

Canadian Sovereignty over the Arctic

Episode 2: We only see what we know
A film review of *This Land - Ce Pays* by Dianne Whelan

Tamara Drummond
Universität Bremen

Overview of the learning unit

Episode 1:

Introduction and Screening/Cinema show *This Land*

Episode 2:

We only see what we know

A film review of *This Land - Ce Pays* by Dianne Whelan

Episode 3:

Interview

Learning target of the episode

Learning target 1:

You gain a first insight into the various problems connected with the Arctic today.

Learning target 2:

You understand that the Canadian society is composed out of diverse groups and that this fact causes tension which manifests itself in various ways.

Learning target 3:

You recognize the north of Canada not only as important for Canada's foreign policy but also as a vital part of Canadian identity.

Topics

- Introduction
- Content of the movie *This Land – Ce Pays*
- The North as unifying space and symbol
- Reception of the mission and the question of internal independence
- Effects of global warming
- Filming techniques
- Music
- The Canadian flag as reoccurring motif
- Conclusion

Introduction

- *This Land - Ce Pays* (2009) by Dianne Whelan captures the mission to reach Canada's most northern point
- Encompasses various aspects
 - the effects global warming has on the Arctic
 - the Canadian society being composed out of diverse groups
 - the question of governance
 - the securing and reassuring of the Canadian border

The content of *This Land*

- The documentary records the seventeen days of the 2000 kilometre journey to Canada's most northern point
- Aim of the mission: the ensuring and demonstration of the Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic
- The team faces harsh weather conditions, different unplanned obstacles and psychological challenges
- They fulfil the mission on the 10th of April, 2007 and are the first team to complete this journey by land

The content of *This Land*

- Thematically the movie begins and ends with the importance of the securing and reassuring of Canadian borders
- Inuit Rangers and army soldiers demonstrate unity, but various problem areas can be observed:
The differences are symbolic for the whole of Canadian society

The North as unifying symbol

- The North seems to be important for all Canadians and
 - signifies a shared aim
 - is significant for uniting the different groups within Canadian society
- By marking the national borders, Canada declares itself as one country
 - it is important to occupy the country (Chris Bergeron)

Reception of the mission and the question of internal independence

- Mixed group of soldiers and Inuit Rangers
-> attempt to combine traditional knowledge and modern techniques and to attract more acceptance
- This plan seems to fail: confusion about the purpose and meaning of the mission
- Question of internal independence and self-governance for the northern regions is raised

Effects of global warming

- The global warming as a threat for the Arctic
→ underlined by Dianne Whelan's plan to capture an impression of the Arctic before it vanishes
- The north of Canada has gone through rapid changes in the last few years:
 - disappearing glaciers
 - thin ice
- We often do not see what is right in front of us because we have never encountered anything like it before

Filming techniques

- Different shots, varying camera angles and the change between static camera and Dianne filming by hand while moving underline the various topics the movie encompasses:
 - Close-ups: emphasize importance, especially used while interviewing the team members
 - Focus on single scenes: often used to highlight how physically demanding it is for the team to fulfil the mission
 - Static camera: evokes impression of merely observing neutrally

Filming techniques

- Non-static hand camera: takes film audience directly into the action on screen
- High angle shots:
 - underline how unbelievably huge the country is
 - > not only of fragile beauty but also hard to occupy on a regular basis
 - underline how small people really are compared to the size of the land
 - > emphasizes the dangerous nature of the mission
 - capture the change nature has undergone in the last years (bird's-eye view)

The music

- Special version of the traditional Inuit throat singing by Inuit singer Tanya Tagaq
- Emphasizes the fragile and impressive nature and brings, at least from a Western point of view, a sense of drama and hectic into the documentary
- Underlines the psychological and political dimension of the movie:
 - The mission is presented as innovative
 - > first of its kind
 - > extremely dangerous
 - > physically and mentally challenging but nevertheless of great importance

The Canadian flag as reoccurring motif

- Emphasizes the patriotic character of the whole mission and connects all the different parts and topics of the movie
 - it is, like the contrast between modern ways of living Inuit tradition, a constant feature throughout the movie
- Tries to unite what might be quite different in core

Conclusion

- The movie *This Land – Ce Pays* is a collage of photographs, interviews, the personal experience of Dianne during her journey and episodes in which Tanya Tagaq narrates what happens and gives background information
- By no means objective, offers an outlook from a number of diverse perspectives onto the different problems connected with the Arctic today

Exercises for Self Study

- 1) Try to do some research on the Arctic Council and its designated aims. Looking at the problems connected with the Arctic today, how important is it to have the Arctic council? What would you regard as its possibilities and challenges?
- 2) In March 2011 French and Belgian media representatives travelled to Nunavut following an invitation of the Embassy of Canada in Paris. Considering Dianne Whelan's statement that we can only see what we know, how important do you think are trips like this one?

Useful links:

<http://arctic-council.org>

http://www.international.gc.ca/eyes-coupdoeil/Arctic_arctique.aspx?lang=eng

References

- *This Land- Ce Pays* (2009) by Dianne Whelan
- <http://www.diannewhelan.com/about.htm>, accessed on 25/02/2011, 22:48
- <http://www.nfb.ca/playlist/films-change>, accessed on 20/02/2011, 11:36
- <http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tagaq>, accessed on 20/02/2011, 11:57
- <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1275>, accessed on 21/02/2011, 8:54
- <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/publications/article/2009/09-22-09-eng.html>, accessed on 21/02/2011, 9:25
- http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Canada, accessed on 21/02/2011, 9:58
- <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/usa/06528.pdf>, accessed on 27/05/2011, 7:17
- http://othes.univie.ac.at/9733/1/2010-05-11_0401281.pdf, accessed on 03/06/2011, 21:03
- <http://www.international.gc.ca/polar-polaire/index.aspx>, accessed on 06/06/2011
- <http://arctic-council.org/article/about>, last accessed on 10/06/2011
- Dickason, Olive, ed. *The Native Imprint: The Contribution of First Peoples to Canada's Character*. Vol 1. Athabasca: Athabasca University Educational Enterprises, 1995.

Anmerkung zu den rechtlichen Grundlagen: Die Rechte der Bilder und Graphiken liegen, sofern nicht anders angegeben, beim Verfasser der Folien. Die Folientexte beziehen sich, wenn nicht anders angegeben, auf eigene Forschungs-, Lehr- und Praxistransfer-Tätigkeiten und sind deshalb bei deren Verwendung zu zitieren.

About the Contributor

I have been studying English-Speaking Cultures and Philosophy at the University of Bremen since 2010. I am very interested in other cultures and this interest led me to take part in the Canada conference of the Bremen Institute of Canada and Québec Studies (BICQS) in November 2010. I analysed the movie *This Land - Ce Pays* as part of the General Studies module and found it fascinating, how closely the different problems the Arctic faces today are connected and how many different layers of meaning the movie seems to have.