape way of seeing" is related to the myth of utopia as an ideal land. The idea of *Utopia* (More 1964), originally meaning a good non-existent place, was influenced by the myths of the Golden Age, Arcadia and paradise (Sargent 2000: 8–9).

As Cosgrove (1998: 69) argues, the development of the idea of landscape and utopian ideal cities in Renaissance Italy were interrelated. For example, the idea of perspective was used to control and organise both the natural environment, and the ideal, capitalist city. Whereas, literary scholar Raymond Williams (2016: 1) points out that since the classical times in English history, literature has represented the city as the centre of learning. The country, in contrast, has been described as the pastoral location of a simple and peaceful natural life. The ideas of utopias, especially in the classical utopia fiction, often unify the country pastoral with the ideal urban city.

Cosgrove (1998: 170–172) draws parallels between the colonial nature of North America as presented by two contradictory landscape images, firstly, the wild nature that needs to be domesticated, and secondly, a utopia seen from a distance. American land was seen as a solution to the insufficient and high-priced land in Europe. In Cosgrove's words (1998: 171), its possibilities are the basis for utopian pressures in colonial undertakings.

In this section, I will evaluate in more detail the different ways in which the landscapes of these three Nordic painters problematise the above mentioned imperial history of the utopian "landscape way of seeing". They combine the familiar utopian landscape types with their related moods and the contemporary dystopian features.

2.1. Pastoral Harmony

> […] nature remains part of the fundamental essence that makes up most people, and that's why I find it so interesting […] I keep working with nature, and even though other subjects may at times be given priority I keep telling myself that there is this fundamental drive within most people, that they have this love of nature. That is why I find nature interesting as a subject of exploration […] I imagine that when most people see a beach, which is one of my favorite subjects, they experience a natural sense of pleasure in seeing it again; a spontaneous joy and an interesting process involving mankind and nature[…]it seems to be something that human beings can relate to and use. (John Kørner in Bank Christoffersen 2013: 111)

This statement above by John Kørner, the Danish painter, emphasises the prolonged source of nature as an inspiration for artists and proves Kørner's fascination with the pastoral type. Kørner's pastoral, picturesque and sublime beach landscapes refer to his world in Denmark and the surrounding environments of Frisland, as in the series of paintings entitled Fallen Fruit from Frisland (2013). These "rural idylls" are depicted as mysterious places. Their abstraction creates a dreamlike quality that mixes philosophical reflections with personal narratives (Coomer 2013). In my view, there is a reference to Paradise's fruit trees. With nostalgic sentiments Kørner presents his world in Danish Frisland as such. Thus, the theme of utopian escapism is linked to the landscapes. Nature is a solution or an escape from the human problems.

Marxist critics Raymond Williams (2016), John Barrell (1980) and Denis E. Cosgrove (1998) all recognise, that the pastoral landscape type contains the utopian tone of harmony, that suggests that man and nature live in balance with each other. Cosgrove (1998) and Williams (2016) discuss pastoral as one utopian type of landscape painting, visible for example in Claude Lorrain's use of golden light (Cosgrove: 1998). Bloch (1986) and Cosgrove (1998) define the pastoral as the archetype of a utopian landscape in the history of the idea of landscape. English literature scholar Greg Garrard (2012: 40)

further acknowledges the pastoral's central influence on the ecocriticism of Leo Marx (1964) and Raymond Williams (2016). Thus, as Garrard (2012: 40–42) suggests, in literature, a utopian pastoral trope or topos signifies the emotional relationship between human beings and nature.

Both landscape art and the utopian types of paradise, Arcadia, sublime and the picturesque, have originated from pastoral poetry. The primary sources for utopian landscapes are Theocritus' *Idylls* (3rd century BC) and Virgil's *Eclogues* (1st century BC) which depict the landscape of the myths of the Golden Age, Arcadia and the pastoral. The latter were all relative places of harmonious existence with nature, as English Literary Scholar John Barrell (1980) points out.

Barrell (1980) discusses the recurrent pastoral and Arcadia in English eighteenth and nineteenth-century painting. For example, Barrell interprets Thomas Gainsborough's painting *Landscape with a Woodcutter Courting a Milkmaid* (1755) as having a harmonic tone in its Claude Lorrainian shimmering light. The subject matter presents collective closeness of a rural society with a natural landscape. The pastoral metaphor is a utopian reflection of human happiness, as well as representing ideas of a good life and society (1980: 49, 52). The pastoral refers to the utopia of "Merry England", where, however, only the rich have time to enjoy the landscape and the products of hardworking labourers. Nevertheless, in the picture's harmonic tone, the community lives peacefully with nature and each other (1980: 52).

2.2. The Signboard of Cracked Society

Like Thomas Gainsborough, Kørner implies in his idyllic pastorals a societal criticism by problematising the pastoral with dystopian tones and elements. Kørner's landscapes present culturally symbolic elements, such as, Adidas shoes, faceless young people, portraits of prostitutes, sign boards from global capitalist institutions, and abstract brush marks that refer to the psychology of the apparently lost contemporary individual. Similar to Anna Tuori, John Kørner includes in his landscapes staged elements, such as faceless human beings, cyclists, or abstract shapes.

Through his pastoral landscape paintings, John Kørner, also comments on contemporary life in Danish society. The capitalist game of artistic success within the cultural industries is one recurrent theme (Bang Larsen 2013: 9, 11). Most of all, the landscapes act as stage set for social interaction and modern problems performed by contemporary human beings. Kørner's paintings comment on, for instance, the ideological use of landscape aesthetics in advertisement and film industries.

Furthermore, the picturesque beach scene often serves as a setting for broken modern families. Kørner's exhibition entitled *The Family* at Galleri Bo Bjerggaard (2013) reflected Kørner's interest in people as members of a community (Høgsbro 2013). The families are also seen as members of the "[…]consumers' community[…]" and part of the "network" of individuals, as Høgsbro (2013) notes. The spotlight is on the marginal, unofficial, and homeless families that form communities in hidden public spaces, such as, "[…]bikers, prostitutes, red-heads [sic!] and park bench bums" (ibid.).

Kørner therefore contrasts the utopian landscape stage set with global world problems, such as war, human and neo-liberal trade, industrial tensions between local and global, and the cultural control of society run by multinational corporations. In my view, in the works of Korner, the social disorganization caused by the twenty-first-century neoliberal ideology in European Union (EU) countries to form a cohesive political "family", is apparent. Political theorist Andrew Vincent (2009: 337) defines neoliberalism as an ideology that seeks "[…]to identify the unregulated free-market capitalist order as the crucial ground for all efficient resource allocation." This ideology is critically commented on by Kørner. Kørner thus guides the spectator to critically reflect on contemporary problems through the utopian landscape.

Kørner's landscapes thus perform a societal critique. This critique is close to Cosgrove's analysis of landscape paintings (1998). Furthermore, Kørner critically points out, with the landscape idea, the world views that the media feeds to people. The paintings fluently handle through the medium of paint the critical interpretations of contemporary culture. After a second inspection, and by rereading the titles, the paintings start to reveal the dystopian reality beyond the rosy utopian landscape, mostly reflected as picturesque, pastoral or sublime.

An example of this can be seen in the three-dimensional trade image close ups of online shops which become the main actors in the landscapes. The pastoral agricultural industry landscape is placed in a dialogue with fashion shots of shoes in *Adidas in Front* (2015, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 120 cm). The topics from Cosgrove (1998) are visible here: the idea of landscape is closely related to land profit – thus the agricultural product taken from the land is compared to shoes. Paintings criticise the learned colonialising "landscape way of seeing". Both shoes and vegetables are products sold globally whose industrialisation has dystopian potential. Furthermore, the picturesque and sublime distant mountains with the utopian crystal light sky (Bloch 1986) provide a contrast to the shimmering shoe sailing into the utopian horizon in *Adidas Spezial* (2015, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 180 cm).

This is a typically Kørnerian way to build a landscape. The postmodern presentation of fragmented and detached landscape elements refers to the rapid changes that are occurring in the shaping of

twenty-first-century landscapes due to capitalist industrial progress. The monumental size of these paintings further highlights the power of advertisements and sets the advertisement imagery in dialogue with the idea of a pastoral agricultural or sublime wilderness landscape.

2.3. Shimmering Horizons and Skies

Kørner's emotive landscapes often present the sky and sunlight, or a broad horizon line over a sunbathed sea. The picturesque and pastoral landscape elements, such as, the light in the sky, gives an underlying positive mood of hope, and thus expresses the wish of a utopian space: like in the vast panorama as *Life Attacks You I and II* (2015, acryl on canvas, 200 x 800 cm). The golden dusk or dawn hints at an Arcadian peaceful summer light. The still water by the seashore gives a sublime emotion with its utopian horizon, as something in the distance and a sign of the state of becoming in the "process-world" (Bloch 1986 and Schmidt 2014). The existential questions typical of romantic landscape painters are ironically hinted at in the title. The view of horizon gives the landscape a postmodern distance that is also suggested by the empty white areas in the painting – a gap in human existence together with the virtual reality.

The painterly function of the sky light originates for example, from the Dutch pastoral painting, such as, the harmony in Jacob van Ruisdael's (1628/9–1682) skies. The clear and cloudy skies are recognisable vistas from the various interpretations of the pastoral landscapes, and to most of us aesthetically agreeable. They are familiar from Leonardo da Vinci's (1452–1519) definition of vistas that give space for the viewer to imagine the world (Cosgrove 1998 and Gombrich 1966). Nonetheless, sometimes Kørner's skies are filled with the dark clouds of melancholy (2016: 9, 33–34).

In other paintings, his local Danish pastoral is combined with figures and landscapes from foreign lands, especially in the paintings about the global sex worker trade in Denmark. Foregrounded with images of prostitutes, the landscape is then given a symbolic mood that suggests the longing and happiness that these women represent for their consumers. The landscape is mostly signified by the sunset, the shimmering light and horizon line, that suggest a utopian Arcadia.

Architecture, Apples + Vegetables (2015, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 240 cm) displays a carrot, a faceless man walking towards the viewer, and a nineteenth-century style wooden house in the background. Agricultural tradition, symbolized by the loamy carrot that still has leaves, is contrasted

with the modern architectural pattern at its side. The schematic approach to landscape constructs a painting with these slightly unconnected symbolic elements.

The dominating element in *Architecture, Apples + Vegetables* is the light blue monochromatic background. The tone transforms the landscape into a dreamlike vision. Half of the architectural modernist pattern, depicted in the foreground, disappears into this "unknown blue" that creates the painting's fractional tone. The depicted objects float against gravitation, as Bjerggaard et al. (2016) state. The mood is similar to that discussed by Ernst Bloch (1986: 799), as the wishful blue of distance and infinity "[…]non-frontier of a sky fading away in the clouds." The mood is, for instance, present in the background in renaissance paintings as the landscape window. The cinematic sky-blue tone is used in conjunction with the yellow hues as a dominating ground colour in Kørner's landscapes.

A dreamlike tone is equally comprehensible in the Finnish painter Anna Tuori's soft pastel sky hues. Paintings *Elisa's True Dream* (2004, oil on canvas, 130 x 130 cm) or *Honey II* (2012, oil on canvas, 155 x 145 cm) utilise the utopian, golden evening light tone of Claude Lorrain and Arcadia. The *Forever Mute* (2008, oil on board, 120 x 130 cm) displays a dystopian pastoral of an abandoned farm by golden fields, in murky cloudy light. Similarly, *Melancholy III* (2006, oil on canvas, 120 x 130 cm) represents a dreamy window emerging from a soft pastel fog into a verdant pastoral. At a distance a train passes by. The sight signifies human civilization and fast movement in the landscape.

2.4. Exoticism – Dystopian Escapism

Exoticism is a central part of the history of utopian landscapes. The idea of exoticism is connected to the presentation of paradise and the pastoral. The term *exotic* originates from the Latin and Greek words – *exōtikos* meaning "foreign", and from *exō* meaning "outside" (Oxford Online Dictionary 2017). In the paintings, the natural world beyond the Nordic hemisphere is hinted at, for instance, by references to "foreign" plants, such as, palm trees in Tuori's *Honey II*.

When I interviewed Anna Tuori (Tuori 2014), she also described that in her island paintings of the 2000s, the utopian escapism of the landscape space is understood as exoticism and a critique of it. She recognises that human beings need the mental images of paradise islands to cope with reality. Tuori's island paintings display this interest towards the polarity between utopian idealism and dystopian reality – the impossibility of utopian imaginings. The paintings picture the possibility of imagining oneself somewhere else and the aesthetic experience of painting fantasies. Utopia is a mental space that only takes shape in the process of a painterly act (Tuori 2014).

Art critic Saara Hacklin (2011) recognises Tuori's approach to utopian-dystopian landscape when she describes Tuori's painting *Icaria* (2005):

> There is a green island on the horizon, with the viewer beaded towards it, to a kind of ideal landscape […] The paradisiacal scene is a beautiful dream, too good to be true. Just like a utopia, paintings entail the idea of something better. This glimpse is enticing even when thought of as unreachable. Tuori's paintings involve a similar twist – we must bear the conflict aiming at the unattainable.

Fig.1.5. Anna Tuori. *Icaria*. 2005. Oil on Canvas. 130 x 130 cm.

Painting about the exotic *Icaria* is a reflection on Étienne Cabet's (1848) *Voyage en Icarie*, a sketch about a utopian ideal society on an island signified by Arcadian mountains, valleys, and paradisiacal gardens. A series of landscape paintings during the 2000s followed *Icaria*. In these, Tuori explores through imagination and paint materials the idealism of utopian places.

Tuori's *Icaria* visually explores the fact that utopias include dystopian colonization. The capitalist world view grounds to the idea of landscape. According to Cosgrove (1998), the idea of landscape has been used in the utopian rhetoric of land possession, colonialization as well as philosophical, religious or political speculations, since the Italian Renaissance. Furthermore, Europeans exploited the found New World by means of perspective, the mathematic ideology of the golden rule, the geographic developments of mapping and architectural principles. The latter forms were used by the European landscape painters, to depict for their patrons these colonialized lands through the utopian landscape of Arcadia and the pastoral (Cosgrove 1998: 231). As Cosgrove (1998: 269) notes, the landscape way of seeing perceives and imagines the colonized land as a utopian myth. In utopian narratives, such as Thomas More's (1964) Utopia or Étienne Cabet's (1848) Icaria, nature is described as paradisiacal. Tuori's *Icaria* describes this distant good place as idealistically unreachable.

2.5. Window to the Grove of the Self

In addition to the colonialized perspective, landscape is also a medium for expressing the personal worldview. Especially environmental emotions come across in the contemporary works through the colour mood. Rosenblum (1975: 195) claims that even in the secularised world, artists continue to project onto their pictures "the sacred" as emotions aroused by the shapes of nature. Thus, he (1975: 195–218) asks if the landscape forms and emotions, such as the sublime in art have "a historical continuity". In my view, humanisation of nature is a characteristic of the history of landscape painting.

The discourse on nature's emotional reception is already present in the early pictures of Eden, Theocritus' description of nature in the Idylls (3rd century BC) with their pictorial representations in paintings. The pastoral paintings have reflected, for example, the sensations given by the verdant vegetation. Thus, the emotive humanisation of the forms of nature in visual arts is closely linked to the utopian topoi in art and literature.

Even though nature in Anna Tuori's painting is an imagined fantasy, it often clearly belongs to the Nordic geographical region. Thus, the paintings can be seen depicting an emotional response to the

local environment. The Director of the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Barbara O'Brien notes (2015: 92) that Tuori's paintings contain the "repetition of memory", that is in O'Brien's interpretation:

> […] a symbolic emotional connection between the human figure and the natural world […] [that] […] is also powerfully present in the work of Edvard Munch (1863–1944) […] They share in the Northern European legacy a knowledge that nature is both primal and always new; offering both danger and pleasure.

Probably, O'Brien refers here to Munch, due to his art historical status. However, Munch is important for Tuori too. I interpret that this quoted Munchian and Nordic knowledge about nature can be read as a psychological underlying tone in Tuori's paintings, one that Tuori also depicts with irony. The process of dealing with emotions and building a relation to the world impacts the way Tuori conceptualises nature in her landscapes. Tuori (Hannula 2015: 165, transl. Roivainen) states that she is interested in:

> […] the protection mechanisms of the psyche, in other words the ways in which the mind processes reality – for example through or with help of repression – or what the mind offers as an alternative. That is to say, from what perspective the seeing and the facing of an issue occur – the whole mechanism.

Tuori thinks that irrational painting activity can be a way to process emotions (Hannula 2015: 169). Tuori uses landscape elements often as features in this artistic self-comprehension process. However, subjective self-reflection through the idea of landscape is something innate in the landscape genre. In Cosgrove's (1998: 18) words: "[…]in landscape we are offered an important element of personal *control* over the external world[…]", such as, in the ideas of the sublime and picturesque. As Cosgrove (1998: 8) states, landscape paintings between the early fifteenth and late nineteenth-century, reflected the époque's world view and emotions that are directed towards the external natural world. Self-understanding, the meaning of life, a worldview or a life-narrative are themes often processed through the idea of landscape, as Cosgrove (1998) has recognised.

Tuori, however, avoids moralizing human–nature relationships. However, through an aesthetic representation of nature the paintings highlight the human need to look at landscapes. If Tuori's works are to be read as ecocriticism, the criticism lies in the fact that human emotions belong to the process of making sense of the surrounding world through the "idea of landscape". Thus, what Cosgrove

(1998: 1) sees as an emotional and aesthetic view on landscape, produced by the Renaissance elite, is still valid.

The forest groves or garden interiors, pictured in Tuori's works, such as in *Into the Wood I Made*, are especially present in paradisiac, Arcadian, picturesque and sublime types of landscapes. Furthermore, in 1500–1700-century painting, the distant landscape was often depicted as a glimpse behind a gap of foliage.

Trees have frequently been an iconography for Arcadia in the Nordic countries, as they are in Nondal's, Eriksson's and Tuori's work too. For example, art historian Michelle Facos (1998: 194, 102) argues that the primitive other, discussed in continental arts, was for the Swedish nineteenth-century artists the self and *habitus* found in the ideal peasant-life and Swedish forests. Facos describes how Swedish artists presented in their landscapes the idea of folk's communion with nature. Facos (1998: 104) notes how the idea of Swedish primitivism was paradoxically used as an ideal pictorial type to articulate the national romantic ideologies of the late nineteenth-century. In art historian Ragnar Josephson's (1891–1966) view, as cited by Facos (1998: 102), "Sweden's pagan heritage" is also inherited in the geographical surroundings because "[…]the thickly forested Nordic regions have a special affinity for trees."

Similar to Eriksson, Tuori has a visual interest to trees. They become painterly elements. The snowy Arcadian grove, familiar, for example, from the Düsseldorf School's sublime landscape type (Pennonen 2020), reappears too in Tuori's work, but in dystopian tones. For example, Tuori's painting *Party in Kadykchan* (2010, acrylic and oil on board, 160 x 150 cm) refers to a once popular remote Soviet mining city. Tuori depicts the subject, as a window to a wintery Arcadian grove. *Kadykchan* was the location of a prisoners' work camp in Far East Russia and has been transformed since the fall of communism into a ghost town (de Tocqueville: 2016). Similarly, the painting *Pripyat* (2009, acrylic and oil on board, 155 x 135 cm) refers to the Ukrainian abandoned town after the Chernobyl reactor disaster. Both of the above are places where nature has taken over deserted human settlements. In *Kadykchan* the dystopian aspects appear as the ghostly connotations of the title. Furthermore, the air is muted by the grey toned sky and slushy ground. A dystopian mood is created within the grove by a painted horse with a swollen hoof that stands beside a snowball shaped head.

2.6. Apocalyptic Kitsch Mountains

Utopian landscapes have become objects of kitsch. In philosopher Tomáš Kulka's (1997: 30) view, kitsch is the product of modernization and is present especially in the advertisement industry and media aesthetics, as well as in mass production. Kitsch, as a landscape, presents itself in Kulka's (1997: 24) words especially in the natural elements that raise automatically strong sentiments in the viewer, such as sunsets, flowers, stormy seashore, palm beach on sunset and mountainscapes (Roivainen 2019). The border between kitsch, beautiful, or utopian landscape types is fluid (Kulka 1997: 27–29, 34).

Ala-Maunus critically reflects the colonizing history of landscape painting genre by incorporating the kitsch qualities of sublime and paradise landscapes into dystopian colour moods. The current apocalyptic climate change discourse is readable in the paintings. Furthermore, the utopian moment that human beings keep searching for in the contemporary presence is indicated by the titles, such as, the metaphoric mountain scape entitled *Nightclubbing in Never-Never Land* (2013, oil on canvas, 137 x 170 cm). The utopian sense of nature is mostly emphasised with kitsch elements, such as the promising crystal light of white mountain peaks, behind a green valley or neon light colours. The skies above the mountain, ocean, or valley landscapes vary between a utopian crystal blue (Bloch 1986) or cloudy and muted greenish yellow tones. In Ala-Maunus' landscapes, the apocalyptic tone is often hinted at with an almost black sky, or murky dark land (Roivainen 2019).

A reference to Apocalypse is made in painting *Nature's Invasion* (2012, oil and acrylic on canvas, 50 x 41 cm) as well as in the image of the Deluge (*The Great Deluge,* 2016, oil on canvas, 220 x 850 cm), that both hint at destroyed states. The combination of utopia, dystopia, and the metaphor of an Apocalypse is a link to Ernst Bloch's (1986 and 2000) utopian philosophy, which contains interpretations of the Apocalypse (Roivainen 2019). Furthermore, the mountainous apocalypse was a frequent subject matter of the influential British romantic landscape painters, such as John Martin (1789–1854) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851).

Mountains are the most known sublime elements of romantic landscape painting, as Cosgrove (1998) notes, and equally mountainous or hillside regions belong to the geography of the myths of utopia and Arcadia in pictorial and written depictions. Dutch landscapes often created fantastical spaces that combined landscape elements, especially mountains, from different geographical locations. This idea of a global landscape was made familiar as the Dutch sixteenth-century concept of ideal world-landscapes (*Weltlandschaften*), for example, in Joachim Patinir's *Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx* (c.1515–1524, oil on wood, 64 x 103 cm). These create an image of an unknown territory

that combines vegetation and visual signs from worldwide landscapes, such as mountain regions, oceans, and southern plants.

As in Patinir's world-landscape, in the paintings of Ala-Maunus the mountains function as a backdrop for contemporary reality. Ala-Maunus' painting *Hinterland* (2014–2015) depicts the typical "worldscape" of placeless mountains; yet it mutates this sublime mood. The emotions familiar from nineteenth century mountain paintings, and paradise imagery, are modified in dystopic dark tones, as a response to the current eye-catchingly affective storms spread by contemporary media imagery and social media (Aarnio, Hacklin and Miller 2016: 17–19). Ala-Maunus shows aesthetic respect for this sublime awe and its kitsch connotations that are connected to the landscape way of seeing picturesque mountains in mass produced imagery.

Ala-Maunus' skilful technique, has been gained through an artistic process of painterly production in a studio environment, in response to the twenty-first-century cultural phenomena of the democratisation of landscape art. Digital camera users can easily replicate the landscape way of seeing, for instance, with the aid of the camera's picturesque perspective compositional tools, such as the golden section grid. Ala-Maunus' representations of the human longing for faraway places, is very much in contrast to the clichéd holiday pictures of sunsets, that one can find, for instance, in Social Media. In Ala-Maunus' paintings the materiality of the oil and acrylic paints responds with a hand-crafted feel to the excess of digital landscape imagery found over the Internet. Ala-Maunus' paintings reflect critically on the role of clichéd utopian images, the learned ideal landscapes, and the historic landscape way of seeing in twenty-first-century culture.

Art Historian Hanna Johansson (2015) points out that Ala-Maunus' mountainscapes, such as, *Hinterland* (2015, oil on canvas, 200 x 510 cm) combine the idea of an abstract paint surface and the idea of untouched wilderness in nature. Johansson views Ala-Maunus' paintings in the continuum of the tradition of the sublime landscape painting, as Rosenblum (1961) has also recognised with his concept of the abstract sublime. Rosenblum (1975) claims that the abstract sublime appears, for example, as a cosmic vision of the origin of the world, as in painters like Jackson Pollock's or Barnett Newman's surfaces of colour, light and planes.

In addition to the Alps and other distant mountains around the world, Finnish hills have also become actors in Ala-Maunus' painting *Vaara-Suomi ('Hill Finland' 2017)*. The painting is a pastiche of Eero Järnefelt's *Kaski/Raatajat rahanalaiset* (1893); Eero Järnfelt (1863–1937) is the late Finnish nineteenth-century Golden Age painter. Ala-Maunus' *Vaara-Suomi* was on display in 2017, the year Finland celebrates 100 years of independence, in the Finnish National Art Museum Ateneum's

collection. *Vaara-Suomi* pictures a central Finnish landscape of a slash and burn clearing in a woody hill region. The landscape is the same as that depicted in Järnefelt's nationalist-toned *Kaski (1893)*. Furthermore, Järnefelt became known from the national romantic landscape of Koli, *Autumn landscape by Lake Pielinen* (1899).

By referencing to the romantic landscape painting's vocabulary of slash and burn clearing and the wilderness, Ala-Maunus reinterprets the Finnish cultural landscape and contextualises it to the apocalyptic global narrative of climate change. Furthermore, he makes his emotional response to the forest ecosystem as a source of human culture and the cultural narratives of the transitional power of fire to change forest into feeding pasture (Hiedanpää and Lovén in this volume).

In *Kaski*, poor Finnish people are burning the forest for cultivation and self-survival purposes. The depiction of the poor is a familiar subject matter from the picturesque and romantic types of landscapes. It points at the conflict between human survival within the capitalist economy and the utopian sentiment of an aesthetic appreciation of untouched nature. In Ala-Maunus' *Vaara-Suomi* the same scene is, however, depicted in year 2893, after the disappearance of man. The painting's dystopian–utopian motif shows nature's invasion over the landscape that was previously destroyed by man in *Kaski*. The utopian hillside serves as the setting for this fantasy about nature. The painted landscape space is removed from its native Nordic context onto a fantastical plane.

Fig.1.6. Petri Ala-Maunus. *Vaara-Suomi (Tree-Covered Hill-Finland)*. 2012. Oil on Canvas. 150 x 170 cm.

Thus, in Ala-Maunus' interpretation, a utopia of nature is a dystopia of human civilization. The painting represents an escape from the dystopian world condition of over consumption of natural resources into a fantasy nature. Therefore, *Vaara-Suomi* can be seen in line with science fiction's dystopian narratives. For example, eco-aesthetician Malcolm Miles (2014: 71) refers to Richard Jeffries' novel *After London* (1885) as a utopian apocalyptic vision. In the novel, London is transformed during a thirty-year period into a green Eden. Following the laws of evolution, it is invaded by the strongest plants and trees. The novel was a response to urbanisation and the misery it has caused to London's poor (Miles 2014: 71) as was Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890).

Nature's Invasion (2012) can be seen as a discourse on the dialectical relationship between human creativity and its imaginative interaction with nature, and those human actions that shape the character of nature. Bloch's apocalyptic view and the idea of the nature subject, as intellectual thought historian

Hans Jørgen Thomsen (1985: 49) has recognised, can be interpreted as one layer in *Nature's Invasion*, that is, the visible act of pouring paint on a picturesque mountain scene. The artificial green hued paint splashes spreading over the top of the scenic mountainous valley signify a nature that invades the human centred landscape way of seeing. The painted landscape object of a sublime, picturesque, and romantic grand vista of mountains is thus critically questioned, and its illusion and painterly construction emphasized.

The main purpose of this visual effect of pouring paint over the neatly articulated picturesque scene, is however, as Ala-Maunus (2013) has stated, to make the painting work visually. The paint splashes poured directly on top of the landscapes, which are rendered in detail, highlight the artificial illusory nature of the genre of landscape painting as a utopian expression. Therefore, the approach of Ala-Maunus to landscapes critically reformulates the traditional conception of "seeing landscape" and the objectifying idea of landscape (Cosgrove 1998). The chemical reaction of the paint on the surface becomes a natural agent that disturbs the painted landscape image and its aesthetic polish. The visible self-referential paint marks on top of the landscapes, thus discuss the painterly construction of picturesque illusion – the integral part of landscape genre.

Fig.1.7. Petri Ala-Maunus. *Nature's Invasion*. 2012. Oil and Acrylic on Canvas. 50 x 41 cm.

3. Eco-Criticism as Hermeneutic Aesthetics

In the view of cultural theorist Malcolm Miles (2014) and science historian Libby Robin (2017), art can raise awareness of the environment. I would further add that landscape painting, with the genre's objectifying and colonising of history, discusses a culturally symbolic human relationship with the natural world. In my view, the above discussed paintings participate in the ecocritical discourse. This is done by questioning the history of the colonialising landscape way of seeing and responding emotionally to the surrounding natural environment. In my view, they present what Garrard (2012: 6) defines as ecocriticism, that is a "way of reading". This means that the artworks contribute "[…]to the environmental debate as examples of rhetoric", such as, "[…]pastoral imagery and apocalyptic rhetoric[…]". Therefore, the paintings can be read as ecocritical as they re-interpret pastoral and other utopian landscape rhetoric.

Furthermore, I argue along the lines of Miles (2014) and Bloch (1986) that the above discussed landscape paintings display a hermeneutic understanding of the world. Hermeneutics is in philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2005: 40) definition the skill of interpretation or explanation that is based on the skill of understanding. In the modern sciences, it includes methodological consciousness (2005: 42). In my view, the discussed landscape paintings reflect, through repeating the utopian landscape, how the relationship between human being and the world has been culturally understood. Landscape aesthetics reflects the self–world-relationship.

In my view, it is fruitful to compare Bloch's ideas of nature to Miles' (2014) (eco)criticism of capitalism. Following Bloch's (1986) idea, I claim that landscape art also contains a wishful tone. Miles (2014: 8) suggests, with reference to the sociologist John Holloway, that one way to struggle against capitalism, is to do something agreeable in life, such as art, and "[…s]top creating the system that is destroying us". This view is parallel with Bloch's idea of a utopian process of self-emancipation (Roivainen 2017). Miles' (2014: 64) ideas correspond to Bloch's (1986) idea that art can give people cause to wish for what they are currently lacking. For example, in Bloch's (1986: 799, 810, 820, 837) view, landscape paintings contain a wish for utopia.

The discussed paintings question the human need to idealise nature and how these idealisations can turn into dystopian consequences. The paintings evaluate conflicting worldviews. On the one hand, the paintings depict landscapes as a utilitarian space for capitalist land use and advertisements for the tourist industry; while, on the other hand, the paintings are concerned with the visual aesthetical experience of nature or the concept of landscape as the mirror of the world – and the self in the world.

However, at the same time, the dystopian environmentally destructive consequences of human control over nature and other human beings are reflected. As philosopher Alfred Schmidt (2014: 163)

mentions, the technological development of the twentieth-century changed the nineteenth-century socialists' utopias of natural universes in landscapes organized by human beings, such as Fourier's, into dystopias of "total destruction".

If in fact the world is dystopian, then Ernst Bloch's (1986) claim that the hermeneutic understanding of the world displays utopian hope, is comforting. The hermeneutical understanding of the world is in my view in this case relevant terms for understanding how landscape paintings reflect the self's position in the world. Furthermore, the self-mirroring of the world implies, according to Miles, the possibility of developing an empathic way of living with the world "[…]rather than exerting power over worlds[…]" (Miles 2014: 49, 50).

Ecocriticism can also be seen in the fact that the paintings discussed comment on our future relationships with the land and the local environment. For example, increasing urbanisation due to global mass movements and digitalisation are tending to enclose human daily life indoors and in city environments. City dwellers are beginning to perceive nature mostly with the help of supermarkets, mobile devices and applications, the Internet, aviation, the travel industry, and so on. It might be that an aesthetic exploration of nature will be promoted as essential role in future leisurely industries. It might also be that human beings keep increasingly projecting psychology onto nature, and keep making nature a productized object of use-value.

Perhaps something has changed in our relationship to these utopian landscapes, or has it? For example, Miles (2014: 144–5) refers to Alex Murdin's *Inclusive Path* (2007) outdoor photographic landscape installation. In discussing his installation, Murdin cites Slavoj Žižek, who comments on the practices of television nature programmes of aestheticising nature from a utopian perspective by ommitting human beings (ibid.). These types of ideal landscapes, that reflect the histories of the Golden Age and Arcadia as utopias, are emotionally effective and their distant unseen locations imaginatively inspiring. For the artists, the clichéd utopian topoi offer material to be altered, problematised, and with which to ask questions about what truth landscapes can give us.

4. Problematisation of the Landscape Object

To conclude, and as I have noted above, the paintings discussed comment on the pastoral, sublime, paradise, Arcadian and picturesque landscapes. They query the living worlds surrounding the artists, either through fantastical imagined landscapes or through the observation of nature. Predominantly, these paintings hint at the living worlds where the artists have grown up, including both the natural

world and the surrounding cultural imagery in which they have become absorbed. As Cosgrove (1998: 105) states, the artist's environment and living world have often become visible in their paintings, such as, the Alpine region in the sixteenth-century paintings by Titian.

One may ask, what is so critical about these quasi-utopian landscapes, when they make no direct political statement or action. To answer the question, one can return to study the history of landscape painting and further reflect upon why we are attracted and feed on landscape aesthetics in the daily media and the world of the Internet. The powerful engines running contemporary culture are aware of the Arcadian golden dream as a utopian landscape. By simply presenting such utopian landscapes, the paintings prove their cultural role as signifiers of utopia. The paintings point out that utopian landscapes play a role in our cultural exchange, such as the symbolic ideas of the good life, and what Bloch (1986: 799, 810, 820, 837) has termed as the wishful landscape, the cultural signifier of utopian hope.

I claim that the aporia of these utopian landscapes, in the case of the paintings discussed, becomes apparent through the historical ideologies of the "landscape as a way of seeing", that Cosgrove (1998) discusses. These include, for example, the exoticism of colonised utopia, the natural park ideology, the picturesque tourism and romantic ideologies of the sublime. In 2000s, the idea of landscape in the Nordic context reflects, for example, the European Union citizen's search for identity, in the form of a global landscape. Furthermore, European self-identity is being re-shaped by contextualising the self in the global world via travel, the Internet or the News Media. Landscapes constantly perform the main actor or setting for films, TV, as well as the advertisement industry, and thus exemplify the cultural continuum of the "landscape way of seeing" (Cosgrove 1998: xxiii–xxiv) and wishful thinking (Bloch 1986).

Currently, ownership of land can be easily rented for suitable periods via electronic travel industries. For city dwellers, the utopian escape from the addictive world of Social Media and the psychologies of social roles performed in life or simply a dull winter, is often done by changing the urban landscape for a quiet and idyllic natural resort. Furthermore, a polemic exists between the personally experienced world landscapes and the culturally meaningful native landscapes or landscapes of permanent residence. The aesthetics of land, such as, a fertile climate, or a quiet wilderness maintain their utopian meaning as topoi of wellness.

The aesthetic appetite for a verdant environment and a broad horizon appear as almost something biologically obvious. Cognitive religion studies scholar Jani Närhi (2009: 98) suggests that there are some generic environmental preferences in the paradise myths around the world. True or not, the

remote rural environment continues to maintain its leisurely pastoral and wishful value. Ernst Bloch's (1986) philosophy recognises this in: the travel industry, ideologies, and religions. In addition, popular culture maintains our hope with the help of wishful pastoral, sublime or paradise landscapes. All these variations connect to the concept of utopia. Landscape painting as a genre can be further seen as characteristically utopian. The only difference is that originally *Utopia* was an ideal city and society. However, as Cosgrove (1998: 96–97) has also shown, the thought of utopia as an ideal city in Renaissance Venice was one step towards the ideal landscape and Arcadia.

I have claimed in this article that landscape painting may not be an exact depiction of utopia, but it is utopian by nature. Western landscape paintings have made use of the concept of utopia and its varying types of paradise. Anna Tuori and Petri Ala-Maunus have especially brought the utopian nature of this landscape genre into public discussion with their paintings that specifically explore the idea of a utopian landscape painting. In fact, their visual problematisations have further guided me to research this topic in my ongoing Art History PhD Thesis.

In my view, these contemporary paintings can also be what is understood as eco-criticism by Garrard (2012) and Eco-Aesthetics by Miles (2014) in their emotional representation of the image of landscapes and relationships with natural environment. Cosgrove's (1998) study clearly points out that one can interpret the "landscape way of seeing" as an ideological, cultural, and political object of study. In my view, one such ideology present in twenty-first-century Nordic paintings is the ideology of global capitalism. This appears in the places the paintings depict. The placeless, global landscape and the imaginative landscape, for instance, in the form of virtual networks, are familiar to today's art lovers and digital nomads. The landscapes, through the aesthetics of painting, add hermeneutical reflections of the world to the clichéd utopian landscapes that we all can experience and easily reproduce. This ability to make the spectator question the objectified landscape concept and ideas concerning utopian landscapes is the stage at which ecocritical thinking interposes.

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