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# Introduction: New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies

Moving maps, reciprocal images, emerging  
communities

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## Abstract

This article provides an introduction to the Research Network “New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies” while at the same time discussing some of its main concerns and questions: the position of the Nordic countries and the role of Scandinavian Studies in the changing geopolitical landscape of post-Cold War Europe. The collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989–1991 led to a reconfiguration of the European political map. This situation also entailed new possibilities for international and cross-disciplinary research: A new understanding of Nordic and Baltic studies was institutionalized and new regional concepts were developed as alternatives to Cold War geopolitics. The network “New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies” is rooted in this ongoing reorientation of the field. The article discusses some of the potentials and challenges of this new agenda of Scandinavian Studies in the context of the new geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West after Russia’s military attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

**Keywords:** “Norden” (the North), Scandinavian Studies, Baltic Region, The Cold War, geopolitics, area studies



**PRESSto.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Folia Scandinavica Posnaniensia* is co-edited and co-authored by members of the research network “New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies”, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark 2019–2023. Based in Scandinavia, the Baltic Sea region and Central Europe and having grown up in the 1970s to 1990s, the contributors of the volume have lived their lives in the historical situation of the Cold War era and the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1989–91. Working together in the framework of the network has provided us with the opportunity to reflect upon our own positions within today’s integrated, yet still divided Europe, and to rethink our common scholarly field of Scandinavian Studies.

The network comprises scholars from departments of Scandinavian Studies at universities in Berlin, Budapest, Gdańsk, Greifswald, Poznań, Prague and Vilnius and sister institutions in cities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Aarhus, Copenhagen, Lund and Trondheim. When we conceived of the idea of such a network in 2019, we took as our point of departure the anniversaries of two seminal events in recent European history: the 30-year anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the 15-year anniversary of the expansion of the EU in 2004 to include the Baltic and East-Central European countries. We wanted to use the occasion of the two anniversaries to reflect upon the impact of these geopolitical shifts on the field of Scandinavian Studies.

Since 2019, the network has been organizing a series of workshops, public seminars and conference panels, facilitating reflection on the significance of geographies and regions (new and alternative) within the field of Scandinavian Studies. On a general level, the network’s research agenda is to explore the role of Scandinavian Studies in the changing political landscape of present-day Europe. More specifically, our aim is to develop new ways of looking at the map and to foster new ideas and perspectives of trans-regional research focusing on the shared history and manifold cultural relations between Scandinavia and the countries of the Baltic Sea region and East-Central Europe. Most importantly, this means transgressing the old Cold War divisions of Western and Eastern Europe, but it also means rethinking the regional, national and linguistic boundaries that usually define the Scandinavian countries, or “Norden”, as a region in the world. The articles collected in this volume are products of these continuous collective reflections and discussions.

The articles in the volume are invested in three entangled strands of inquiry. First, drawing on concepts from the field of imagology (Beller & Leerssen 2007; Leerssen 2022), the contributions study how images and concepts of “Norden” and Scandinavia have been articulated and negotiated in Central European and Baltic literatures and other cultural discourses, including the translation and transmission of Nordic literature into East-Central Europe.

Second, drawing on concepts from the field of human geography (Cresswell 2014) and the spatial turn in Scandinavian literary and cultural studies in recent decades (Andersen 2006; 2013; Ringgard & DuBois 2017; Mai & Ringgaard 2010; Malmio & Kurikka 2019), the articles examine the performative role of literature, film and other cultural products in the creation of imagined geographies and regional identities, and question in what way such map-making practices reflect major geopolitical shifts in recent and contemporary European history.

Third, the volume investigates Scandinavia’s changing position in the world – i.e., the meanings and representations ascribed to Scandinavia and “Norden” in the present context of East-Central Europe and the Baltic Region.

## 2. SPATIO-TEMPORAL NODES: SCANDINAVIA IN THE COLD WAR ERA AND BEYOND

Over the course of the last decades, the cultural and political landscape of Europe has undergone a series of considerable changes. In purely geographic terms, Europe is still located where it used to be. But in mental and cultural terms – when it comes to the way we perceive and imagine Europe, its place in the world and its internal borders and regions – the European map has been reshuffled by events and developments in recent history. It is the significance of these “cartographical shifts” (Czapliński 2020:144), and of ensuing encounters and representations in literature, as well as other cultural forms of expression, that the authors of this special issue want to collectively explore.

During the Cold War period, the geographical imagery of Europe was locked in a political opposition between the communist East and democratic West. As is well-known, this political map had its most influential symbolic framing in the concept of the Iron Curtain, coined by Winston Churchill in his seminal speech in Fulton, Missouri, in the spring of 1946 – a performative speech act and a powerful piece of historical storytelling often regarded as marking the very beginning of the Cold War.

The collapse of the communist Eastern bloc and the dissolution of the Soviet Union during the revolutions of 1989–1991 were seen by many as the end of this geopolitical world order. The US-American political scientist Francis Fukuyama even conceived of these ruptures as “The End of History”, leading to a reunification of Europe and to the global victory of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992). Later developments boldly exposed the invalidity of this thesis and its naïve evolutionary optimism, as well as its eurocentrism and ignorance of the postcolonial Global South.

Furthermore, proponents of liberal democracy and European integration also overlooked another virtual threat arising on the horizon, signalled when Vladimir Putin in his 2005 annual state of the Russian nation denounced the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the Russian invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, predated by Russia’s military aggression towards Georgia in 2008, we are again facing a new geopolitical order. A new Iron Curtain is emerging, this time coinciding with the western borders of Russia and Belarus, while large parts of the former European East now form part of an alliance of the West.

“We have found ourselves at the frontier of the imagination”, as Przemysław Czapliński writes (2020:143), commenting on the virtually unstable position of Poland *vis-à-vis* the four geographical entities and imagined communities, which have until recently defined the country’s place on the European map: the European Union in the west, Central Europe in the south, the Lithuania-Belarus-Ukraine belt in the east and Scandinavia in the north. Today, “Poland is ‘somewhere else’”, Czapliński argues, “not because its position has changed, but because our presence in the larger structures to which we once belonged is radically changing” (*ibid.*:144).

A similar analysis may also be applied to the position of the Nordic countries in the changing geopolitical landscape of present-day Europe. During the Cold War, the Nordic countries assumed the role of a neutral buffer zone between the East and West. This security arrangement came to be known as the “Nordic Balance” (Hilson 2008:128). The Nordic welfare model held the status of a distinct “third way” solution between capitalism and socialism, whereas, in terms of security policy, the Nordic countries earned a reputation as bridge builders and advocates of *détente*, peace and cooperation among the great powers. With the closure of the Cold War, this Nordic brand lost a substantial part of its significance and *raison-d’être*, and scholars have similarly pointed to a crisis in Nordic identity and a “consequent decline of the pan-Nordic community” (Browning 2007:46).

Most recently, with Sweden and Finland abandoning their traditional status of neutrality and seeking NATO membership as a consequence of Russia's invasion in Ukraine, this development has been further emphasized.

The present situation reminds us of the historically contingent and temporary nature of political geographies. In retrospect, the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989–1991 not only led to a reconfiguration of the European political map, with the Central European and Baltic states regaining their autonomy and independence. The process of transition and European integration also led to a reestablishment of political and cultural connections disrupted by the Cold War and to a renewed interest in regional communities and identities as alternatives to Cold War geopolitics. In the 1990s, “Central Europe” became a prominent category in European cultural and political discourse (Ash 1989), paving the way for the incorporation of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia into the EU in 2004.

In the same period, the Baltic Sea region was also rediscovered as a distinct European region, defined not only by its transitional location between the East and West, but also by its identity as a zone of peacefully minded small states favouring international cooperation and exchange. Interestingly, this situation also led to the rediscovery of the notion of “Balto-Scandia”, an idea originally proposed by the Swedish professor of geography Sten de Geer in 1928 and later developed by the Lithuanian geographer and political theorist Kazys Pakštas, who in the 1942 essay *The Baltoscandian Confederation*, advocated in favour of the creation of a political confederation of the three Baltic and the five Nordic countries (corresponding to what is today referred to as the Nordic-Baltic Eight, NB8). Written in the political context of the Second World War, in a situation where the Baltic countries had been occupied alternately by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Pakštas' essay expressed the basic idea that Europe's small nations should seek international cooperation and institutional unification as a means to avoid aggressions from imperial powers. The vision of increased cooperation among the small states around the Baltic Sea was taken up again in the wake of Lithuania's regained independence in 1991, and again when Lithuanian foreign politics shifted after accession to the EU in 2004.

As part of this political transition, the three Baltic countries have preferred to perceive themselves as a part of “Central-Northern Europe”, looking towards the North in an attempt to construct a new regional identity that transcends the East/West binary (cf. Šukaitytė 2015). These developments have also implied new opportunities for the Scandinavian countries, who via renewed relationships with their Baltic neighbours have been able to strengthen the position of this formerly peripheral region within Europe.

The monstrous and tragic events of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine have led to a greater sense of cohesion in Europe (Ash et al. 2023). Europe's compliant reactions to Russia's previous military aggressions towards Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 show in retrospect the widespread ignorance and lack of awareness, especially among its older, “Western” members, of Russia's revanchist aspirations to reclaim its former glory as an imperial power and the danger to democracy and European security these ambitions pose. On the other hand, another consequence of the Russian aggression is that former Eastern Bloc countries and the Baltic states are now speaking with renewed authority in the EU and NATO based on their historical experiences with Russian imperialism. In this way, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also led in the “West” to a greater awareness of and empathy for the experiences of former Eastern bloc countries during the Soviet era.

On the occasion of the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023, the eight foreign affairs ministers of the Baltic and Nordic countries published a joint op-ed in *The Washington Post* in which they evoked the successful integration of the Baltic countries into Europe and the transatlantic alliance in the 1990s and 2000s as “One of the Nordic countries' greatest foreign

policy achievements”.<sup>1</sup> This statement marks a remarkable departure from the principles of neutrality and balance that guided the Nordic countries’ foreign and security policies during the Cold War era. Today, the Nordic countries do not position themselves as bridge-builders between opposing powers, but rather as entrepreneurs in support of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. In the same statement, the eight ministers also signalled the example of the Baltics as a possible model for Ukraine’s future Euro-Atlantic integration.

It remains to be seen if this new readiness to incorporate the knowledge and perspectives of the Central and Eastern Europe will have a lasting potential for stronger political and cultural cohesion in Europe.

### **3. SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES AS AREA STUDIES: RESEARCHING EUROPE’S NORTH-EASTERN GEOGRAPHY**

The reshaping of the European geopolitical landscape in the 1990s also paved the way for new approaches and initiatives in research, teaching and academic collaboration: A new understanding of Nordic and Baltic studies was institutionalized and new geographical concepts were developed to grasp the new situation. Rooted in a philological tradition, Scandinavian Studies have traditionally been preoccupied with the study of the languages and literatures of the Nordic region, defined by their linguistic, literary, historical and cultural kinship. Since the 1990s, the field has undergone changes to incorporate the understanding of multidisciplinary Area Studies, uniting scholars and approaches from both the humanities and the social sciences. The “New Geographies of Scandinavian Studies” research network is rooted in these tendencies and has contributed to an ongoing exploration of how recent ‘cartographical shifts’ can be translated into collaborative scientific practice.

One example of this development is the Nordeuropa-Institut at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where several network members have spent crucial time during their careers. Founded in 1994 as the result of a merger of the two Scandinavian Studies departments at Humboldt-Universität in East Berlin and Free University in West Berlin, the institution’s research agenda has been focused on the promotion of the multidisciplinary study of the new Nordic or North-Eastern region of Europe that had emerged with the collapse of the Eastern bloc (Henningsen & Stråth 1996; Dahl et al. 2014). The Nordeuropa-Institut has both initiated and participated in a large number of cross-Baltic Sea region academic events, exchange programs and research projects, among them the MA program “Baltic Sea Region Studies”, the EU-funded mobility program BaltSeaNet, and the publication series “The Baltic Sea Region: Nordic Dimensions – European Perspectives” (edited by Bernd Henningsen, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2004–17).

Among other examples of the emergence and institutionalization of Nordic region or area studies as a multidisciplinary field of study are the Centre for Nordic Studies (CENS) at the University of Helsinki, founded in 2002, and the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University in Sweden, which was founded in 2005 and hosts the multidisciplinary journal *Baltic Worlds* (2008–). It has been a point of the Network to engage with these research milieus in the form of invited keynote lectures and collective conference participation.

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<sup>1</sup> “There is a model for Ukraine’s future Euro-Atlantic integration: The Baltics” op-ed by Lars Løkke Rasmussen (Denmark), Margus Tsahkna (Estonia), Elina Valtonen (Finland), Þórdís Kolbrún R. Gylfadóttir (Iceland), Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš (Latvia), Gabrielius Landsbergis (Lithuania), Anniken Huitfeldt (Norway) and Tobias Billström (Sweden), *The Washington Post*, July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/10/nordic-baltic-ministers-ukraine-european-integration/> (accessed 8 January 2024).

A growing tendency towards multidisciplinary and collaboration between scholars across the old East-West divide is also visible in regard to the recent history and activities of the International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS). Founded in Cambridge in 1956, the IASS has played a role as one of the most important international forums for scholars of Scandinavian literature and cultural studies (Bredsdorff 1986; 2003; Bredsdorff & Garton 2006; Jelsbak 2023). From its outset and during the first decades of its existence, the IASS was largely dominated by Western scholars, but since the end of the Cold War, one can observe that the centre of gravity of its activities and recruitment of members to the organization has shifted towards Eastern and Central Europe. Today, a substantial part of the delegates at the bi-annual conferences are scholars from former Eastern bloc countries. This development is also evident from the fact that within the last ten years, the IASS conference has been hosted twice at universities in the Baltic countries (Riga 2012 and Vilnius 2021). Several Network members are active on the IASS board, working towards a stronger anchoring of the Association's activities in transnational collaborative research.

Parallel to this institutional evolution, one can also observe a renewed interest in a conceptual rethinking of *Norden*, the North, as a region in the world – beyond the limits of the Scandinavian language family and nation states that have traditionally served to define the field of Nordic Studies. It is not surprising that the critique of this traditional understanding of the region has been inspired by Postcolonial and Indigenous studies, which point to the region's inherent ethnic and cultural diversity and dynamism (Mazierska 2014; Einhorn et al. 2022). It is in line with this reconceptualization of the region's composition and boundaries that two recent European conferences within the field have been devoted to the topic of cross-regional connections and cultural contacts between Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea region.<sup>2</sup> The concept of the transnational *regioscape* of the Baltic Sea, as proposed by Anna Estera Mrozewicz in her article in this volume, also marks a contribution to this geographical rethinking of Nordic and Scandinavian studies.

#### 4. THE ARTICLES

The opening article by **Przemysław Czapliński** (Poznań) “Coming to terms with the North. Scandinavia in Polish culture at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” – originally given as a lecture at a network meeting in Poznań in January 2022 – discusses the multiple presence of discourses and representations of Scandinavia and the Nordic countries in Polish literature over the past few decades. Since the late 1980s, more than 150 books on Scandinavia have come out in Poland, a number which bears witness not only to the popularity of Scandinavian culture in a Polish context but also to the structural role of Scandinavia in relation to the renegotiation of Polish national identity that has taken place in the post-communist period. Czapliński's basic point is that during this period, Polish literature has pushed the social imagination from the West to the North. Traditionally (in fact since Poland's loss of independence in 1795), Polish identity and history were conceived along an East-West-axis (“As far from Russia as possible and as close to the West as possible”). With the Fall of the Soviet Empire and Poland's integration into Western Europe, Polish culture was freed from the burdens of this geographical entanglement, thus leaving space for new ways of conceiving the country's position on the European map. Subsequently, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, many Polish authors have directed their attention towards the North, turning

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<sup>2</sup> As was the case with the French organization of Scandinavian scholars APEN's 4<sup>th</sup> conference in Paris, 18–20 November 2021, dedicated to the theme “Entre Scandinavie et Baltique orientale” (Between Scandinavia and the Baltic Region), and the 5<sup>th</sup> “Nordic Challenges” conference organized by the research hub ReNEW (Rethinking Norden in an Evolving World) at Södertörn University, 1–3 June 2022, with the theme “Nordic Neighbourhoods: Affinity and Distinction in the Baltic Sea Region and Beyond”.

Scandinavia into a kind of laboratory for the modern imagination. Czapliński demonstrates this point by showing how Polish authors have depicted the Nordic welfare model partly as a social utopia, partly as a scary picture, emphasizing its more problematic sides. At the same time, an important point in the article is that such imaginations must not be taken for granted as representations of social realities. Rather they testify to the performative aspect of literary place-making. Another important observation is that Polish literary imaginations of Scandinavia have emphasized the point that modernity is always local and not a universal model that can be copied from one cultural context to another. It must be translated, and in this connection, literature has an important performative role to play. By emphasizing these main observations and conclusions about the role of literature and narratives in the construction of places, national and regional identities, Czapliński's article provides an important theoretical framework for the following articles.

As another case study devoted to Polish literature, predating Czapliński's examples, **Karolina Drozdowska** (NTNU Trondheim) discusses reciprocal images across the East-West divide in her article "A stereotype that deconstructs itself. Representations of Danes and Denmark in Joanna Chmielewska's crime novels". Popular Polish crime novelist Joanna Chmielewska (1932–2013) used stereotypes as a key element of her 'ironic crime' sub-genre developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Drozdowska argues that Chmielewska's satiric representations of Danes and Denmark are examples of the exoticization of the West in Cold War Eastern Europe. By highlighting the reciprocity of images depicting the respective other side of the Iron Curtain, Drozdowska offers a supplement to Larry Wolff's classic study *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994): Scandinavia appears as an 'invented' place, too, and together such images form a dynamic 'performative map' of a changing Europe.

**Anita Soós'** (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) article "Scandinavian crime fiction through Hungarian eyes: Zoltán Kőhalmi's practical guide to crime writers" contributes to several of the publication's central themes: The relationship between self- and hetero-images of Scandinavian societies; the reception of Scandinavian cultural production in the wake of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain; and the renegotiation of locations on Europe's moving map. Soós' case study is the Hungarian stand-up comedian Zoltán Kőhalmi's 2019 novel *A férfit, aki megölte a férfit, aki megölt egy férfit* (The man who killed the man who killed a man), which can be read as both a parodic reenactment and an interrogation of the hugely popular Nordic Noir genre. Soós reads Kőhalmi's novel as an indicator of how, from a Hungarian perspective, Scandinavia appears an exotic and distant, yet oft-idealized part of a now-shared cultural and literary realm. The novel's implicit contrastive approach sheds light on social and cultural differences between Hungary and Scandinavia. According to Soós, Kőhalmi's work represents a 'benevolently critical' view of Scandinavia and, at the same time, a metafictional commentary on crime fiction as part of the Scandinavian *brand*.

Another important practice of literary place-making and region branding is taking place within the field of translation, transmission and reception of Scandinavian literatures in Central Europe. Two articles in the volume are devoted to this topic, each of which study the processes and dynamics by which Scandinavian literature in translation contributes to the cultural significance of Norden as a region. Examples are drawn from the reception of Scandinavian literature in Poland and the Czech Republic, respectively.

In her article "'It is more than needed in our country'. Contemporary Czech images of Scandinavia through the lens of literary criticism", **Helena Březinová** (Charles University, Prague) presents a qualitative discourse analysis of Scandinavian stereotypes or 'ethnotypes' (in the sense of Joep Leersen) as they are articulated in the reception of Scandinavian literature in Czech mass media. Březinová identifies two recurrent ethnotypes: The emancipated Scandinavian woman and the alleged social egalitarianism of the Scandinavian countries. Březinová argues that these ethnotypes seem to replicate the

earliest Czech images of Scandinavia created around 1900, when the first Czech travellers came to Scandinavia and wrote books about the region. In accordance with the argument put forward by Czaplíński, the analysis of Czech stereotypes of Scandinavia may tell us more about contemporary Czech culture than about the essence of Scandinavian societies. Březinová concludes her article by identifying an interesting pattern in the studied material. The ethnotype of the emancipated women is positively valorized as a model worthy of aspiration for the Czechs. Egalitarianism, on the other hand, is negatively perceived because of its associations to Czech experiences with communism.

**Sylwia Izabela Schab** (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań) in her article “What kind of place is *Norden*? The image of *Norden* in Polish literary reviews of Nordic literature” likewise addresses the question of how Nordic literature in translation – in this case translations into Polish and their reception in Polish literary reviews – is contributing to the cultural imagery of Norden. The article studies three examples of this process, analysing the Polish reception of three works of contemporary Scandinavian literature, all of which have earned great international circulation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Stieg Larsson’s *Millennium* trilogy of crime fiction, Tove Ditlevsen’s *Copenhagen Trilogy*, and Karl Ove Knausgård’s auto-fictional novel series *My Struggle*. Although the concept of Norden does not appear explicitly in the analysed reviews, Schab observes a pattern of evoking Norden as a culturally progressive and egalitarian society with a pro-environmental attitude. Very much in line with Czaplíński’s argument, Schab also stresses the point that Norden in the Polish context remains a place that is not entirely recognized, thus providing Polish critics with a tool to discover new ways of talking ‘about themselves’.

The following three articles in the volume present close readings of works by two prominent authors in contemporary Baltic and Nordic literatures, the Lithuanian writer Marius Ivaškevičius and Finnish-Estonian Sofi Oksanen. Both may be characterized as authors who are especially attentive to the significance of cultural geographies and mental borders in Europe and as authors who, furthermore, share an interest in the legacies and cultural memory of the Cold War. Ivaškevičius is not only one of Lithuania’s most prolific writers, both his writing and his international career are reflections of the emergence of a reconnected Baltic Sea region, and by extension a reconnected Europe, after the revolutions of 1989 and 1991. Ivaškevičius is also an important and recognized voice within the exchange about recent political events – a role that was confirmed during the network’s public conversation with the writer on the occasion of the “Nordic Challenges” conference in Stockholm in 2021 with the theme “Nordic Neighbourhoods: Affinity and Distinction in the Baltic Sea Region and Beyond”. What is more, Ivaškevičius provides an interesting perspective on Scandinavia from across the Baltic Sea, which is why it proved worthwhile to revisit two of his works from the 2000s.

In their article “‘If Sweden is a province, what are we?’ Map-making and man-making in Marius Ivaškevičius’s essay series *My Scandinavia*”, **Lill-Ann Körber** (Aarhus University, from spring 2024 University of Göttingen) and **Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė** (Vilnius University) take a closer look at Ivaškevičius’s essay series *My Scandinavia*, published in 2004, the year when Lithuania together with nine other countries joined the EU. The essay cycle is read as a literary map-making project in which the narrator explores the Northern European territories unattainable for him until the borders opened in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a dialectic process, the narrator shapes ‘his Scandinavia’ and gets shaped by the changing European geographies, using the encounters and opportunities he experiences during his travels to reinvent himself.

While the essay series sketches out how Scandinavia is framed by the North Sea and the Baltic Sea respectively, **Clemens Räthel** (University of Greifswald) focuses on another



inner-Scandinavian waterway in his article “Somewhere between Malmö and Copenhagen: Inter-spaces in Marius Ivaškevičius’s play *Close city*”: the Öresund strait forming the borderland between Denmark and Sweden, connected by a bridge since the year 2000. According to Räthel, Ivaškevičius uses the potential of this particular inter-territorial space to explore issues of “real-and-imagined places” (Edward Soja) and their impact on identities and relationships, as well as the circulation of a Scandinavian cultural canon in the transregional imaginary in his 2005 play *Close City*.

**Torben Jelsbak’s** (University of Copenhagen) article ““Didn’t that sound like the north was calling us?” Imagined geographies and Cold War legacies in Sofi Oksanen’s *Dog Park (Koirapuisto)*” presents a discussion of Sofi Oksanen’s 2019 novel *Dog Park (Koirapuisto)*, a historical and psychological thriller about two Ukrainian women working in the Ukrainian fertility industry, offering surrogacy services to Western and Nordic clients. Drawing on concepts from human geography, feminism and postcolonial theory, Jelsbak reads the novel as a reflection on the new geographies of Post-Cold War Europe, using the female body as a site of memory. The novel depicts the transition from communism to capitalism in Ukraine during the early years of independence in the 1990s and 2000s but is also a story of the ways in which the legacies of the Iron Curtain continue to shape mental geographies and experiences in this part of Europe. Written well before the Russian full-scale military invasion in February 2022, the novel offers an intriguing psychological account of some of the historical backgrounds of Russia’s war on Ukraine, while also envisioning how these may relate to the life of a privileged Nordic nuclear family in Helsinki.

In the final article in the volume, “A transnational regioscape in the making. The Baltic Sea in Christian Petzold’s *Barbara* and Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen’s *My Favorite War*” **Anna Mrozewicz** (Lund University) provides an analysis of Christian Petzold’s feature film *Barbara* (2012, Germany) and Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen’s animated documentary *My Favorite War* (2020, Norway, Latvia), proposing the concept of the ‘transnational regioscape of the Baltic Sea’ as a way to rethink the cultural significance of the region. The transnational regioscape of the Baltic Sea refers to the way the Baltic Sea has been represented in Scandinavian and Eastern European films and tv-series during the last decades. Mrozewicz understands the cinemas of the Baltic Sea as a ‘dynamic archive’ of mediations and experiences of the boundaries and encounters that have characterized the lives of Baltic Sea residents. Both films represent the ambivalence of the sea as seen from the perspective of those who are denied access to it: In the GDR (*Barbara*) and Soviet Latvia (*My Favorite War*), the sea represented both a strictly monitored and therefore dangerous border and a ‘horizon of hope’ for freedom. Inspired by Pei-Sze Chow’s study of representations of the Øresund region, Mrozewicz suggests approaching the Baltic regioscape as a fluid prism through which divisions, differences and inequalities can be addressed to make space for transnational encounters. Mrozewicz further emphasizes the relevance of such an approach in the current geopolitical situation of Russia’s full-scale military attack on Ukraine. Beyond given geopolitical circumstances, the sea itself appears as a ‘material and nonhuman agent’ that transgresses human-made borders.

## 5. FUTURES IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

When we first drafted the agenda for the research network, we had the aforementioned anniversaries of landmark events in mind, and envisioned an examination of the legacy of the Cold War era as seen from our respective locations and standpoints in Central and North-Eastern Europe. We had no (or, those of us equipped with more foresight, only a vague) idea that we would be facing new ‘tectonic shifts’ during the project period that would shake up our plans. First, the Covid pandemic challenged our concept of a ‘mobile

network' with the aim of visiting each other's departments and engaging with the respective Scandinavian Studies research and teaching milieus (fortunately, we were able to bridge the time with regular online meetings and resume traveling as soon as possible). Then, in February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine ended the post-Cold War era for good and instigated the ongoing geopolitical and ensuing cartographical shifts. The immediate reactions to the invasion within the group varied according to previous experiences and the impact of the situation on our daily lives, which in turn was directly related to our respective positions on the map of Europe. The continuous exchange of concerns, perspectives and information in our by then tight-knit group helped us all through these uncertain times. A new era of European history has dawned, and the future requires a continued exploration of its impact on our lives, our work and our common field of research. What are the coordinates of Scandinavia, and what might be the role of Scandinavian Studies in this new situation? One thing remains certain in the face of uncertainty: The value of cooperation and collective thinking and action.

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