UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education.

Destructed Environments, Gendered Spaces and Colonial Legacies.

Contemporary Artistic Practices Sensing the Arctic and the Circumpolar North.

Stephanie Spreter von Kreudenstein

A dissertation for the degree of philosophiae doctor - April 2024

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Abstract

This thesis is a feminist contribution to a circumpolar art history in becoming. By examining contemporary artistic practices anchored in the Arctic and the circumpolar North three entangled issues are identified: climate change and environmental destruction, gendered spaces and colonial legacies. A common characteristic to the artistic practices studied are the use of the camera and photography, both as emancipatory tool and in reference to the role the mediums played in contributing to the violation and exploitation of the Arctic and the circumpolar North and its Indigenous inhabitants.

Three independent articles with its in-depth examinations of works by female artists Himali Singh Soin, Tonje Bøe Birkeland and Pia Arke, stand central in the research. The articles form the basis of the outlined thematic issues which simultaneously function as analytical categories in the cover article. Here the works of Soin, Birkeland and Arke are contextualized, and connected to the artistic practices of Terje Abusdal, Evgenia Arbugeva, Hanan Benammar, Sophie Calle, Cristina de Middel, Carola Grahn, Marja Helander, niilas helander, Siri Hermansen, Judit Hersko, Katarina Pirak Sikku and Liselotte Wajstedt. The contextualization includes an examination of artists' roles within historical and contemporary expedition culture.

By employing a method of writing *with* and listening *to*, the thesis discloses how historically dismissed stories and events materialize in contemporary art anchored in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. It shows how artistic practices productively speculate about histories in which silent or silenced voices could have been heard. Through the application of theories and methods beyond established art historical ones, the thesis makes it possible to link contemporary artistic practices, art history, posthuman feminism, decolonial and cultural theory, and Arctic and environmental humanities discourses.

Abstract in Norwegian (Samandrag)

Denne avhandlingen er et feministisk bidrag til en sirkumpolar kunsthistorie som er under tilblivelse. Gjennom å undersøke samtidige kunstneriske praksiser forankret i Arktis og det sirkumpolare nord identifiseres tre sammenvevde tematikker: klimaendringer og miljøødeleggelse, kjønnede rom og kolonial arv. Et kjennetegn ved de kunstneriske praksisene som studeres, er bruken av kamera og fotografi – både som et emansipatorisk verktøy, og knyttet til fotografiets rolle i forbindelse med vold og undertrykkelse av urbefolkningene og utvinning av ressurser i Arktisk og det sirkumpolare nord.

Tre uavhengig publiserte artikler med dyptgående undersøkelser av verkene til de kvinnelige kunstnerne Himali Singh Soin, Tonje Bøe Birkeland og Pia Arke står sentralt i forskningen. Artiklene utgjør grunnlaget for de identifiserte tematikkene, og fungerer samtidig som analytiske kategorier i avhandlingens kappe. Her kontekstualiseres verkene til Soin, Birkeland og Arke og settes i sammenheng med de kunstneriske praksisene til Terje Abusdal, Evgenia Arbugaeva, Hanan Benammar, Sophie Calle, Cristina de Middel, Carola Grahn, Marja Helander, niilas helander, Siri Hermansen, Judit Hersko, Katarina Pirak Sikku og Liselotte Wajstedt. Kontekstualiseringen inkluderer også en undersøkelse av kunstneres roller i en historisk og samtidig ekspedisjonskultur.

Ved å anvende en metode for å skrive *med* og lytte *til* avdekker avhandlingen hvordan fortellinger og hendelser som ikke er innlemmet i historien materialiserer seg i samtidskunst forankret i Arktis og det sirkumpolare nord. Den viser videre hvordan kunstneriske praksiser på en produktiv og spekulerende måte gir stemme til de som har blitt fortiet eller har vært tause. Gjennom å ta i bruk av teorier og metoder som befinner seg utenfor etablerte kunsthistoriske rammer, gjør avhandlingen det mulig å knytte sammen samtidskunstpraksiser, kunsthistorie, posthuman feminisme, dekolonial og kulturell teori, og diskurser innen arktisk miljøhumaniora.

Acknowledgments

Little did I know how my PhD journey would enfold when I embarked on this project in August 2019. What I do know now is that is has been an incredible journey in which I not only had the opportunity to learn, listen, grow and discover new worlds of knowledge. But also, a journey filled with support, collegiality, empathy, respect, and kindness. My biggest thank you goes to my supervisors Hanne Hammer Stien and Elin Haugdal: Thank you for believing in my research project from beginning to end, for all the patience and uncountable hours of feedback and discussions, and for standing by my side no matter which storm I had to withstand. I am so grateful. Thank you also for entrusting me with being part of projects that went beyond this thesis, foremost in the context of the research group WONA Worlding Northern Art at UiT. Being part of WONA was essential in feeling part of something bigger, in learning from locally anchored (including Indigenous) scholarship, in discovering my own blind spots, and in experiencing tremendous collegiality and friendship. My sincere thanks go to everyone who is part of this research group.

This thesis would not have been possible without the tremendous generosity of the artists whose practices I examined. Thank you for taking the time to be in conversation with me beyond conventional interview formats and for trusting me in writing about your work: Terje Abusdal, Tonje Bøe Birkeland, niilas helander, Katarina Pirak Sikku and Himali Singh Soin. I also sincerely thank family, friends, former collaborators, and curators of the work of the late Pia Arke for helping me to trace what was supposedly 'lost': Nivi Christensen, Stefan Jonsson, Anders Kold, Jan-Erik Lundström, Tone Olaf Nielsen, Johan Swinnen. Thank you also to Jan Martin Berg, Jan von Bonsdorff and Dikka Storm for retrieving notes and reports from the conference *Kunst og Sted* at UiT in which Pia Arke and her brother Erik Gant participated in 1997. A special thanks goes to Erik Gant for taking so much time to be in dialogue with me to both revisit the conference contributions and extensively "re-reflect" on Pia Arke's work.

As a thesis that examines contemporary visual artistic practices, images are essential. A big thank you to all the artists for giving me permission to reproduce illustrations of

their artworks: Terje Abusdal, Evgenia Arbugeva, Hanan Benammar, Tonje Bøe Birkeland, Carola Grahn, niilas helander, Siri Hermansen, Ahmet Öğüt, Pia Arke Estate / Søren Arke Pedersen, Katarina Pirak Sikku, Himali Singh Soin and Liselotte Wajstedt. For the articles on Tonje Bøe Birkeland's and Pia Arke's practices I also thank again Pierre Sans-Jofre from the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris and Lærke Rydal Jørgensen at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art respectively. Last but not least, a big thank you to Neil Bennun who meticulously proofread my thesis. You did make it much better.

As a thesis that pays attention to my own situatedness, those I am surrounded by in my private life are naturally of tremendous importance. Thank you to all my wonderful friends who were there throughout: with every single one of you I have a special connection. You all know what connects us. I am grateful that you are in this world. I also thank my parents for their ongoing support: you are tremendously important to me. My largest thank you goes to my three children, the most wonderful beings in the world and whose existence I cherish every day. Thank you for your patience, and for cheering me all the way. You are amazing.

Neither did I know that I would meet my soulmate on this journey. You Atle showed me how to rewind and grow at the same time; to take a step back, focus and practice gratitude; to set and reach my goals and visions. Thank you that you climbed that mountain with me. It means the world to me.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 2012, I was part of a group of contemporary art curators working in photography institutions in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden that came together to form what we called the *Nordic Photography Network*.[1] Our objective was to generate deeper mutual knowledge about each country's artistic and curatorial practices, and to increase cross-border institutional collaboration. As part of our inquiry, we sought to investigate whether there existed a "Nordic" aesthetic in contemporary photographic art and the thematic concerns they had in common. The network's concrete outcome was a four-year institutional collaboration (2014–2017) with events hosted annually in each partner's country. Each event (Oulu 2014, Stockholm 2015, Oslo 2016, Aarhus 2017) responded to such Nordic concerns with exhibitions and seminars including *What's Up North?* (Oulu), *Inner and Outer Landscapes* (Stockholm) or *Nordic Neighbours – does it make a difference?* (Stockholm). Oslo's iteration stood under my curatorial responsibility and resulted in the exhibition *For a gentle song would not shake us if we had never heard a loud one* (Fotogalleriet, Oslo, 9 September–23 October, 2016).[2] The exhibition's hypothesis was that certain contemporary art practices provide us with perspectives on the Arctic region that reflect on and counter preconceived ideas, myths, and imaginaries of a place that has historically been mediated through the eye of the Western male polar explorer and that is today principally represented through the apocalyptic lens of the mass media or sober climate science. The eight invited contemporary artists (Katja Aglert, Janet Biggs, Tonje Bøe Birkeland, Jacob Kirkegaard, Lasse Lecklin, Mette Tronvoll, Ulla Schildt and Helene Sommer) I argued, took more sensitive and differentiated positions, using

[1] The network is no longer active but still runs a Facebook page to promote exhibitions, events and open calls. Its founding institutions are Galleri Image, Aarhus; Northern Photographic Centre, Oulu; Centrum för fotografi, Stockholm; Fotogalleriet, Oslo and Forbundet Frie Fotografer, Oslo. It expanded to include Fotografisk Center; Copenhagen; Gallery Hippolyte, Helsinki; Fotogalleriet Format, Malmö; The Icelandic Photography Festival, Reykjavik and Kaunas Photography Gallery, Kaunas.

[2] An expanded version of the exhibition toured to the collaboration partner Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen in 2018 (26 March–27 May, 2018). The exhibition at Fotogalleriet ran parallel to Forbundet Frie Fotografer's 2017 edition of the Oslo Fotobokfestival, which also had a Nordic focus (15–21 September, 2017).

the "artistic lens as a means to interweave the diagnostic and analytical with the utopian and poetic" (von Spreter 2018, 4). Their artistic practices commented on historical omissions in representations of the Arctic, what had shaped Western perceptions of the region, and how these perceptions persist in contemporary Western visual culture.

With its Nordic focus, this exhibition built on my prior interest and research on the "Nordic" Arctic and the circumpolar North, in the course of which I visited Svalbard in March 2014. The purpose of my trip was to accompany the artist Mette Tronvoll as dialogue partner and observer while she was working on her photographic series *Svalbard* in Longyearbyen and Ny Ålesund. It provided me with an essential first-hand experience of a region that I, also, had pre-conceived ideas and projections of. It was during this trip that I read Christiane Ritter's published diary *A Woman in the Polar Night A Woman in the Polar Night* (Ritter [1955] 1938). The book recounts Ritter's experiences of overwintering together with her trapper husband in a small hut in Gråhuken, North Spitsbergen, between 1934 and 1935. It struck me that her writing conveyed a very different and more sensitive image of the Arctic than any I had encountered before. The book served as an important source of inspiration for the exhibition mentioned above, its title being a quote from the book:

> Why have I been so shaken by the peacefulness of nature? Because it was preceded by the titanic storm? Do we really need the force of contrast to live intensively? It must be that. For a gentle song would not shake us if we had never heard a loud one. (Ritter [1955] 1938, 87)

Ritter's writing and accompanying drawings contrasted sharply with the photographs of polar explorers I had previously encountered through the work of the photo historian Harald Østgaard Lund. He had presented his research at a seminar at Fotogalleriet in 2012 related to the book *Norske Polarheltbilder 1888–1928* (Berg and Lund 2011).[3] The book's overall argument is that the Western perception of the Arctic

[3] Harald Ø. Lund's presentation was part of the seminar *The Integrity of Reality* at Fotogalleriet, Oslo, on 12 January 2012. It was a cooperation with the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KhiO), Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus (today *Oslo Metropolitan University*) and Nordisk Institutt for Scene og Studio (merged with Westerdals Høyskole – Oslo School of Arts, Communication and Technology,

and Antarctic has, to a large extent, been shaped through the constructed image of the heroic polar explorer, with Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen as important protagonists in the Norwegian context. It laid out photography's crucial role in composing an image of the male explorer who heroically traverses, maps, and conquers the (supposedly) empty and white polar landscape.

Learning about contemporary and historical narratives on the Arctic from different angles nurtured my motivation to find out more, to thoroughly research the ways in which contemporary artistic practices sensitize the viewer as to what or whose stories aren't told, and how they can imagine worlds that differ from those (previously) constructed. As a natural consequence, I approached UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø to investigate what research and scholarship in and on the Arctic and the circumpolar North had been done, and how I could make a truly valuable contribution to a research environment already rich in knowledge while being aware that I was, then, an outsider to this region myself. Becoming part of the research group Worlding Northern Art (WONA) as a PhD fellow has been vital in my training curve related to the research for this thesis, including the discovery of my own blind spots and the opportunity to learn from Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers locally anchored in the region.[4]

1.2 Research Topic and Thesis Outline

My aim in this thesis is to show how contemporary artistic practices anchored in the Arctic and the circumpolar North thematize three urgent and entangled issues: the impact of climate change and environmental destruction; gendered spaces; and colonial legacies. In thematizing these crucial issues, which are particular but not exclusive to this geographical region, the examined artworks reference stories and events that have been silenced, downplayed, ignored or overlooked. They speculate about histories in which silent or silenced voices could have been heard and make the viewer aware about what is at stake in the Arctic and the circumpolar regions. My

today part of Kristiania University College). Harald Ø. Lund's contribution was entitled *Virkelighet og fantasi! Fikseringer i fotografi, reproduksjon og norske polarheltbilder* (Reality and fantasy! Fixations in photography, reproduction, and Norwegian polar hero portraits). The other speakers were Stefan Jonsson, Anne Hege Simonsen, Nina Toft, Hilde Honerud and Pedro Gómez Egaña.

[4] I will elaborate on WONA's projects in the literature review of this thesis.

close reading of these artistic practices contributes to understanding the complexities embedded in each artwork and the thematic issues they are entangled with.

The camera and photography stand central in the artistic practices I have chosen to examine, even if some of the artists additionally employ other media in their work. Since its invention, the medium of photography has played a crucial role in documenting, categorizing, mapping and conquering the world and its inhabitants. In the context of the Arctic and the circumpolar North, the camera has historically been used to document male human feats (such as having reached the North pole), scientific investigations (such as scientists' measuring activities) and representing the Arctic as empty and sublime (such as a small human being set against a magnificent glacier). Furthermore, photography was an important tool in colonizing the region and its Indigenous inhabitants. By for example using the medium to scientifically "prove" Indigenous people's racial inferiority, colonizers could justify the withdrawal of legal rights including right to land and practicing their own language and spiritual belief systems. In the past few decades, the camera has yet again become essential as a documentary tool, namely in bearing witness to climate change, evident through the endlessly circulating videos and photographs of melting glaciers or hungry polar bears. In contemporary visual art, in turn, the camera and photography have been used as powerful emancipatory tools. Amongst many other usages: to challenge normative aesthetic categories, indeed rebelling against modernist formalisms (Solomon-Godeau 1991) or the category of "fine art" itself; as an experimental tool for artist subjects who had prior been excluded; as a tool "… for transgressive self-imagining and radical world-making among people who are routinely reduced to grotesque stereotypes" (hooks 1992, quoted in Durden 2013, 131); or as having the capacity to develop an aesthetics of active resistance to the status quo (Sekula 1999, referenced in Durden 2013, 201).

In its ambiguity and double role as (potential) transgressor and emancipator, I term the camera and photography particularly relevant in the context of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. I argue that the artistic practices I examine in this thesis employ the photographic medium to make visible what appears invisible (as emancipator) and at the same time take a self-reflective approach to point out the medium's problematic history (as transgressor).

Furthermore, all the artworks I examine in this thesis, I argue, are powerful agents that sense the urgency inherent to the three thematic issues of climate change and environmental destruction, gender and colonial legacies. They are sensors that instigate emotions and, through their affective capacity, transfer this urgency to us. In the Greenlandic context, for example, literary scholar Kirsten Thisted has argued that artists use "… their art as an affective methodology processing the social, epistemological and affective consequences of colonialism" (Thisted 2022, 38). Particularly in the contexts of artists engaging with climate change and environmental destruction, cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis advocates that artworks have a unique capacity to sensitize us about issues that otherwise are less detectable, even act as amplifiers. They help us to connect to our own (watery) bodies and lived experience, and to access our own politics of location (Neimanis 2017, 55). In a similar conviction, art historian T. J. Demos, interdisciplinary scholar Emily Eliza Scott and artist-activist Subhankar Banerjee see visual and aesthetic practices capable of helping "… make sensible—and newly sensitize us to—the unfolding processes of environmental transformation in singular ways" (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021, 1-2). For art historian Suzaan Boettger "[a]rt reconstitutes information that speaks in complex ways that other means do not, and through its engendering of affects, offers access to aspects of the self, and the self in the world, that non-art forms cannot reach" (Boettger 2021, 257). That the artistic practices I examine in this thesis sense the complexity of issues specific to the Arctic and the circumpolar North and sensitize the viewer about them, was crucial for my selection. In doing so, they sensitized me to disentangle the complexities and multiple layers of each artwork and instigate a reading that could open up for new spaces of thinking, acting and knowing. My reading, I argue, contributes to an understanding of how we arrived at the current crisis and how we can learn from artistic practices to be able to not only imagine, but also create a future that differs. With this conviction, I follow Sverker Sörlin's standpoint and the environmental humanist scholarship this thesis is embedded in:

> Our belief that science alone could deliver us from the planetary quagmire is long dead. … It seems this time that our hopes are tied to the humanities. … in a world where cultural values, political and religious ideas, and deep-seated

> human behaviors still rule the way people lead their lives, produce, and consume, the idea of environmentally relevant knowledge must change. (Sörlin 2012, 788)[5]

Thus, it is not accidental that the first thematic issue I examine in this thesis concerns climate change, global warming, and environmental destruction in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. According to recent scientific observations and a re-evaluation of data, the Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the rest of the planet since 1979 (Rantanen et al. 2022). While mostly visible through the melting of ice and permafrost, this can also be discerned through increasing geopolitical and commercial interests in gaining access to land/raw materials, trade routes and ground for military testing. Environmental destruction and pollution are part of this package. That (specific groups of) humans are responsible for these developments is no longer an open secret, despite continuous climate change scepticism. In this context the term "Anthropocene" – originally conceived as the idea that, for the first time in planetary history, the human species is responsible for the dawn of a new geological epoch – is in widespread use, especially in relation to the region I focus on in this thesis. Meanwhile in the humanities the term is widely used as a concept to make aware of human-induced environmental destruction and the repercussions it has for the entire planet (an aspect which I will further go into in my literature review). The artistic practices I examine relate to the term in dismissing both the idea that humans are the planet's supreme species and that the entire human race is responsible for the damage.

The second thematic issue concerns the view that the Arctic and the circumpolar North constitute a complex gendered space. I assert that perceiving the region as gendered particularly leads back to the so-called golden age of polar exploration, which lasted roughly from the mid nineteenth to the early twentieth century. It is in this period that the cult of the white male heroic explorer was nurtured. He was the principal character moving on the Arctic "stage". In this male-dominated territory, landscape itself symbolically carried supposedly female traits – mysterious, cold, and intimidating, even called frigid – that had to be subjugated. People that

[5] Parts of Sörlin's statement have also been cited by Ursula K. Heise in her introduction to *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities* (Heise 2017, 3).

differed in terms of gender, class and ethnicity were marginalized and colonized. The artistic practices I discuss in this thesis pay close attention to this part of the history including its contextual specificities, and how it continues to pervade contemporary Western culture.

The third thematic issue concerns the colonial legacies inherent to the region and how artists grapple with these legacies through their work. Many of the artists I discuss in this thesis belong to the Indigenous groups that have been colonized (or are of mixed heritage) and work to come to terms with their own legacies. There are also "outsider" artistic practices that dig into histories that go back to the beginnings of polar exploration and related imperial expansion, with the colonization of land and its Indigenous peoples as a consequence. Significantly, even if the artistic practices I discuss in this thesis largely pay attention to colonial legacies, it must not be neglected that colonialist practices continue to this day. Referring to the first thematic issue, unsustainable resource extraction and industrial pollution is a form of (capitalist) colonialism because it confiscates and destroys the land that is both physically and spiritually vital for humans and more-than-humans that call it their home. It finds ways to torpedo human/Indigenous rights, as well as what has been called environmental or climate justice.

As I see it, these are issues that demand renewed contextualizations and agendas for art historical readings, and which this thesis responds to. Within these renewed contextualizations, there are three artistic practices that are the focus of my research and which have materialized in the form of three independently published scholarly articles: "Sensing Polar Ice Bodies" (von Spreter 2024b), which examines the video work *we are opposite like that* (2019) by Himali Singh Soin (1987 Delhi, based between London and Delhi); "Feminist strategies for changing *the* story: re-imagining Arctic exploration narratives through (the staging of) photographs, travel writing and found objects" (von Spreter 2021a), which examines the work *Character #1 Aline Victoria Birkeland* (2009) by Tonje Bøe Birkeland (born 1985 Bergen/Norway, based in Bergen); and "Pia Arke and 'Arctic Hysteria': Visual Repatriation and the Problematics of a 'Lost' Artwork" (von Spreter 2022), which examines the work *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997) by Pia Arke (born 1958 Ittoqqortoormiit/Greenland, died 2007 Copenhagen). The focus on these three artworks allows for a reading that does justice

to the complexity of each individual artistic practice and the corroborated thematic issues they are entangled with. Furthermore, it allowed me to pay attention to the different strategic uses of the camera and the photographic medium to sensitize the viewer/reader about the issues I singled out in this thesis.

Each of the independently published articles is in dialogue with specific chapters of this cover article. “Sensing Polar Ice Bodies” enters in dialogue with *Arctic Expedition Culture and Environmental Destruction* (chapter two); “Feminist strategies for changing *the* story” with *Gendered Arctic* (chapter three); and “Pia Arke and ‘Arctic Hysteria’” with *Colonial Legacies* (chapter four). In these chapters I summarize the articles and contextualize the work of Himali Singh Soin, Tonje Bøe Birkeland and Pia Arke. I argue why their artistic practices stand central in this thesis and how they relate to the other contemporary artistic practices that sense environmental destruction, gendered spaces, and the colonial legacies of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. More specifically, in chapter two I contextualize Himali Singh Soin’s work within historical and contemporary expedition culture, climate change and environmental destruction. I relate her work to the artistic practices of Liselotte Wajstedt (born 1973 Kiruna/Sweden, based in Stockholm), Siri Hermansen (born 1969 Geneva, based in Oslo) and Carola Grahn (born 1982 Jokkmokk, based in Malmö). In the context of this chapter, I briefly refer to specific photographs by Evgenia Arbugeva (born 1985 Tiksi/Siberia, based in London) and Pia Arke. In chapter three I contextualize Tonje Bøe Birkeland’s work within a discourse that considers the Arctic and the circumpolar North as gendered, which again relates to polar expedition culture. Birkeland’s works enters in dialogue with the artistic practices of Judit Hersko (born 1959 Budapest, based San Diego), Sophie Calle (born 1953 Paris, based in Malakoff/France), Cristina de Middel (born 1975 Alicante, based in Uruapan/Mexico) and Marja Helander (born 1965 Helsinki, based in Helsinki). In chapter four Pia Arke’s work stands central. I read her artistic practice as decolonial practice *avant la lettre* and establish a connection to the artworks of Katarina Pirak Sikku (born 1965 Jokkmokk, based in Jokkmokk), niilas helander (born 1983 Álletnjárga, Tana/Deatnu, based in Athens and Berlin), Hanan Benammar (born 1989 Paris, based in Oslo) and Terje Abusdal (born 1978 Evje/Norway, based in Oslo).

The literature review, which is integral to this introductory chapter (chapter one), is divided into the separate thematic issues of environmental destruction, gendered spaces, and colonial legacies in the Arctic and the circumpolar North – even if, as mentioned before, they are entangled with one another. It gives an overview over the discourses prevailing in art history/the environmental humanities, and to an extent includes curatorial practices. This decision is based on my conviction that especially in the arts and humanities, discourses overlap. There are often fleeting boundaries between disciplines and the roles practitioners/scholars (artists, curators, critics, art historians and other cultural producers) adopt. As art historians Victoria Horne and Lara Perry have expressed in a similar persuasion, art historical knowledge emerges through the complex liaisons between formal scholarship, the museum and the art market (Horne and Perry 2017, 2).

Apart from its basic function to gain an understanding of the existing research and discourses, the literature review also serves as an introduction to the prevalent thematic issues in the arts and humanities and provides important background information for the three thematic chapters that follow. The concluding chapter (chapter five) summarizes and concludes my findings. I finally delineate the potential of art history in making an important contribution to research and decolonial practices within the environmental humanities and discourses of the Arctic and the circumpolar North.

1.3 A Notion on Place

The Arctic and the circumpolar North has a long history of being imagined from afar. As a region once arduous for outsiders to reach, it functioned perfectly as a surface onto which myths and fantasies were projected. Since ancient times it has exerted a magnetic gravitation – as did the poles – for spiritual leaders, men of science, tradesmen, male explorers and adventurers, writers, poets, and artists alike. Many never travelled to the Arctic and the circumpolar North. But those who did could equally contribute to the mythologizing of a place found "at the ends of the Earth".[6]

[6] I use this expression in inverted commas to make aware that this is a designation for a region seen from the middle or centre of the earth. It has also been used in books and seminars in various wordings, such as *The News at the Ends of the Earth: The Print Culture of Polar Exploration* (Blum 2019) or the conference *Thinking at the Edge of the World* on Svalbard in 2016 ("Thinking at the Edge of the World" 2016).

For who could prove that it really wasn't uninhabited, white, empty, frigid, terrifying, and full of inexplicable wonders? Modern science and technology naturally altered these Western views. But if a fascination with and an attraction to the Arctic and the circumpolar North remains, it is today because the region takes a central role in climate science and commercial and geopolitical interests driven by the receding ice. Trans-Indigenous movements and solidarity between Indigenous peoples have led to increased discussions about their experiences of colonization and working against the misconception that the land was devoid of people (*terra nullius*) there to be mapped and conquered. Locally-anchored humanities and social sciences scholarship have turned upon themselves. Today these disciplines work to the benefit of Indigenous rights by contributing to their support and seeking to recuperate Indigenous language and culture.

I consider the Arctic and the circumpolar North unique as a place where former dichotomies – imagination and reality, deep time and modernity, science and spirituality, Indigenous and Western cultures, pristine landscapes and pollution, nature and culture, inside and outside views – are contested and collide. Of these, the dichotomy of inside and outside views is important for any understanding of how diversely the Arctic and the circumpolar North are perceived. On the one hand, it is a place of belonging, a place called home, a cultural landscape, and a place where humans and more-than-humans are closely entangled with one another; on the other, it is a place of dreams, fascination, opportunity, and investigation. It is often difficult to draw a sharp line between the two, however. Many outsiders have become familiar with and sensitive to this region through settlement or long-term research. Indigenous peoples in turn have (been) resettled, often expressing that they have lost part of their identity. The artistic practices I examine in this thesis represent varied positions, at times consciously pointing out their mixed situatedness.

In this thesis I consistently refer to the Arctic and the circumpolar North as my geographical focus. I am aware that the name Arctic takes its etymology from the ancient Greek word *arktikos* which refers to the star constellations of the Great and Little Bear in the northern hemisphere. Thus, when using the term "Arctic" to designate the geographical region surrounding the North Pole, more specifically the area above the Arctic Circle (located 66° 34' N), it is evident that this is not a term

created by the peoples inhabiting the region themselves.[7] Although for Indigenous peoples the concept of territory differs widely from the Western understanding in terms of designated borders and ownership (especially regarding the idea of human ownership of land), there are Indigenous names or designated homelands used within this area. These include the area of Sápmi which stretches over contemporary Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and Russian territories; the areas inhabited by the Inuit which stretch over Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland, the United States (Alaska), Canadian and Russian (Chukotka) territories; the areas inhabited by the Gwich'in and Athabaskan which stretch over Canadian and United States (Alaska) territories; and areas inhabited by 40 Indigenous peoples united under the Russian Federation of Indigenous Peoples of the North. All are termed "permanent participants" in the 1996 established Arctic Council. In addition, the regional designations "Barents" or "Euro-Arctic", applied to the northernmost parts of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Northwest Russia, are in use. It is important to be aware that both the Barents/Euro-Arctic region and the regions designated as Arctic under the Arctic Council umbrella are geopolitical constructs. In order to both evade and point out those constructs, I have decided to use the terms "Arctic" and "circumpolar North" together in the context of this thesis. The term "Arctic" clarifies that the region has been the subject of an enduring preoccupation from outside; "circumpolar North" in turn, attempts to evade a geopoliticized definition. I neither make exclusive use of Indigenous names for regions that make up the circumpolar North such as Sápmi, though I am aware that several artists and their practices I discuss in this thesis refer to Sápmi as their homeland. This decision is related to my determination to work against exclusivity, with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living entangled lives in this region. Nevertheless, I use Indigenous place names the first time they are mentioned in a chapter as an expression of respect for the early inhabitants of the land. I subsequently revert to the place names used in the English language, corresponding to the language I write in.

Furthermore, this thesis has a geographical focus within the Arctic and the circumpolar North in terms of the artistic practices I examine. This focus is based on my own situatedness, being a researcher firmly anchored in Norway. From this

[7] I am also aware that there are discussions around which areas/countries are included in the Arctic, with the Arctic Council (established 1996) often used as a reference point.

perspective there exist close historical entanglements with the countries of Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, as well as Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland. The archipelago of Svalbard, incorporated into Norway since 1925, is part of this focus area. One could thus call this focus "Nordic" Arctic and circumpolar North, but I refrain from this use in my thesis because I have not included artistic practices from Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. I have additionally largely left untouched artistic practices that wouldn't count as Nordic, namely those anchored in the Russian, Canadian and U.S. Arctic. The literature review, however, often takes a broader perspective on the Arctic and the circumpolar North, which is due to transnational and transdisciplinary collaborations and common concerns found across the region.

1.4 Situatedness, Methodologies, Embodied Concepts, Scholarly Position

As much as my situatedness is related to the country I live in, Norway, this thesis is equally anchored in my own material reality (woman, European, white, middle-class, mother, non-Indigenous, multilingual, German/foreigner/outsider, Norwegian-speaking/locally anchored/insider) in relation to my objects of knowledge, i.e., the artistic practices I examine in this thesis. According to feminist theories, all theoretical concepts are grounded in material reality. Feminist scholars describe this inseparability in terms of "embodied concepts" or "figurations" (Neimanis), "living maps" (Braidotti) or "material-semiotic knots" (Haraway), as Astrida Neimanis has pointed out (Neimanis 2017, 5). From this standpoint, concepts can neither be separated from everyday lived (bodily) experience, nor fully detached from it – disembodied. Detachment and what has been called "scientific objectivity" have been dismantled by feminist standpoint theorists as the singular "enlightened" white male perspective claiming the status of universal knowledge. It is this that Haraway, for example, has called "the god-trick" (Haraway 1988, 582-583) and Pratt "the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene" (Pratt 1992, 197-204) (see literature review for detailed explanations). True objectivity, feminist standpoint theorists argue, acknowledge that all knowledge claims are socially situated and permeated by local values and interests. This self-reflexive acknowledgement allows for a more accurate objectivity: "Strong objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as

'strong reflexivity'" (Harding 2004b, 138). Thus my art historical research and writing expresses "who I am" (Elkins 2014, 21). As Elkins has put it, "[o]ur writing is our testament, …. And if that is the case, then our writing must be understood as an expressive endeavor, one that speaks for us and for our contemporary situation" (Elkins 2014, 22).

In order to place myself on the same critical, causal, plane as my objects of knowledge and at the same time "speak of our contemporary situation," my methodology for this thesis is not a writing *on* but a writing *with* and listening *to*. This methodology included being in dialogue *with* and listening *to* the artworks themselves, as well as the artists (or their contemporaries) whose works I examined. In several cases I have been writing *with* artistic projects that were still ongoing at the time of writing (Soin's and Abusdal's), or have the status, indeed, of a lifelong undertaking (such as Pirak Sikku's). I thus found myself deliberately unable to make final judgements or claim to have an "overview". Writing while the artworks were in the process of becoming put me in something of a vulnerable position. This methodology, I argue, contributes to avoiding the art historian (me) becoming the ultimate executioner and final, authoritative voice as to how these works should be analysed, interpreted, or even inserted into an art historical canon. As Griselda Pollock has stated, "we must refuse the art historian's permitted ignorance of living artists and contribute to the present-day struggles of living producers" (Pollock 2003, 20).

My method of writing *with* and listening *to* the artists and their contemporaries meant providing a dialogical space to listen to the artists' self-reflective observations and their responses towards mine. All dialogues paid attention to showing mutual respect for one another's practice. Such dialogues took the form of an interview (Birkeland), a "love letter" (Soin),[8] a meeting (Abusdal), and long email/whatsapp/messenger conversations (Abusdal, Benammar, Grahn, helander, Pirak Sikku, Soin).[9] In the case of the late Pia Arke, I established contact with her former collaborators, family, and friends (Erik Gant, Stefan Jonsson, Kuratorisk Aktion, Jan-Erik Lundström, Søren Arke Petersen, Johan Swinnen) and attendants of a

[8] See further explanation in the article "Sensing Polar Ice Bodies" (von Spreter 2024b).
[9] Here I would like to point out that large parts of my research period for this thesis happened during the Covid-19 epidemic. As a result, physical meetings and travelling to archives were largely not possible.

seminar in which Arke had participated with her brother Erik Gant (*Kunst og sted*, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, 25–26 April 2007; Jan Martin Berg, Jan von Bonsdorff, Dikka Storm). Here also long, deep conversations enveloped (Erik Gant, Jan-Erik Lundström). Some artists I was not in direct conversation with during my period of research but had already followed their work for many years (Hermansen, de Middel).

All types of exchange led to an in-depth understanding of the works, the artists' own situatedness, and how they connect to other artistic and scholarly practices. Nevertheless, this thesis is my analysis and interpretation, formed of my decisions as to which concepts and (writing) methodologies communicate best with my objects of knowledge. As Mona Livholts has expressed, "writing methodologies include both theories and research strategies to create and collect material and to shape knowledge" (Livholts 2012, 2). Relating to her question "What forms of writing does the research question demand?" (Livholts 2012, 3), I see method and theory as intertwined and argue that both need to be flexible to be able to connect to the object of research in the best possible way. This flexibility becomes visible through my use of different embodied concepts and theories to analyse and communicate with the singular artistic practices in the three independent articles as well as this cover article. My methodology is thus, to refer once again to Elkins, not what he has criticized many art historians do: "pick and assemble theorists and theories without paying attention to how they have been chosen or how they work together," which he argues happens when the "the historian is not paying attention to the writing itself, to its voice, its coherence, or its expressive content" (Elkins 2014, 23). My work, I argue, does the opposite. Through differences in methodologies or approaches, mine is that of an art historian that "… continually seek[s] out the overlooked moments and spaces within the dominant narrative that structures cultural production and consumption, and to contest the concepts that exert authority over the discipline at any given time (Horne and Perry 2017, 12-13).

My methodology of writing *with* and listening *to* means that I not only closely listen to the artworks and the artists, but also sensibly and sensitively connect them to theoretical, or embodied concepts I term apt for my objects of knowledge. More concretely, without my prior knowledge, research and reflections on how to (re)read

the artworks and let them speak "for us and for our contemporary situation", none of the dialogues could have taken place. Further, it is important to acknowledge that my methodology is grounded in posthuman feminist theory and feminist art history in that it fundamentally deals with shifts of perspective. In accordance with posthuman feminist scholar Braidotti, my writing is an emancipatory process that has the capacity to give space to and create "other possible worlds" which transmit and transfer multiple worldviews to us (Braidotti 2022, 3). Allowing for shifts of perspective means also moving away from anthropocentricity, even if I, as a human being, can never fully evade my own centralized position. But it creates an awareness of other beings, elements, things that are equally important parts of this world and that we are entangled with. It is therefore that I apply the terms "other-than-human" and "more-than-human" throughout this thesis. Both terms are by today widely used in the humanities (feminist theory, anthropology, human geography, to name a few), even if there is no single fixed definition of them. However, what these concepts aim to do, is to move away from the idea that humans are at the centre of everything. They advocate that the non-human world not only exists but has powers and capacities of its own, and that there are other ways of experiencing the world.[10]

I argue that this thesis is a self-reflexive feminist art history writing that is acutely aware that, in Haraway's words, "[i]t matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories" (Haraway 2016, 35). In being conscious and determined about which artworks are chosen for interpretation, and which theories, embodied concepts and methodologies are applied, it is possible to create new spaces of thinking, acting and knowing. It supports what intersectional feminist scholars continuously claim: that also the tools need to change.[11] This, I argue, becomes most prominent in my three independently published articles. Here I applied different approaches, embodied concepts and writing

[10] For one definition of "more-than-human," see (Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin 2013); for an informative overview as to how both terms came into being, see (Franklin 2023).
[11] Without providing an extensive list, prominent supporters for changing "the master's tools" (and inspirational for my work) are Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, Kerry Greaves, Audre Lorde, Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock.

methodologies to the artworks and artistic practices I examined, whereby commonalities are found in the application of feminist and decolonial theories.

"Sensing Polar Ice Bodies" (von Spreter 2024b) is a close reading of Soin's video work *we are opposite like that* (2019) through posthuman feminist theories (Neimanis, Alaimo, Braidotti, Tsing et al.) that decentre the human perspective, pay attention to our human and other-than-human entanglements, the ghosts and monsters of the Anthropocene and colonialism's role in environmental destruction. At the same time my choice of theory makes it possible to enter in dialogue with the artist's statement that her work is told from the non-human perspective of the ice. My writing methodology aims at being in a dialogical conversation with Soin's work. Exemplary for this methodology is my decision to use her poems (which function as voiceovers in the video) as "guiding storytelling elements" to structure, converse with and weave together the aesthetic qualities of the video, posthuman feminist embodied concepts and my own analysis. I thereby literally provide space for Soin's voice (and deliberately evade scholarly subheadings) which then converses with my analysis.

In "Feminist Strategies for changing *the* story" I argue that Birkeland's photographic work applies two feminist strategies to challenge the grand, male-dominated heroic narratives of the Arctic and the circumpolar North: firstly, by storytelling and speculative fabulation; secondly by complying with and disrupting re-occurring Arctic tropes and representations. The article is a close reading of Birkeland's *Character #1. Aline Victoria Birkeland* for which the artist reinvents herself as an early twentieth century female polar scientist through staged photography, speculative writing and found objects. In this article Donna Haraway's string figure theory acts as an embodied concept to read Birkeland's story as a story that matters.

"Pia Arke and 'Arctic Hysteria'" is a re-reading of a photographic artwork that has been object of analysis by many scholars and curators (Maude-Roxby 2024; Roxanne 2024; Boetzkes 2023; Smith 2021; Larsson and Stenport 2019; Jonsson 2017, 2012; von Harringa 2016; Thisted 2012; Mondrup 2012; Kuratorisk Aktion 2012, 73-76): *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997). Thus, the decision to re-read an artwork naturally puts me in a tenuous position in terms of repetition and innovation. Not least because my re-reading can be easily placed in the current trend to re-appraise or re-

discover previously marginalized (Indigenous) women artists (see footnote 48). Furthermore, I asked myself whether I could make a valuable contribution to this already existing important art historical scholarship. Again, I take inspiration from feminist art historians in advocating that it is important to re-read, correct and reposition previously interpreted artistic practices, go back to primary source material and find out what has been omitted, overlooked or forgotten (Paasche 2024, 9-18; Pollock 1992). In that sense my re-reading of *Arctic Hysteria IV* is not only an attempt to find out why Arke's work speaks so well of "our contemporary situation", but also how a re-reading of her work can expand on important discussions around the visual repatriation of photographs, trauma processing, uncontested art historical terminologies ('lost' artworks) and decolonial art historical scholarship in general.

The thematic chapters of this cover article (two, three, four) make use of embodied concepts and theories that are only partially found and applied in my independently published scholarly articles. As chapters that contextualize the artistic practices examined in the three independent articles, and relate to artistic practices with common thematic concerns, I termed it important to apply concepts and theories that have a superordinate function. These are: Astrida Neimanis's concepts or figurations of sensing, sensitizing and amplifying (chapter two); Helen Palmer's concept or figurations of defamiliarization, queering and mattering (chapter three); and Ariella Azoulay's concepts or figurations of potential history and unlearning imperialism (chapter four). These I argue work best to, referencing again Haraway, examine artistic practices as "material-semiotic knots" in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another (Haraway 2024, 43). At the same time, these concepts or figurations act as inspirational for the entire thesis, which justifies the prominent use of the verb "sensing" throughout. The final chapter (chapter five), apart from communicating my concluding remarks, again lets an artwork speak (niilas helander's poetry) which builds a bridge to my own analysis and proposal as to how to go forward in art historical and environmental humanities research.

1.5 Literature Review

In this literature review my primary focus lies on prevailing scholarly discourses within the environmental humanities that engage with the three laid out thematic

issues I termed specific to the Arctic and the circumpolar North: environmental destruction, gendered spaces and colonial legacies. My discursive focus is part of what has been termed *Arctic Humanities*. At times however, it goes beyond the regions of the Arctic and the circumpolar North, namely Antarctica. It thereby connects to the more recently developed *Ice Humanities* (Dodds and Sörlin 2022).[12] Within this environmental humanities framework I pay particular attention to discourses of art history and visual culture, as well as interdisciplinary research projects and scholarly publications that entail art historical scholarship. With few exceptions, I have focused on discourses that emerged or manifested themselves in the past twenty-five years, whereby scholarly literature from the past five to ten years predominates. My focus on this time frame reflects that the three thematic issues I outline in this thesis are highly relevant within current environmental humanities discourses, but also, as I selectively show, within curatorial practices. It confirms that there are urgent issues that need to be tackled from multiple perspectives. I pay further attention to local/regional discourses, referring again to my situatedness as a researcher based in Norway, even if I observe that, especially in relation to climate change and environmental destruction, Anglo-American discourses are predominant.

Significantly, I do not lay out a discourse on contemporary photographic theory in general. Nor do I establish an overarching discourse on contemporary artistic and photographic practices that engage with the Arctic and the circumpolar North. The reasons are twofold: firstly, in the context of this thesis, I termed it appropriate to apply photographic and cultural theories in the independently published articles and the thematic chapters of this cover article. Secondly, it would have been beyond the scope of this thesis to establish a discursive overview over the incredibly vibrant contemporary visual culture found in and connected to the diverse cultural regions and places of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Rather, my argumentation for reviewing discourses that engage with the three outlined themes, is based on my conviction that artworks are intrinsically connected to their creators and are embodiments of how they perceive the world. As art historian Ludmilla Jordanova has

[12] The establishment of the Center for Arctic Humanities at UiT The Arctic University of Tromsø in 2023 confirms this increased focus within the humanities. See https://uit.no/nyheter/artikkel?p_document_id=826046

pointed out, artworks express and comment upon contemporary issues in their own ways, and "arise out of social relationships, acting as mediators, not as mirrors, and can become dense with meanings, habits and conventions" (Jordanova 2012, 2, 6). The artworks examined in this thesis have (predominantly) been created in the period we currently live through. Thus, due to the artworks' true contemporaneity, I term it necessary to gain a discursive overview over the prevalent thematic issues connected to the regions entailed in the Arctic and the circumpolar North.

1.5.1 Destructed Environments

1.5.1.1 Climate Change Scholarship, New Polar Aesthetics and the Anthropocene

In her most recent book, art historian Lisa E. Bloom argues that there exists a new polar aesthetic practised by contemporary artists, photographers and filmmakers that challenges the narratives dominating mainstream media. These are on the one hand the apocalyptic spectacles of melting ice and desperate polar bears, and, on the other, persistent images of sublime wilderness that justify, with a masculinist and imperialist mindset, so-called green capitalism (Bloom 2022b, 2). She argues that there is a new aesthetic focus in which there are "feminist, queer, and Indigenous engagements with a newly exposed past, even as they challenge and engage older narratives and material histories that have shaped the regions" (Bloom 2022b, 7). These work to de-mythologize the notion of the Arctic sublime and an idealized wilderness:

> Even though the poles were at times presented through a more traditional Western aesthetics of landscape painting and photography that represented these regions as beyond the calculable and measurable in the appeal to the sublime and wilderness, I and a growing group of scholars and artists point out how such a romantic view of pristine nature in these regions has proved counterproductive. Such an idealization of wilderness is not merely a myth but in the case of the Arctic continues to be used to justify Indigenous absence rather than presence and even extends such older aesthetic strategies in art, film, and visual culture in this new era. (Bloom 2022b, 9)

Bloom's book can be read as a response to media and visual studies scholar Birgit Schneider's call for new pictorial strategies, an "aesthetics of dissonance". Schneider criticizes works of art which follow the line of the sublime, remain within the logic of the spectacle and might even immobilize observers (Schneider 2021, 272). This art, she argues, risks following the footsteps of colonizers and explorers (Schneider 2021, 266).

Bloom's and Schneider's critical writings do not stand alone in discussions about contemporary art and visual culture in relation to what philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour has called "the new climate regime" (Latour 2017). While Bloom's writing focuses more specifically on visual practices in and on the circumpolar North and South, Schneider's is more broadly related to art and artistic methods and research responding to the "new climate regime". Both contribute to what has been called "eco-critical research" (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021, 1) or "critical climate change scholarship" (Bloom 2019, 269) and are part of the growing transdisciplinary community of the Environmental Humanities. I count the anthology *Artistic Visions of the Anthropocene North: Climate Change and Nature in Art* as part of this growing important scholarship, some of its contributions I refer to in other parts of this thesis (Gremaud and Hedin, 2018).

Within this scholarship the notion of the Anthropocene is often an underlying aspect of the discussion because the term signifies that the damage done to our planet is human-induced and that this must also lead to (epistemological) changes in humanist scholarship. Here discussions include the question as of who has caused the trouble in the first place (Haraway 2016) and whether the term is appropriate when it is not the case that every human is responsible for it. As Latour expressed, "Who can claim to speak for the human in general without arousing a thousand protests at once? Indignant voices will be raised to say that they do not hold themselves responsible in any way for these actions on the geological scale – and they will be right!" (Latour 2017, 109). Alternative terms such as Eurocene, Technocene (Sloterdijk 2015, 328) or Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene (Haraway 2015, 2016) have therefore emerged in this context. Anthropologists Anna Tsing et al. have noted that some earth system scientists apply the equally useful term Great Acceleration because "the massive increase in carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrate emissions into the

atmosphere from industrialized agriculture, mineral extraction, petroleum-driven production, and globalized shipping/transportation networks has outpaced all other rhythms of life" (Tsing et al. 2017a, G5). Some anthropologists and environmentalists, however, have contested the term altogether. They consider its use an insult because it reinscribes the human above "nature" as an isolate subject and prime mover (LeMenager 2017, 473). There are also differing opinions as to when this "epoch" was supposed to have begun (Frank and Jakobsen 2019, 15-16; Hedin and Gremaud 2018, 2-3; Cheetham 2018, 61; Neimanis 2017, 160; Latour 2017, 103-133; Robin et al. 2014, 208). While many scholars waited many years for the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) to take a decision on whether the "Anthropocene" should be designated as a new epoch, it has been pointed out that the "drive to officially recognize the Anthropocene may, in fact, be political rather than scientific" (Finney and Edwards 2016). On 21 March 2024 the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) finally officially stated that it rejected "the proposal for an Anthropocene Epoch as a formal unit of the Geologic Time Scale" ("Joint statement by the IUGS and ICS on the vote by the ICS Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy" 2024). This statement in fact frees scholars from its fixed usage and acknowledges the multiple conceptual uses of the term.

This is what literary theorist Mary Louise Pratt had already earlier argued for, namely that the word "Anthropocene" should be seen more as a concept than as a term designating an epoch. She claims that concepts are connected to problems and work as tools to solve them. It is thus less important to discuss "what the Anthropocene *is*, but how it is *lived*" and pose the question as to how to write it (Pratt 2017, G170). Latour, further, values the term in "that the name of this geohistorical period may become the most pertinent philosophical, religious, anthropological and … political concept for beginning to turn away for good from the notion of the "Modern" and "modernity" (Latour 2017, 106).

The term "Anthropocene" is widely used in "eco-critical research" relating to the Arctic and the circumpolar North.[13] I reason that this is because here the anthropogenic climate change and environmental pollution has a triple-impact: firstly, because pollution occurring in other parts of the world impacts the region most visibly

[13] However, it is largely non-Indigenous scholars that use the term.

through melting ice and permafrost or microplastics and other toxins brought up through water currents; secondly, because environmental destruction is caused locally through overhunting/fishing, extractivism/mining, industrial shipping, militarization/atomic testing, water diversion projects, and so on; thirdly, as a result of the first two impacts, the climate/planetary ecosystem is put out of balance leading to flooding, heatwaves, more frequent hurricanes, among many other things on the entire planet. However, as Sörlin has expressed,

> What seemed to be unique to the Arctic has become part of the human condition. Being used to looking at the Arctic from the outside in, as the microcosm at the end of the world, where change arrived last--the *Ultima* Thule, as the ancients baptized it--the situation is turning almost into its opposite. The rest of the world is undergoing the same kind of Arctic amplification, but later. (Sörlin 2017, 437)

In this literature review, and the chapter of this cover article that takes up the issue of Arctic destructed environments, I focus on the first two impacts: firstly, the melting ice/toxins moving up and secondly, environmental destruction taking place in the Arctic and the circumpolar North itself. I do so because they are directly related to the geographical area and related artworks delineated in this thesis.

1.5.1.2 Melting Ice and Anthropogenic Ghosts

I constitute that it is the melting ice that provides one of the strongest emotional imagery of anthropogenic climate change in the polar areas. The melting ice is often the main protagonist/object of investigation across disciplines (geology, glaciology, archaeology, anthropology, history, art, music, to name a few) where it is both object of physical investigation and metaphor; material and ephemeral; dense, viscous and fleeting. Scholarly work in the humanities of the recent years, prominently in the Arctic and Ice humanities, confirms this engagement (Schneider 2024; Bloom 2021; Smith, 2021; Martinsson 2021; Bloom 2019; Frank and Jakosen 2019; Spieker 2019; Spring and Schimanski 2019; Boetzkes 2018; Sörlin 2017; Stuhl 2017; Matilsky 2014; Renshaw 2013). In addition, the artistic practices that engage with the medium of the melting ice in the (circum)polar areas are numerous. Some of the most prominent

artistic practices are those of Ursula Biemann, Julian Charrière, Olafur Eliasson, Roni Horn, Jacob Kirkegaard, Tyrone Martinsson, to name just a very few.

Literature and culture scholar Susi K. Frank and historian Kjetil A. Jakobsen argue that the melting ice and permafrost of the Arctic and the circumpolar North are the knowledge archive of our planet (Frank and Jakobsen 2019, 16). This is because, they argue, ice acts as a memory medium that can provide us with detailed information from deep time (more so than stone), including climate history. At the same time, it can reveal what has hitherto been hidden and thereby can become a counter-archive (Frank 2019, 286). Frank shows how this happens when for example Gulag victims formerly stored in the Siberian permafrost surface. Here, she argues, "permafrost turns out to be a counter-memory that may help the traumatized, or, as an unintended archive, it may become a troublesome legacy" (Frank, 2019, 289).

Literary scholar Hester Blum in turn has shown that "polar ecomedia" – which she defines as printed matter and other ephemera produced in the ecological and geophysical extremity aboard icebound ships – are archival materials that represent in their "very ephemerality the processes of drift, erasure, acceleration and change endemic to Anthropocene life." As material that increasingly emerges from recovered shipwrecks, these "evanescent printed records generated in polar extremity, …, offer conceptual and formal devices for describing, comprehending, and most ambitiously, surviving climatic extremity" (Blum 2019, 4-5). Thus, according to Blum, these ephemeral materials play an important role in grasping and coping with climate change.

Other objects that derive from icebound expeditions and emerge due to the melting ice, might at first glance be less useful as metaphors to grasp and cope with climate change. Especially when these objects are transferred to museums that focus on polar history, they initially acquire the uncritical status of relics. They become important elements/props in telling the story of the fearless polar explorer (von Spreter 2021a, 147). However, as Schneider has shown, even a mundane object such as a light brown cookie wrapper left from Scott's fatal expedition (which she discovered at the Polar Museum in Cambridge, UK) can become a symbol for the many traces the explorers left behind. She argues that the "adventure associated with this story is the exploitation of humans, non-humans and fossil resources, an exploitation that became

the cause of climate change" (Schneider 2024, 105, 119-120). I also take up this connection in the first article of my thesis, namely by constituting that a "broken chronometer preserved in ice" is both a physical trace and metaphor for environmental exploitation. The chronometer, I argue, was an essential invention for navigating the oceans and determining destinations, thus making it possible to map unknown territory and potentially extract resources (von Spreter 2024b, 137).

Tsing et al. argue that it is not only physical traces of past ways of life that are contained in landscapes. Also ghosts that have been carried to us by the "winds of the Anthropocene" can be detected (Tsing et al. 2017b, G1). In fact, they argue that these ghosts are everywhere in our rapidly changing environments: "As life-enhancing entanglements disappear from our landscapes, ghosts take their place" (Tsing et al. 2017b, G4). These are the traces of what is no longer there (such as ice or extinct species) or the traces of the "invisible" toxins that travel in water and through soil and that get inside plants and animals (such as radiocesium). In the Arctic and the circumpolar North, the most prominent ghosts of absence are the melting ice and permafrost. The ghosts of presence are the "invisible" toxins/pollutants travelling up with water currents and winds from other places on the planet, in addition to those locally leaking into soils and groundwater. While ghostly presences can be visualized through artistic practices, Tsing et al. advocate that also scientific on-the-ground-observations are necessary (Tsing et al. 2017b, G3). With this, they mean that there is a need to thoroughly investigate what is happening in a specific place and to understand how everything is entangled with everything else.

Also, Astrida Neimanis pays attention to how everything is entangled with everything else. In *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* she argues that because our bodies are "bodies of water" they are and cannot be seen as autonomous. Here her attention lies on the watery liquids that constantly enter and leave our bodies. She writes: "But as bodies of water we leak and seethe, our borders always vulnerable to rupture and renegotiation. With a drop of cliché, I could remind you that our human bodies are at least two-thirds water, but more interesting than these ontological maths is what this water does – where it comes from, where it goes, and what it means along the way" (Neimanis 2017, 2). Thus, we are always situated bodies, determined by the where and what. Through this phenomenological approach

she challenges what she calls the "three related humanist understandings of corporeality: discrete individualism, anthropocentrism, and phallogocentrism" (Neimanis 2017, 3). *Bodies of Water* is what Neimanis describes as a "thinking-with" and "learning from" water, a figuration (concept) that helps us to understand our politics of location; how nature is in us and how we are in nature – including human-made "ghosts". Neimanis uses many examples in her book, including from the Arctic and the circumpolar North. One scientific study has shown that toxins (POPs - persistent organic pollutants) which travel up north and settle there through atmospheric currents, enter the food chain in concentrated ways (because toxins don't break down in colder climates). They are first absorbed by plants and animals and then enter human bodies. The study laid bare that the breast milk of Inuit women in the Canadian Arctic contains two to ten times the amount of organochlorine concentrations than those of white women living hundreds of kilometers further south (Neimanis 2017, 35-36). Also PCB levels are alarmingly high.[14]

Tsing et al. and Neimanis are important scholarly voices, amongst many others, in breaking down the causes of anthropogenic environmental destruction, advocating and proving human and other-than-human entanglements, and how (post)humanist and hard science scholars can work together (Frank and Jakobsen 2019; Haraway 2017; Alaimo 2010; Bennett, 2010; Barad 2007). Tsing et al. and Neimanis point out that artists play an important role in such collaborations, having a unique capacity to amplify and sensitize the viewer by visualizing what is at stake and how to imagine a liveable future – which I pointed out earlier and will get back to in the next chapter. Thus, they subliminally urge a movement beyond disciplinary prejudices and connect to what Haraway has called for: have art, science and activism collaborate (Haraway 2017, M31).

Another form of collaboration and on-the-ground-observation to sense environmental destruction and its anthropocentric ghosts is for Western scientists to respect and listen to traditional Indigenous knowledge – in fact, to acknowledge it as Indigenous Science (Whyte 2018, 232). Contemporary art and aesthetics theorist Amanda Boetzkes brings attention to this necessity by discussing Ian Mauro and Zacharias Kunuk's documentary film *Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change* (2010).

[14] PCB are polychlorinated biphenyls (industrial products or chemicals).

Her scholarship, which I refer to in my article of this thesis, "Sensing Polar Ice Bodies" (von Spreter 2024b, 133), summarizes what the Inuit elders recount in the film. Namely that they witness that the world has tilted on its axis, that there are longer periods of daylight during winter and that the sun sets at a different location on the horizon than a generation ago. Their observations are based on trans-generational knowledge of how to read the sky and the landscape (Boetzkes 2018, 135). This observation, as it has been transmitted through Mauro and Kunuk's film, shows how Indigenous people sense anthropogenic ghosts and how these ghosts impact their everyday environment. Similar to Boetzkes, art historian Mark A. Cheetham argues that it is important to acknowledge Indigenous perspectives on the North within art, despite the danger of yet another recolonization of the North when Indigenous Science is imported into eco-conscious art (Cheetham 2018, 71).

Equally referencing Mauro and Kunuk's film, Cheetham further points out that the film not only shows how anthropogenic climate change impacts the life of Indigenous Arctic peoples, but also teaches the viewer how Indigenous knowledge is part of a worldview in which Indigenous peoples see themselves as part of the land. As cross-cultural theorist Michael Koskey has described it, among Indigenous peoples "knowledge is gained through developing and fostering relationships with all aspects of the environment: Humans, animals, plants, ideas, values, notions, concepts, histories, traditions, artefacts, and the supernatural" (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005; Koskey 2021, 92). Thus, when their land is destructed, it has severe impacts for all aspects of their life and well-being. Consequently, Indigenous peoples sense the anthopogenic ghosts much more dramatically than we do in our Western urbanized worlds – worlds where we are sealed off from climate most of our time and where weather is mostly relevant for planning leisure activities or are subject of conversation (Schneider 2021, 263).

1.5.1.3 Local Environmental Destruction

The Arctic peoples have lived, hunted, and traded with one another over centuries, as archaeologist Robert McGhee describes it in his book *The Last Imaginary Place: A Human History of the Arctic World* (McGhee 2007, 240-271). However, he continues, with the beginning of European industrialization and the increasing hunger for valuable resources, commercial and political interest in the Arctic regions grew – for it

is in the Arctic and the circumpolar North that many sought-after resources are found. This development set in motion colonization processes that included the confiscation of land and denial of access to hunting, grazing and fishing grounds for the Indigenous populations. With the influx of people from outside, the dramatic spread of illnesses not only led to the near extinction of entire Indigenous peoples but also destroyed their spiritual belief systems and cosmologies.[15] Turning the region into an even less densely populated and missionized land, little resistance was encountered, allowing modernity's industrialization projects to proceed smoothly. McGhee mentions a few of those initiated in the 1930s alone: major mining started on the Kola Peninsula amidst Sámi reindeer-pastures; nickel and other metals were discovered at the base of the Taimyr peninsula; coal deposits of the Vorkuta Basin began to be exploited depriving the Nenets of their traditional pastures; oil drilling at Norman Wells on the Mackenzie River with a refinery built in 1939; the world's richest known deposit of uranium was discovered on the shores of the Great Bear Lake; in the Nordic countries Sámi reindeer-grazing lands had to give way to farming. While the Indigenous population decreased, was exotified and deprived of their land, people from outside were settled to work as labourers in the new industries (McGhee 2007, 247). One can barely imagine what more has been extracted since, and what waste, from radioactive to toxic contaminants, has been added (Bravo 2019, 220).

Both the research project *Arctic Modernities* (2013–2016) with its resulting publications (Hansson and Ryall 2017a; Kjeldaas and Ryall 2015) and the book *Arctic Environmental Modernities* (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017) take up the problematics embedded in the Arctic as a space of and for modernity. Through different research/article contributions from the field of humanities, they problematize how imaginations and projections about the Arctic have led to the "fallacy of an undisturbed Arctic landscape at a time when the anthropogenic impact on it can no longer be denied" (Hansson and Ryall 2017b, 1-2). More, they argue that these projections have "hit a crescendo in recent years, catalyzed by anthropogenic climate change, accelerating resource extraction, mass tourism, and a heightened global

[15] See for example Harold Napoleon's written personal reflections and explanations as to how Indigenous spiritual belief systems, here amongst his own Native Alaskan Yup'ik people, were destroyed (Napoleon [1996] 2005).

awareness and activism regarding environmental change, Indigenous rights, and nature preservation" (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017, 1-2).

However, while both *Arctic Modernities* and *Arctic Environmental Modernities* have a transdisciplinary approach, there is little focus on the analysis of artistic practices that relate to climate change, pollution and extraction industries. There are two out of fifteen chapters that focus on visual artistic practices (Körber 2017, 145-167; Bloom 2017, 183-195). Two chapters include artworks only for illustrative purposes or to support their overall argumentation (Vik 2017, 43-58; Gremaud 2017, 197-214). I observe a similar approach in the anthology *Arctic Modernities* (Hansson and Ryall, 2017). I will revisit both in the chapter that investigates the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a gendered space.

Contrary to *Arctic Modernities* and *Arctic Environmental Modernities*, art historians and artist-activist T. J. Demos's, Emily Eliza Scott's and Subhankar Banerjee's edited anthology *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (Demos, Scott and Banerjee, 2021) focuses on contemporary art practices in relation to climate change. Even if this anthology does not focus on the geographical area of the Arctic and the circumpolar North, I term it an essential contribution in ecocritical scholarship and important response to the indicated imbalance within transdisciplinary environmental humanist scholarship. Demos, Scott, and Banerjee indeed argue that their book is motivated by this imbalance. The editors further argue that visual and aesthetic practices, as already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, can help to make sensible and newly sensitize us to the unfolding processes of environmental transformation (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021, 1-2). The scholarly contributions of this anthology are divided into the six thematic sections of "Extractivism", "Climate Violence", "Sensing Climates", "In/Visibilities", "Multispecies Justice" and "Ruptures/Insurgencies/Worldings". While I see this thesis as an important contribution to the anthology's scholarship and its outlined themes in general, I here pay particular attention to the editors' thematic focus on "extractivism". It helped me to apprehend and identify what extractivism entails, how artistic practices respond to extractivist processes and how these can be transferred to the geographical areas I focus on in this thesis. Demos, Scott, and Banerjee aptly define "extractivism" as "a political economy premised on the withdrawal of value without corresponding

deposit: resources are removed from the Earth, profits from labor, and commodifiable data from plants, bodies, and information systems. Returned to their place is waste, toxicity, disease, exhaustion, and death" (Demos, Scott, and Banerjee 2021, 11). The individual scholarly contributions that focus on artistic practices engaging with extractivism on a global scale, lay bare how extractivist industries are entangled with colonial history and the neoliberal economy, and what consequences these have for the environment and its local inhabitants/labourers. Thus, even if this section in the book does not focus on the geographical areas which I focus on in this thesis, commonalities can be found in the artistic practices I discuss:

> Contemporary visual artists responding to this complex terrain of environmental politics are utilizing a variety of strategies to highlight the harm from extractive practices, labour exploitation, and environmental damage. Photographic constructions, collaborative practices, performative engagements, and relational approaches attempt to dissolve historical boundaries reconnecting peoples, land and human-nonhuman relations. (MacKenny and Green 2021, 15)

Concluding this section of the literature review, I constitute that especially anthologies within the environmental humanities that engage with the Arctic and the circumpolar North in relation to climate change, environmental destruction and the notion of the Anthropocene put minor focus on the analysis of artistic practices. In turn, anthologies within art historical and visual culture often take a larger global perspective, some of which are *Art, Theory and Practice in the Anthropocene* (Reiss 2019), *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies* (Turpin and Davis 2015) and *Das Anthropozän. Zum Stand der Dinge* (Renn and Scherer 2015). *The Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* is part of this important discourse. All referenced scholarly work is important in communicating to a larger audience for what is at stake in this time of crisis, how we got there and how humanities scholarship can contribute to solutions. Through its concise and thematically focused sections as well as clear argumentations as to how artistic practices can sensitize us about climate change and environmental destruction, Demos, Scott, and Banerjee's anthology remains an

important reference for this thesis. It also connects to the earlier referenced *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics* (Bloom 2022), as well as individual contributions in *Artistic Visions of the Anthropocene North* (Hedin and Gremaud 2018) and the publication in which one of my articles has been published, *Communicating Ice through Popular Art and Aesthetics* (Hemkendreis and Jürgens 2024).

1.5.2 Gendered Arctic

1.5.2.1 Modernity and the Making of the Male Polar Hero

Both *Arctic Modernities* and *Arctic Environmental Modernities* remain important references in the context of this thesis, not least in relation to the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a gendered space. Literary and gender scholars Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall argue that the region has historically been perceived as the exotic opposite of modernity and typically been represented in atemporal terms so that it could act as a battling ground for the superhuman struggles of a few exceptional men against the forces of nature. The *Arctic Modernities* project sought to interrogate and deconstruct this aspect by equally investigating the Arctic as a space of modernity, a space in which the environment is threatened and as a space of an everyday, lived reality of its inhabitants. Nevertheless, they argue that remnants of masculinist rhetoric survive (Hansson and Ryall 2017, 4).

This rhetoric is still largely related to a single type of masculinity we find associated with this area, namely that of the historical figure of the heroic(ized) male explorer. This comes as no surprise since it is largely through travel accounts and visual documentation from and about eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century expeditions made by the crew and their male leaders – the ones deserving the "explorer" title – that information and visualizations of the Arctic were, and continue to be, disseminated. It was here that the strong, rational, heroic man thirsty for knowledge and recognition could explore untamed nature and could, once having set foot on it, examine, map and conquer the virgin landscape.[16] While this historical dualism in Western thought is of course not exclusive to the Arctic/polar areas, it is

[16] Simon Schama points out the difference between nature and landscape, with landscape signifying a unit of human occupation, thereby pointing out the annexation of nature through culture, and the impossibility of separating the two (Schama 1996, 9-12).

here where it became strongly visible and was continuously nurtured – at the supposed last frontier or no man's land. In this dualism between man and nature, the Arctic landscape became a stage on which homosocial activities could be perfectly played out. Here, far away from Europe's metropoles, the polar explorer could be the principal hero and protagonist in his quest to reach the pole (north or south), unchartered passages (northeast or northwest), examine and exploit its Indigenous inhabitants (human and other-than-human), and conjure the at times spiritual, at times frightening, mysterious female body as landscape.

Scholarship of the last three decades, especially, has highlighted how one specific type of masculinity historically dominated the Arctic (and Antarctic) stage, leaving no or insignificant space for women or its Indigenous inhabitants (Gaupseth and Hauan 2024, Bloom 2022a, Reeploeg 2021, Reeploeg 2019, McCorristine 2018, Aarekol 2014, Glasberg 2012a, Glasberg 2012b, Hansson 2009, Lewander 2009, Berg 2006, Glasberg 2002, Bloom 1993).[17] In *Gender on Ice*, Lisa E. Bloom challenged those narratives, focusing on the polar explorers Robert E. Peary and Robert Falcon Scott in their quests to reach the North and South Poles respectively. Here Bloom showed how their stories represented related ideals of manliness and nationalism, and how popular media nurtured a heroic masculinist image that degraded lower class, Black and Indigenous people as well as women from all backgrounds to the status of helper/assistant or mistress in their quests to reach the poles (Bloom 1993). Bloom highlights differences between the disseminated expedition accounts and masculinities (for example gentlemanly honour and self-sacrifice versus representations of an image of modernity and scientific progress). She notes that in both cases the masculinist ideal was that of the lone hero fighting against all odds. The fact that other expedition members and Indigenous inhabitants (in Peary's case) played important roles, and that the expeditions were marked by failure and incompetence, was largely left out of the narratives. Bloom further points out that despite their differences, both accounts represent the male polar explorer as disembodied, where authority resides in the erasure of the speaking and experiencing subject, which Bloom argues particularly suited imperial ideologies. In Scott's account,

[17] There is no Indigenous population in the Antarctic, nor on the Arctic Svalbard archipelago or the island of Jan Mayen.

> a nationalist myth was established in which writing itself becomes a means to mythologize an ideology of masculinity in which paradoxically the male body is ignored. Or rather, the male body's performance becomes the means by which a moral theater is constructed, in which the body ultimately disappears. The gendered, physical body is replaced by moral character, which provides the foundation on which masculinity becomes heroicized. (Bloom 1993, 127)

Peary's account, on the other hand, tried to produce a narrative as part of a non-subjective scientific tradition marked by professional detachment: "The rhetoric of science does not allow for subjectivity except in the form of genius, or for a sacrifice for a collective identity" (Bloom 1993, 128). Bloom's words reflect then-prevalent discussions about scientific truths and objectivity, which continue to be highly relevant today. Feminist science scholar Donna Haraway's calls for "situated knowledges" and an embodied feminist objectivity were troubling "universal" (meaning: male) established knowledge systems and ways of seeing (Haraway 1988). What Haraway calls "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 581) is exactly what Bloom criticizes in her reading of Peary's and Scott's polar exploration accounts from the early twentieth century. Mary Louise Pratt's first edition of *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* was published a year prior to Bloom's; she relates to this view from nowhere with god-like qualities, and calls it, particularly in relation to travel and exploration accounts by European men, the "monarch-of-all-I survey" scene. Here the male European traveller is the sole, universal discoverer. What he sees is all there is (Pratt 1992, 197-203). The worlds and vantage points of others simply do not exist.

Pratt focuses on "imperial eyes" that colonized Asia and the Americas. Bloom's *Gender on Ice* ventures to the most frigid zones, areas possibly most distant from Western "civilization" and modernity. Paradoxically enough, it is here were modernity's dividing gender roles and its related masculinist and feminine ideals (strong, rational, dominant, cultivated, breadwinner, head of family, public presence vs weak, irrational, nurturer, caretaker, subordinate, chaste, confined to the private sphere) are strongly played out. In modernity's story of progress (which Peary more

forcefully embodies) women (and the Indigenous inhabitant) received little place, despite their presence in many areas, as aesthetics and literary scholar Rita Felski has shown (Felski 1995). In fact, Felski has argued that while modernity "is often caricatured as synonymous with a totalizing logic of identity [it] reveals on closer examination a multiplicity of voices and perspectives that cannot be easily synthesized into a single, unified ideology or world-view" (Felski 1995, 8). This is also the case in Arctic exploration, as historians Roald Berg (Berg 2006) and Lisbeth Lewander (Lewander 2009), for example, have shown. According to Berg, polar literature is silent when it comes to the achievements of women in the air and on the ground in the early twentieth century. He refers to the pilots Frances Wilson Gracon, Gidsken Jakobsen and Louise A. Boyd. The latter, he writes, was even ridiculed in the media and by other, male, explorers as a "pampered millionaire," longing for men of few words who had given her life new meaning and direction, and thus demeaning her role in the rescue operation of Amundsen (Berg 2006, 136). Lewander points out that although female explorers and travellers were present in the polar areas, they were marginalized. In the Antarctic, women were explicitly banned from overwintering and independently working at research stations well into the 1970s (United States) and 1990s (Britain). Only few exceptions were made when spouses could accompany their partners (Lewander 2009, 95-96).[18]

Much critical scholarship focuses on polar literature by and on the male explorer (Bloom 1993; Berg 2006; Gaupseth 2017) as well as the role of vernacular photography in disseminating an image of the polar explorer as heroic (Berg and Lund 2011; Berg 2019; Aarekol 2014; Barr 1997; Glasberg 2012b). As photo historians Siv Frøydis Berg and Harald Østgaard Lund have shown in the Norwegian context, there were several tropes in the genre of polar portraiture photography that presented the male explorer as strong, heroic and invincible (Berg and Lund 2011). The hooded half bust portrait which I mention in the introduction to chapter three, was one of the most popular tropes together with the full-length portrait in fur, either with props like a harpoon or skis. It became manifested through its endless reproduction, such as

[18] This absence is also thematized in Bloom's analysis of Anne Noble's *Bitch in Slippers* which is a photographic series of machines used and operated by men in Antarctica that bear personalized female names with a "bitchy" undertone such as Hazel, Patsy or Brenda. See (Bloom 2022a, 30-40).

through the sought-after collectible cabinet card.[19] But they were also repetitively reproduced in newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, postcards, slide lectures and as illustrations in published travel diaries and books.

The camera had already become an important item in the expedition equipment list for Nansen, whose expeditions preceded those of Amundsen; before too long, taking one had become customary (Larsen 2011). Thus, the camera could witness heroic feats such as reaching the South Pole. The photograph of the Norwegian flag flying at the peak of the tent with Amundsen and his three companions gazing at it in reverence (14 December, 1911) has become one of the most iconic polar expedition photographs, and still endlessly circulates. The image was heavily used in the celebrations of the Nansen-Amundsen Year in 2011 and retains a prominent place in contemporary museum exhibitions such as the Fram Museum in Oslo (Aarekol 2014). Polar historian Lena Aarekol, in fact, argues that

> polar photographs are used as if they were neutral, unmediated and truthful photographic evidence of expedition life. Thus they illustrate how the production of exhibitions has not necessarily developed in line with recent academic scholarship. While such scholarship has adopted new perspectives of indigenous people, colonization, and power and powerlessness – and on how photographs work as cultural constructions, the museum's exhibition practices and uses of photographs have not visibly changed. (Aarekol 2014, 161-162)

Photographs stemming from the expedition of Amundsen's rival Scott (more precisely, taken by the photographer Herbert Ponting, whose book *The Great White South* was published in 1921), fuelled, in literary scholar Elena Glasberg's words, a "Heroic Age aesthetic". This aesthetic was characterized by dramatic juxtapositions of human figures and icescapes, or within inherently dynamic mountains or crevasses (Glasberg 2012a, 91-92). It connects easily to notions of the sublime in Arctic imagery, here

[19] The artist Sayed Hasan also refers to this trope through his alter ego Hasansen and the project *Hasansens Kjelke* (Hasansen's Sledge), on which he crosses the city of Oslo's neighbourhood "Grønland" – Greenland (Hasan).

juxtaposed with the image of the male heroic polar explorer fearlessly moving on that "white" and "empty" stage.

At the same time, this "Heroic Age aesthetic" and the image of the ostensible sublime obscures the modernity lurking behind polar exploration. For there exists, as literature, media and culture scholars Lill-Ann Körber, Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport point out, a close relationship between the two. They argue that European and North American explorers had "the goal of 'expanding' territorial holdings in the name of the nation state" and that therefore the "era of polar exploration can be understood as an attempt to mobilize Western technology and the global expansion of territorial holdings, by which the colonial practices of nation states (from cartography to whaling) were further sanctioned" (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017, 2-3). Thus, the activities of the modern male polar explorer stand in corelation with the mapping and exploration of the resources found in the Arctic and circumpolar North, the colonization of its Indigenuous peoples, climate change and the continuous drive for resource extraction. This entanglement, and more specifically, that of gender, indigeneity and ecology, is also discussed in the earlier-mentioned research project *Arctic Modernities* (2012–2015). Here it is pointed out that images and representations deriving from the heroic era of polar exploration continue to shape, influence and inform the Arctic (Kjeldaas and Ryall 2015, ii). Despite its continuous deconstruction, a masculinist rhetoric survives in many contemporary narratives of technology-supported polar adventures (Hansson and Ryall 2017b, 6-7). In response, Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport argue that it is important to "to strip away this view and offer a fragmentary and dialogical account, positioning the Arctic as a site of meaning that is widely contested, continuously negotiated, reimagined, and elided" (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017, 17). An integral part of this "stripping away," they argue, is an analysis of gendered constructions of the Arctic to complicate "the region as a bastion for the discursive construction of heteronormative masculinities as ruling over nature" and point out that it has continuously been "an arena for the performance of conflicted narratives about masculine heroism, supposedly anchored through recourse to normative male rationality and beliefs in technological progress" (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017, 4).

Film studies have also increasingly engaged with women's roles in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Literature, media and culture scholars Mariah Larsson and Anna Westerståhl Stenport note that there is a "close association between explorers and filmmakers [that] points to a continuous dominant masculinist paradigm that has informed not only Arctic and polar film history but also connects strongly with the figure of the auteur as it has been developed and applied within film studies in general." Their writing draws an interesting parallel between the "independent director-as-auteur persona" and the male polar explorer: representing strength, virility, endurance, leadership, force of personality and equipped with qualities of dominance and privilege (Larsson and Westerståhl Stenport 2019, 68). In response, their scholarship investigates what they call *women film explorers* who were either filmmakers themselves, women explorers documented by others on film or staged/fictionalized accounts of women explorers in cinema.

Larsson and Westerståhl Stenport's article has been published in *Arctic Cinemas and the Documentary Ethos* (Kaganovsky, MacKenzie and Westerståhl Stenport 2019) which can be seen as a follow-up of their previously edited book *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic* (MacKenzie and Westerståhl Stenport 2014). The book looks, according to the editors, at different forms of Arctic filmmaking (films made by Arctic residents, films made by outsiders and films viewed by Arctic residents) to reveal "the complexity of Arctic visual, cultural and ideological representation" (MacKenzie and Westerståhl Stenport 2014, 1). The book largely leaves out an analysis of contemporary artistic practices engaging with the medium of film. Exceptions are an interview with contemporary artist Eva la Cour (Ihle 2014), Helga Hlaðgerður Lúthersdóttir's analysis of Isaac Julien's and John Akomfrah's film works in terms of Arctic creolisation (Lúthersdóttir 2014) and Daria Shembel's discussion of experimental cinema meeting digital art in DJ Spooky's and Dziga Vertov's work exploring the polar regions (Shembel 2014). Significantly, specific issues of gender are taken up through Sabine Helin-Strømme's "White on White: Twenty-First-Century Norwegian Horror Films Negotiate Masculinist Arctic Imaginaries" (Helin-Strømme 2014) and Gunnar Iversen's "Arctic Carnivalesque: Ethnicity, Gender and Transnationality in the Films of Tommy Wirkola" (Iversen 2014).

1.5.2.2 Women's Uneasy Presence

One method of complicating the Arctic as a bastion for the discursive construction of heteronormative masculinities (Körber, MacKenzie, and Westerståhl Stenport 2017, 4) is to look at women's – often uneasy – presence in the Arctic/polar areas. Closer readings of (settler) women's diaries and travel literature highlight the discursive pressures women experienced when publishing their accounts, as I have previously pointed out (von Spreter 2021a, 4-6). Heidi Hansson's reading of the polar narratives of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary (1893) and Jennie Darlington (1956), for example, highlights how gender anxieties at the end of the nineteenth century and what she calls the "backlash phenomenon of the postwar period" resulted in the continued promotion of conventional gender roles. In both cases, it is argued that the female authors not only failed to contest but in fact contributed to the construction of the polar region as a masculinist space while women were still confined, or confined themselves, to the domestic sphere (Hansson 2009). Social and cultural historian Silke Reeploeg and other scholars have further investigated Western women's role and relationship to coloniality in the Arctic and the Nordic countries. It is in this research that "blind spots" are investigated in which gender, race and colonial legacies intersect. Here there is a scholarly focus on women's roles as colonial agents and their potential complicity in superimposing Christian and European gender norms on Indigenous societies (Reeploeg 2021; Reeploeg 2019; Höglund and Burnett 2019).

Other scholarship challenges the standard narratives of polar exploration by working against the continuously nurtured image and myth of the rational male hero conquering nature. According to interdisciplinary historian Shane McCorristine, this

> pervasive dichotomy not only ignores the everyday dreaming and religious or "superstitious" behaviour which explorers carried with them, [it] also obscures the messy spiritual values that were sensed by people in polar landscapes, whether through atmospheric phenomena such as the Aurora Borealis or the embodied spiritual journeys of Inuit shamans and British clairvoyants across vast distances. Both Inuit oral testimonies and the published journals of explorers tell us that shamanism and spiritual forces played a key role in the

> encounters between strangers in the Arctic, as did Inuit guides, interpreters and map-makers. (McCorristine 2018, 16)

McCorristine points out that, in Victorian fiction especially, the Arctic became a space "complicated" by the presence of women – either in the physical form of helpers, informants, geographers and sexual objects or as imagined women (ghosts, polar queens, mummies) showing a spectral relation between men and absent women back home (McCorristine 2018, 174-175). Spectral relations between men and women back home have also been pointed out by investigating place names in the Arctic and Antarctic. As Carol Devine has shown, many places were named after explorer's daughters, wives, lovers, patrons or as in the case of Amundsen, a beloved childhood nanny called Betty (Devine 2022, 2). Significantly though, place names dedicated to women were called by their first names, whereby their male counterparts were called by their surnames.[20] However, the largest number of place names were dedicated to those who physically travelled to the polar areas: the men themselves. As polar historians Einar-Arne Drivenes, Harald Dag Jølle and Ketil Zachariassen noted on the mapping of Svalbard: "Famous scientists, expeditionists, and members of their families had got places named after them. … Adolf Hoel's name was given to both a peninsula and a mountain, while the leader of the Norwegians on the expeditions, Gunnar Isachsen generously provided his own family name to designate the region generally" (Drivenes, Jølle and Zachariassen 2006, 281).

Spectral relations or, better, women's presence-through-absence, also became apparent through the staging of theatre plays and printed media aboard expeditions. These included ship newspapers and other written ephemera which often played an essential role in keeping the crew's spirits up during long dark winter months when ships were moored in the ice. Here newspapers no longer regulated "diurnal time but instead call[ed] attention to (and help[ed] relieve) its attenuation" (Blum 2019, 3). Printed poems or stories could conjure up women's presence and express sexual desires; theatre plays staged on board included role reversals and gender cross-

[20] For example Marguerite Bay, Ann Island, Mount Betty versus Ross Ice Shelf, Amundsen Sea, Enderby Land in Antarctica; Sabinebukta, Kapp Laura, Magdalenefjorden versus Nordenskjöld Land, Longyearbyen, Wedel Jarlsberg Land, Kapp Wrede, Sverdrupisen on Svalbard.

dressing. Here expedition members filled both male and female roles, often with homo/transsexual undertones. In fact, theatre props and costumes began to be an integral part of the inventory for ships destined for the Arctic, with William Edward Parry's expedition to discover the North-West Passage (1819–20) setting the precedent (Hansson 2015, 52-53). Amundsen's expedition to the South Pole (1910–1912) also exemplifies this practice: at the "Equator Party" on board the ship, a special guest appeared: the so-called "*Fram* ballerina" (Gaupseth 2023). Even though the entire crew knew that the ballerina was Second Mate Hjalmar Fredrik Gjersten, written accounts and photographs document that "she" was warmly welcomed as an "apparition from a better world" and considered in the "highest degree feminine" (Amundsen, quoted in Gaupseth 2023, 8). Photographic documentation of the celebration shows the ballerina in a flirtatious pose sitting on a crew member's lap. The gender ambiguity present in this cross-dressing activity, it has been argued, can be understood as an uninhibited play outside of norms of gender and sexuality. It possibly even allowed for an opportunity to flirt with the same sex but was tolerated because the male gender was disguised in women's clothing (Janes 2022).

1.5.2.3 Different Gender Types

More recent analyses of cross-dressing events, and of these conjurations of the female presence in the Arctic, reflect the previously-overlooked existence of quite different types of masculinity. To refer once again to Körber, MacKenzie and Westerståhl Stenport, this critical scholarship contributes to complicating the Arctic "as a bastion for the discursive construction of heteronormative qualities." Researcher and folklorist Marit Anne Hauan's publication *Polare Maskuliniteter* (Polar Masculinities) makes an important contribution in showing that not one, but multiple types of masculinities were present in the Arctic. The heroized polar explorer was only one, if dominant, type. Only he was of national symbolic value (Hauan 2021, 237). Only he was at risk of losing this heroic status if he was not constantly reaching higher goals, satisfying financial backers, and nurturing the media spectacle. Other (upper class) male polar travellers in turn, such as the "Arctic trophy hunter" (Aarekol 2016) or the gentleman tourist as personified by Sir Martin Conway or Lord Dufferin (Ryall 2015) remained outside this spectacle. Their masculinity was connected to the adventurous type courageous enough to venture into frigid "uninhabitable" (in the Western mind) zones

in which dangerous, if defeatable, animals lurked. The trophy and the photograph acted as physical proofs which could be displayed back home. Their masculinity, however, did not have to withstand the pressure of being or remaining a national hero.

The male trapper/hunter represented yet again a different type of masculinity in the polar areas. Hauan proposes that this type can be called a "working class" polar masculinity (Hauan 2021, 15). I would add that the coal miner, whose presence dominated the population of Svalbard throughout the twentieth century, continuing into this century, has a similar status (if it has so far been little discussed in terms of masculinity). It is also important to note that different types of masculinity were at play depending on whether the polar areas were inhabited by an Indigenous population or not, as is the case for Svalbard and Jan Mayen (and Antarctica). Gender can therefore not be seen in isolation; the ways in which the classed and raced nature of gender affects the way that space can be inhabited and spatial relations experienced, must be considered (Mills 2005, 2). However, even if gender identity is formed in relation to its location, class and ethnicity, Hauan still argues that the Arctic was and still is gender-segregated with heterosexual men as the norm (Hauan 2021, 20).

Considering the Arctic as gendered is thus complex and multifaceted, as recent scholarship serves to prove. In this scholarship, both formerly accessible and newly emerging visual and written historical documents are (re-)read against the grain. However, I observe that there is still selected scholarship which reads contemporary artistic practices in relation to the complex and multifaceted notion of gender in the Arctic (and Antarctic). Often contemporary art has served more illustrative purposes when considering the Arctic as gendered. Perhaps because it was formerly not sufficiently seen as having the potential to strip away and position the Arctic as a site of meaning widely contested, continuously negotiated, reimagined and elided. An illustration from Marja Helander's video work *Trambo* (2014), prominently used on the cover of the research project's concluding publication *Arctic Modernities*, offers a striking example (Figure 1). While the illustration triggers the reader to find out more about both the interdisciplinary research project and the artwork itself, there is no in-depth article engaging with the artwork or Helander's practice; nor are there articles that analyse other contemporary artistic practices that deeply engage with the Arctic, gender and its relation to modernity (Hansson and Ryall 2017a). *Trambo* serves only

as illustration, and its mention in the book's introduction is intended as a means to support other scholarly contributions (Hansson and Ryall 2017b).

1.5.2.4 Intersectional Feminist Perspectives on a Gendered Arctic

Since the past few years there is a growing scholarship that focuses on reading contemporary and modernist art practices in and from the Arctic and the circumpolar North (and Antarctica) from intersectional feminist perspectives. This scholarship prominently takes up the interrelated issues of gender, indigeneity, coloniality and ecology. It includes theories such as posthuman feminism, and works towards acknowledging that uneven power relationships, marginalizations and inequalities are based on an interlinkage between gender, race/ethnicity and class.

In *Climate Change and the New Polar Aesthetics. Artists Reimagine the Arctic and Antarctic* Lisa E. Bloom examines the work of several contemporary women artists commenting, parodying and queering gender representation in the Arctic and Antarctic (Bloom 2022a). The anthology *Modern Women Artists in the Nordic Countries, 1900-1960* edited by art historian Kerry Greaves (Greaves 2021) contains articles that analyze women's artistic practices from the emergence of modernism until the feminist movement of the 1960s. Greaves underlines that the book is a response to the continuous threat that women artists in the Nordic countries are underestimated, become invisible, even erased (Greaves 2021, 4). Of the twenty scholarly contributions, several chapters analyze individual women's visual strategies to raise questions of identity, coloniality, indigeneity and human rights issues within the Arctic and the circumpolar North (von Harringa 2021, 51-62; Helgason 2021 15-25; Pushaw 2021, 159-170).

The recently held seminar *Kjønn i isen: Polarhistorie med kjønnsperspektiv* (Gender in the ice: Polar history with a gender perspective) and related publication *Kjønn i isen. Fragmenter til ei ny polarhistorie* (Gender in the ice. Fragments for a new polar history) further proves this change in scholarly approaches.[21] According to the editors of the book, *Kjønn i isen* is motivated by adding "new fragments" to a polar

[21] The seminar took place at the University of Oslo in December 2023. It sprung out of the research group *Exploration, Exploitation and Exposition of the Gendered Heritage of the Arctic* at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. For the detailed programme see ("Kjønn i isen: Polarhistorie med kjønnsperspektiv").

history which is incomplete because it has not been taking diverse gender perspectives into account (Gaupseth and Hauan 2024, 10). Silje Gaupseth and Anne Marit Hauan write:

> With gender as the overarching perspective on polar history, several of the contributions in the book illustrate how gender as a lens also enables us to better see other conditions that affect relationships connected to power, oppression, prioritization, and marginalization, both in history and in the present. The individual contributions may fall under categories such as women's studies, feminist research, masculinity studies, or queer studies, but generally (but also individually), they clearly illustrate that gender should be studied in correlation with factors such as class affiliation, Indigenous background, queerness or breach of gender and sexual norms, as well as human-animal-relations [my translation]. (Gaupseth and Hauan 2024, 14)

I conclude that art historical scholarship examining contemporary art practices with a special focus on gender in the Arctic and the circumpolar North, especially those with an intersectional feminist approach, is in a phase of growth. Significantly, there are many scholarly voices that are firmly anchored in regions of the Arctic and the circumpolar North itself. Their scholarship is tremendously important because they speak out of their own embodied experience, while they are acutely aware of how the region they live in has been perceived from outside. I further observe that there is an increasing number of collaborative projects where artistic and scholarly practices meet. The exhibition and accompanying publication *Polarhistorie på skeiva* (Queering polar history) (Gaupseth, Hauan and Tanguay 2023), for example, is an important contribution in this context. For the exhibition the curators invited queer Sami artist Gjert Rognli (born 1966 Manndalen, Kåfjord/Norway, based in Oslo) to make site-specific works that would queer polar history as it was communicated through the polar museum's exhibition display. It effectively broke up normative ideas about polar history in terms of gender, identity and indigeneity.

1.5.3 Colonial Legacies

1.5.3.1 Circumpolar Resurgence

In the previous section I pointed out that there is increasing scholarship that highlights, deconstructs and differentiates the image of the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a gendered space. Yet, despite this increase, there is relatively limited attention given by art historical scholarship to contemporary artistic/visual practices dealing with gender in this geographical context. This stands in stark contrast to scholarship on artistic and curatorial practices that relate to the colonial legacies of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. What stands out in this observation is not only the comprehensive nature of the research focusing on contemporary artistic and curatorial practices on and from this region in the past decades, but that there has been an exponential increase in trans- and multidisciplinary projects in which non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers, artists, curators and activists meet, often across national boundaries. In many projects colonial legacies are thematized and investigated. But these are often not the sole focus. Rather, these bring forward Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices and practices alongside one another, giving a more nuanced picture of and from a region that does not see itself as being at the periphery. These nevertheless use their unique position to break up traditional dividing lines inherent to the discipline of art history, such as between art, craft and popular culture, art and identity/life, nature and culture, or – as Pia Arke did – between ethnography, art and aesthetics. The Sámi Art Research Project (SARP) at UiT The Arctic University of Norway could be such an example (2009–2017). It resulted in a comprehensive anthology comprising the thematic sections "Colonialism and the Struggle for Indigenous Self-Definition", "Duodji, Contexts and Ethnographic Objects", and "Contemporary, Indigenous Art and Architecture of the North" (*Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives* 2017). Another research project, *Mediated Arctic Geographies* (2019–2023), combines Indigenous, "Western" and "Southern" voices from different disciplines and cultural backgrounds, both from inside and outside the circumpolar Arctic. It studied the poetics and politics of Arctic geography in contemporary fiction and art ("Mediated Arctic Geographies"). WONA Worlding Northern Art (2017–), the research group I am affiliated with at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, equally takes a transdisciplinary approach in bringing together art historians, curators, artists and art critics practising in the circumpolar

North and researching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contemporary visual practices, architecture and museology. Exemplary projects that spring out from WONA are the seminars and conferences *Photographic Practices as Care-Taking* (2022), *Mediating the Arctic and the North. Contexts, Agents, Distribution* (2021) and *Colonisation, Climate Crisis and New Technology: A Seminar on Theories and Methods for a Changing Photographic Image* (2020) – all of which included Indigenous and non-Indigenous art historians, artists and curators as participants, as well as outsider and insider perspectives to the Arctic and the circumpolar North. The thematic issue *Nordlige verdensgjøringer* (Northerly worldings) for the art history journal *Kunst og Kultur* (Vol. 105, Issue 2-3) in 2022 is another example in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous art and material culture in/from the circumpolar North were analyzed. It additionally included an artistic contribution (by Geir Tore Holm) and an exhibition review on one of the most avantgarde cultural events in the circumpolar North, the Barents Spektakel.

With these examples I aim to highlight that there has been an overall rise in trans-disciplinary scholarly, curatorial and artistic projects that emphasize both the importance of Indigenous voices and worldviews "at a time when the circumpolar Indigenous homelands are most vulnerable to climate change, resource extraction and Arctic development" (Hudson, Igloliorte, and Lundström 2022, 7). Here it is evident that colonial legacies are intertwined with the challenges the region meets today. There is a coming together of different perspectives precisely because the abovementioned challenges concern the livelihood and well-being of all humans and the more-than-human in the circumpolar North. Thus, what Jan Erik Lundström calls a "circumpolar resurgence" is in my understanding related to the (broader) dynamic interplay between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarly, curatorial and artistic/cultural practices (Hudson, Igloliorte, and Lundström 2022, 7). Here disciplinary and academic boundaries are much more fluid than in other areas of concern. This justifies my much broader focus on interdisciplinary (exhibition) practices in this literature review than in the previous sections.

1.5.3.2 Nordic Colonialism and Beyond

The 1990s and early 2000s were marked by interdisciplinary, discursive exhibition projects that reflected colonial legacies and broke up Western curatorial paradigms of

exhibition-making, the role of the artist and academic disciplines. Okwui Enwezor's *Documenta11* (Kassel, 2002) with its four interconnected discursive conference platforms *Democracy Unrealized* (Vienna, Berlin, 2001), *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation* (New Delhi, 2001), *Creolité and Creolization* (Saint Lucia, 2002) and *Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos* (Lagos, 2002) should be seen as seminal regarding the potential for the discussion, processing and visualization of colonial legacies. It was the first time globally oriented discursive and exhibition platforms were decentralized, and it included artists, academics and curators from the perspective of the colonized body. The five platforms reached an audience at an unprecedented scale, with over 650,000 visitors to Kassel alone ("documenta11 Retrospektive" 2002).

In the context of the Arctic and the circumpolar North, changes were taking place, too. As Heather Igloliorte has pointed out, the 500 anniversary celebrations of Colombus's so-called "discovery" of the Americas (1492–1992) triggered a turn in which Indigenous scholars, curators and artists came together to contest official histories and reach out in solidarity across national boundaries (Zacharias Kunuk's film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* from 2000 was, for instance, included in the Documenta11 film programme, the first time an Inuit filmmaker participated in such an exhibition). It is exactly during this period Pia Arke worked on her project and book *Stories from Scoresbysund* (1997–2003). According to Jan Erik Lundström, artists identifying as Sámi, also, became increasingly visible in this period. He relates this resurgence to earlier important events, amongst them the environmental/political protests by Sámi activists – which included artists – against the planned expansion of hydropower in the Áltá river valley. The establishment of the Sámi Artist Union (1979) and the Máze Group (1978) fall into this period. In all regions, however, Igloliorte and Lundström conclude, these resurgences did not manage to sustain the momentum to maintain a permanent engagement with Indigenous cultural rights in a global cultural context. They argue that the art world, especially, turned away from their concerns (Hudson, Igloliorte, and Lundström 2022, 8).

The 1990s and early 2000s were distinguished by a significant focus on explorations of identity and concepts of belonging, including Indigenous perspectives

– albeit from a global or globalized perspective, and only rarely from that of people indigenous to the region. We see these currents, to take one good example, in the Centre Pompidou's influential, controversial and still widely debated 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* (Siegel Corrêa 2021; Dixon 2018; Cohen-Solal 2014; Steeds 2013; Buddensieg 2013). The exhibition is often discussed as a forerunner to many large-scale "global contemporary art" exhibitions that followed, and which also sought to include non-Western artists. Exhibitions such as *Art Worlds in Dialogue* (Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1999–2000), *Zeitwenden/Time Changes* (Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, 1999–2000), *The Song of the Earth* (Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 2000) and the many "globally-oriented" biennials of the time reflect on these developments (Havana, Johannesburg, Istanbul, Gwangju, Manifesta). It has been noted that major museums and biennials played an instrumental role in this development, which unfortunately contributed to turning contemporary art into spectacle and become heavily intertwined with the international/neoliberal art market (Smith 2013, Bydler 2004).[22] One of the underlying critiques is that these exhibition platforms would promote "contemporary art without borders and without history" (Belting, Buddensieg, Weibel, "GAM—Global Art and the Museum," quoted in Smith and Mathur 2014, 164).

This lack of borders and history could be one way of understanding the argument that the artworld turned away from Indigenous peoples' concerns. It is indeed remarkable that the majority of curators for these global exhibitions and biennials were neither Indigenous nor locally anchored; nor were there many institutions run by art professionals with Indigenous backgrounds. In the 1990s, important Indigenous voices emerged, rather, from individually practicing artists. In the Norwegian context, Geir Tore Holm can be seen as representative of a new generation that engaged with Indigenous Sámi identity from a local context (while being acutely aware of the global currents). Other examples are Aboriginal artists dealing with legacy images in this period (Andrew and Neath 2018), as mentioned in my article on Pia Arke (von Spreter 2022). This proves that early resurgences had an impact on smaller scales and communities which helped a growing generation of

[22] The notion/development of contemporary art in relation to the global and globalization has been widely discussed and is not part of this thesis; see, for example, the insightful (*The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* 2013).

Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural scholars, artists, curators, and activists to come together. They started to pose questions such as: How have histories been written, and by whom? How has this region been imagined, and by whom? How has it been possible to hide truths about climate change and the destruction of human and more-than-human worlds when these phenomena can be witnessed at first hand? What alternative methodologies and epistemologies can be developed or applied as a common way forward?

These developments can be attributed to the explosion in scale and diversity of research projects, art festivals, art exhibitions and cultural discursive events in the past two decades. While it is impossible to do justice to the numerous individual cultural projects and scholarship engaging with these questions and their relation to coloniality and colonial legacies, there are certain themes I deem relevant in the context of this thesis. These are, due to my geographical research focus, anchored in the "Nordic" circumpolar areas (see 1.3) and relate to what has evolved as the discourse of *Nordic colonialism*.

According to my research, the transdisciplinary art exhibition project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* (2006) saw the first critical use of the term "Nordic colonialism". Initiated by the Danish curatorial duo Kuratorisk Aktion, the project took place in different locations across the Nordic countries. The curators announced:

> The colonial history of the Nordic region is a dark chapter that seems to have slipped the memory of some of the Nordic populations. A comprehensive exhibition project titled *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts* will shed light over this memory loss and at the same time show that lines can be drawn from the colonialism of former times and contemporary problems of intolerance, xenophobia, and nationalism in the Nordic countries today. (Hansen and Nielsen 2006)

The project further communicated that it mixed "art forms such as visual and video arts, film, performance, music, and action art, with postcolonial critique and political theory". Three of the artists discussed in this thesis (Pia Arke, Marja Helander and Katarina Pirak Sikku) participated. Other projects by Kuratorisk Aktion followed,

including the exhibition *The Road to Mental Decolonization* (Tromsø Kunstforening, 2008) as part of the Sámi Dáiddafestivála/Sámi Kunstfestival (2008–10), again including Pia Arke and Katarina Pirak Sikku. The exhibition was accompanied by the seminar *Healing Postcolonial Traumas of the Nordic Indigenous Woman* (2008). *TUPILAKOSAURUS: Pia Arke's Issue with Art, Ethnicity, and Colonialism, 1981–2006* (2010), which I continuously refer to in my thesis, is to be situated in this curatorial context and discourse. In scholarly debates, however, the term "Nordic colonialism" (and the often-used equivalent term "Scandinavian colonialism") first appeared around 2010 (Ipsen and Fur 2009; Naum and Nordin 2013). Significantly, an entry entitled "Nordic Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples" in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* makes explicit reference to theoretical contributions of the art project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*, with four out of twenty-two entries in the reference list (Boyle and Garden 2016, 396-397), proving its influence beyond the field of art. Since 2018 there has been a rise in publications and research projects entering this discourse, including publications in social sciences (Lindroth, Sinevaara-Niskanen, and Tennberg 2022), literature (Höglund and Burnett 2019), cultural history/exhibition practices (Baglo and Stien 2018) or collaborative research projects such as *Nordic Colonialism and the Global* (Lahti et al. 2021-2022) and *The New Sámi Renaissance: Nordic Colonialism, Social Change and Indigenous Cultural Policy* (Junka-Aikio and Fonneland 2021-2024).

Concluding this literature review, I term the research project *The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories* (2019-2022), led by art historian Mathias Danbolt, as one that stands out in focusing explicitly on art and visual culture within the abovementioned discourse. According to its website presentation, it brought

> together researchers, curators, and artists working on art and visual culture related to Nordic colonial projects in the Caribbean, West Africa, India, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Sápmi" and claims that "… art and visual culture pertaining to Nordic colonial histories have previously received surprisingly little scholarly attention and remain to be properly accounted for. (Copenhagen 2019-2022)

In the special issue *The Art of Nordic Colonialism* at the Danish journal of art history, *Konsthistorisk tidsskrift*, the editors and project's PI (principal investigator) further outline that the project "…sought to contribute to the collective endeavor of developing approaches and vocabularies to address the contact zones between art history and colonial history" (Danbolt and Pushaw 2023, 71). From my understanding, the project thus also sought to answer many of the questions I raised earlier (page 47), scrutinize the conceptual boundaries of art (as Arke did with *Ethno-Aesthetics*) and pursue new, decolonial methodologies and epistemologies. In that sense my own research is aligned with *The Art of Nordic Colonialism: Writing Transcultural Art Histories*, particularly regarding the thesis's thematic focus on colonial legacies in the Arctic and the circumpolar North.

1.6 Figure Corresponding to Chapter 1

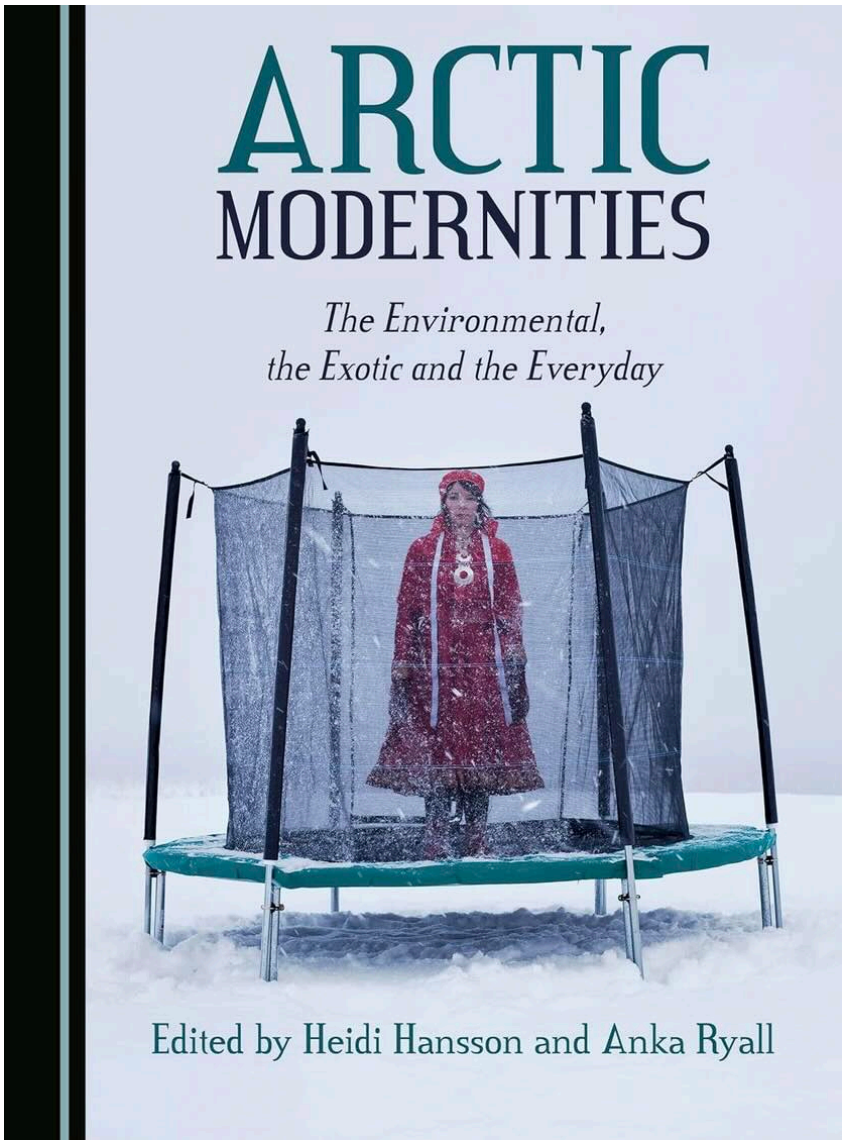

Figure 1. *Arctic Modernities* (book cover). 2017

2 Arctic Expedition Culture and Environmental Destruction

2.1 Introduction

The Arctic is an "aesthetically constituted object" constantly sustained by institutions with political and subjective interests, a region shaped by inward and outward gazes on a landscape with included and excluded bodies (Vola 2022, 16). In this chapter I trace what contributed to the Arctic becoming an "aesthetically constituted object" by looking at artists' roles within it. More specifically, I look at selected historical and contemporary Arctic expeditions in which artists – as outsiders to the Arctic – participated and thereby contributed to the Arctic becoming such an "aesthetically constituted object". I examine how artists' roles and aspirations change over the course of time, and how thereby also the properties of the Arctic as an "aesthetically constituted object" change. As social scientist Joonas Vola writes, attention on the inward and outward gazes is hereby important, as well as its included and excluded bodies.

Indian artist Himali Singh Soin, whose work from her long-term project *we are opposite like that* (2019-22) stands central in this thesis, embodies all these aspects simultaneously. As an outsider to the Arctic and expedition participant, her gaze is that of an outward (explorer). At the same time, hers is that of an historically excluded body (female, brown, colonized) which makes it possible to read her work through different lenses than for example only the explorers', the female or the Indigenous. More, she evokes an insider's perspective by identifying herself with the element most "indigenous" to the Arctic: the (melting) ice. In the video *we are opposite like that* (2019), which is the particular work I analyse in this thesis, Soin visually and metaphorically merges her own body with that element. In the inaugural scene of the video, for example, a static large ice block is visible. Using techniques of overlaying, montage and fading, it appears as if her body is one with the ice block until the image of the ice eventually fades. The ice gives space to Soin's body which then moves out into the Arctic landscape (von Spreter 2024b, 123). Parallel, the video's voiceover – Soin's poetry – takes the first-person narrator perspective of the ice.

This inaugural scene acts as a statement in showing that the video's entire story is told from the perspective of one body, even if it constitutes both Soin's and the

ice's. The body is an "aesthetically constituted object" that is both human and other-than-human, flesh and ice, white and brown, and represents an inward and outward gaze. Further, I argue that because Soin's work communicates that the Arctic ice is perceived as "aesthetically constituted object", it has the capacity to point to its own destruction. In this thesis I show how *we are opposite like that* creates a link between expedition culture, exploration and anthropocentric climate change.

Because Soin's work is the result of an expedition to the Arctic, more specifically, an art-science expedition to Svalbard as part of The Arctic Circle Residency, there is a need to critically examine polar expedition culture and artists' involvement in them. As artists' roles and aspirations change over the course of time, I relate their artistic practices – with Himali Singh Soin's as the driving force – to climate change and environmental destruction in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. I will hereby move from Himali Singh Soin's perspective as outsider/insider and excluded body to perspectives by artists who call the (circumpolar) North their home: Liselotte Wajstedt, Siri Hermansen, and Carola Grahn. Additionally, within my discussion of exhibition projects that relate to polar expedition culture, I highlight how also photographs by Pia Arke and Evgenia Arbugeva can be read in relation to climate change and environmental destruction.

2.2 Historical Arctic Expeditions and Arctic Imaginaries

Arctic expeditions were possibly the ultimate embodiment of dream, imagination and adventure. Here future traveller-explorers would dream up an image of the Arctic characterized by sublime beauty (conjured by visual material from previous expeditions) and embark on an adventurous travel to a place reserved only for the selected few. What has been called the "heroic" or "golden" age of polar exploration, roughly set between the early/mid-nineteenth and the early-twentieth century (Bloom 2022b, 2021; Bravo 2019, 134; Stam and Stam 2019; Blum 2019, 1,40; McCannon 2018, 19; Millar 2017; Hansson and Ryall 2017b, 3; Houltz 2013; Glasberg 2012a; Bloom 2010; Glasberg 2002; Bloom 1993), was the peak period for an Arctic/polar expedition culture in which also artists were involved. Largely by commission, their participation resulted in artworks and illustrations for scientific publications, travelogues, popular magazines, commercial exhibitions, natural history museums and

schools of higher learning (Matilsky 2014, 13). We see a striking example of such a result in the large frescoes by the painter François-Auguste Biard (1799–1882) for the vestibule of the Museum of Mineralogy and Geology at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris (Figures 2a, 2b, 2c). The frescoes were executed following Biard's participation at the French expedition *La Recherche* under the patronage of French king Louis-Philippe (1773–1850). *La Recherche* is seen as the most comprehensive historical expedition to the Nordic countries, Svalbard (Spitsbergen) and the White Sea to this day – both in terms of length (1838–1840), trans-national cooperation (principally with French and Scandinavian participants), and the visual and scientific material it accrued (Knutsen et al. 2002). That Biard was commissioned to paint a prominently placed mural with scenes from Spitsbergen for France's first purpose-built museum ("Les coulisses de la Galerie de Minéralogie") should be considered an achievement, both in terms of the status of art and the artist (the French king as benefactor and protector), choice of motifs (set at Magdalenefjorden/Magdalena Bay, Svalbard/Spitsbergen, a place not owned or colonized by France) and artistic-scientific interplay. It reflects the importance of the presence and the role of artists in the documentation of scientific expeditions. Notably, not all scenes in Biard's frescoes were based on real events. Like many other artists, Biard melded fact with fantasy, naturalism with romanticism (Matilsky 2014, 67).

In many other cases, the visual material disseminated following Arctic expeditions was made by artists who were commissioned to make visual renderings based on described scenery and narrated events. Thus, they had not witnessed the events themselves. This made them even more susceptible to a melding of fact with fantasy (Barr 1997, 47) and contributed to the cultural construction of the Arctic and circumpolar regions (Høydalsnes 1999, 7-8). As much as artists were commissioned to document expeditions to the Arctic and the circumpolar North during and after expeditions, many also drew inspiration from these images (in addition to other disseminated material) for their own sake. One of the most well-known examples is Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Das Eismeer* (1823–24). Friedrich had never seen the Arctic with his own eyes. Yet the painting clearly represented a shipwreck stuck in the Arctic ice. It is known that Friedrich based his knowledge on reports and illustrations from Arctic expeditions. He also used his imagination and drew visual

inspiration from ice sheets on the river Elbe (Hinrichs 2008, 134). As Hinrichs has pointed out, Friedrich's painting was criticized at the time for not representing the Arctic in a truthful way. Paradoxically enough, the critics had not been to the Arctic themselves. Their image of the Arctic was equally imaginary, fed by circulating descriptions and illustrations (Hinrichs 2008, 135-136).

Other artists physically travelled to the Arctic by their own initiative, among them the painters Fredric Edwin Church (1826–1900) and William Bradford (1823–1892). Bradford's undertaking is an excellent example of how certain imaginaries of the Arctic pervaded Euro-American visual culture. Sponsored by a wealthy patron, Bradford chartered the steamship *Panther* to head from Massachusetts towards Greenland in the summer of 1869. His original motivation was to make "a glorified sketching trip" to gather material for his paintings at first hand, with the secondary purpose of exploring the region (Parr and Badger 2004, 31). Bradford himself expressed that the expedition was "made solely for the purposes of art" (Bradford 1873, v). For this endeavour he had hired, amongst others, two commercial photographers (John Dunmore and Richard Critcherson) and the Arctic explorer, physician, and politician Isaac Israel Hayes. The expedition can be termed a real success: not only did the photographers manage to handle the wet-collodion technique under special climatic conditions but the journey itself was without life-threatening failures, in contrast to numerous other expeditions at the time. This made it possible to return with a large number of intact negatives, of which the developed photographs became the basis for what has been called "one of the nineteenth century's most spectacular photographically illustrated travel books" (Parr and Badger 2004, 31). Entitled *The Arctic Regions: Illustrated with Photographs Taken on an Art Expedition to Greenland*, this hardback book was fully bound in brown leather with gilded embossing, 61.2 x 48.5 cm in size and filled with 141 high quality albumen prints alongside an introductory chapter on "ancient Greenland" by the writer B. F. de Costa and a "descriptive narrative" by Bradford in the fourteen chapters that follow (Bradford 1873). Being of outstanding quality and printed in a limited edition of 300, the book quickly became a sought-after collectible item, not least because Queen Victoria was on the list of purchasers. Bradford's book proved that it was possible to operate a camera at low temperatures with the aim of "truthfully" documenting polar

expeditions, and that there was the technical expertise to publish photographs as an integral part of a (travel) book. The most striking thing about this book, however, is that only certain photographic motifs from it have been, and repeatedly continue to be, reproduced by photo stock agencies, in book reviews, exhibitions, auction catalogues, and so on.[23] These are the same motifs Bradford used as "sketches" for his most well-known paintings: those subsuming themselves to an aesthetic of the "Arctic sublime" (Figure 3).

As a well-studied part of Romantic and Victorian aesthetic culture, the "Arctic sublime" included "spectacular panoramas and tableaux vivants, massive paintings of barren landscapes and wrecked ships, and a tremendous amount of adventure fiction idolizing the Arctic explorer" (Morgan 2016, 3). The adventurism of (scientific) exploration to the poles went hand in hand with aesthetic developments reflecting a great cultural fascination with the raw and ungovernable forces of nature (Renov 2019, 208). Here (failed) expeditions played a crucial part in establishing the aesthetic category of the Arctic Sublime: "Each failure … made the mystery of the Arctic more fascinating, the challenge more impelling. … The very fact that so little was known about it after centuries of exploration added to its power as a source of sublimity, and it became a challenge not only to man's strength and courage, but also to his imagination" (Loomis 1977, 100).

Bradford's expedition passed without failure – and consequently without obvious signs of human struggle against the forces of nature. Additionally, as LeBourdais has shown in the digital humanities project *Tracing the Arctic Regions. Mapping William Bradford's 1869 Photography Expedition to Greenland*, over 50 percent of the photographs document people's (undramatic) everyday lives in the Arctic, of Danish colonizers and Inuit alike. Only the minority of photographs constitute "some manifestation of the icy landscape – glaciers, icebergs, the ice pack, mountains, fjords" (LeBourdais 2019). However, it is these photographs that provide

[23] See for example auction house catalogues/websites: https://godine.com/products/the-arctic-regions (accessed 26.08.2024); https://catalogue.swanngalleries.com/Lots/auction-lot/WILLIAM-BRADFORD-(1823-1892)-The-Arctic-Regions-Illustrated-?saleno=2443&lotNo=17&refNo=731773 (accessed 26.08.2024); https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5754371 (accessed 26.08.2024); https://www.copperdogbooks.com/book/9781567924909 (accessed 26.08.2024).

the basis for the recurring motifs in Bradford's paintings: the vast, empty, white Arctic landscape with a human figure just about visible in the distance to symbolize the overwhelming forces of nature compared to human capabilities; the panoramic view of a glacier emphasizing its sculptural qualities and conveying a sense of sublime, elevated majesty; and the expedition ship immersed in or even moored to the Arctic ice in which the forces of nature dwarf human existence and precariousness within it. These become the "standard" representations of the Arctic and part of the aesthetic category of the "Arctic sublime".

Many of Bradford's contemporaries such as Richard Brydges Beechey, Frederik Edwin Church, Edwin Landseer or William Simpson followed the same aesthetic category. This is reflected, for example, in Arctic panorama shows which reached their height of popularity in 1845, following the lost Franklin expedition (Potter 2007). Curator and art historian Samuel Scott argued that although artistic tastes for the sublime representation of nature declined over the course of the centuries, the power of human spirituality at the fringes of the world remained powerful well into the early twentieth century. Behind this reasoning lies the idea that the areas around the poles represented epic natural forces which acted as a reminder of the frailty of human existence and, with their austerity of space and purity of light, were well-suited to contrast the impact of modernity and industrialization on the human psyche (Scott 2008).

My discussed examples and references largely refer to a North American context. However, North American and European visions of the Arctic are closely interlinked and dominate outsiders' views of the region. Not only did many expeditions have members from both continents on board, but expedition accounts were also immediately translated into several languages to reach a readership both in Europe and North America.[24] Through documentation and scientific research it is

[24] Examples of travelogues from Arctic expeditions published in several languages, limiting myself to the publications written by Norwegian explorers and first editions/translations, are: Fridtjof Nansen, *Paa Ski over Grønland*, 2 vol. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1890), first English edition *The First Crossing of Greenland*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), first Swedish edition *På skidor genom Grönland* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1890), first Finnish edition *Suksilla poikki Grönlannin* (Helsingissä: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1896), first French edition *A travers le Grönland* (Paris, 1893), first German edition *Auf Schneeschuhen durch Grönland* (Hamburg: Verlagsanstalt und Druckerei AG, 1891, 1898); Fridtjof Nansen, *Fram over Polhavet: den norske polarfærd 1893–1896* (first published Oslo: Aschehoug, 1897), first English editions *Farthest North* (London: George

known that panoramas and painting exhibitions travelled across the continents, such as in the case of Frederic Edwin Church's *The Icebergs* (1861). Church even slightly altered the painting prior to being shipped from the United States to Britain to cater to an audience still mourning the loss of the Franklin expedition (Mitchell 1989, 21).

It has been argued that visual representations of the Arctic during the heroic age of polar exploration were closely connected to national cultures because they mirrored locally specific nation-building processes (I take up this issue more thoroughly, including references, in my article "Feminist strategies for changing *the* story," see von Spreter 2021a, 13). This in turn influenced artists' representations of the Arctic. Cultural specificities in visual representations of the Arctic have, for instance, been pointed out in a Canadian context. Here, confirming Samuel Scott's argumentation, the Arctic was seen as a frontier and associated with wilderness as opposed to civilization (Keskitalo 2009, 28-35). The Canadian "Group of Seven" (1920–1933) reflected this in their paintings, conveying a nationalist aesthetic based on the sense of an obliterating and uncontrollable wilderness connected to the country's Northern/Arctic regions (Mackey 2000, 129). However, despite national variations, I argue that certain tropes and characteristics commonly pervade artistic representations of the Arctic, allowing them to fit safely within the aesthetic category of the Arctic sublime – largely due to a "polar expedition culture" that fed into these representations and imaginaries, in which the visual arts played an important role. These generally marked the Arctic as a spectacular, wild, white, empty landscape, rather than an inhabited environment that has provided a living ground for humans and other-than-humans since time immemorial.

Newnes 1897 / Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897 and 1900 / London: Macmillan, 1897 / London: George Newnes, 1898), first French edition *Vers le pole* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1897), first German edition In Nacht und Eis: Die Norwegische Polarexpedition 1893–1896 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1897); Roald Amundsen, Nordvestpassagen Beretning Om Gjøa-Ekspeditionen 1903–1907, 2 vol. (first published Oslo: Aschehoug, 1907), first English edition *The North West Passage: being the record of a voyage of exploration of the ship "Gjøa" 1903–1907*, 2 vol. (London: Archibald Constable, 1908); Roald Amundsen, *Sydpolen: Den Norske Sydpolsfærd Med Fram 1910–1912* (first published Oslo: Dybwads, 1912), first Danish edition (København: Gyldendal, 1912), first English Edition *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the "Fram", 1910–1912* (London: John Murray, 1912); first German edition *Die Eroberung des Südpols: Die norwegische Südpolfahrt mit dem Fram 1910–1912* (München: Lehmann, 1912), first French edition *Au Pôle sud* (1913).

2.3 Contemporary Polar Expedition Culture and Ice as Spectacle

This "polar expedition culture" in which artists are present continues to this day, if through different set-ups and with different motivations than those of historical expeditions. It is possible to divide this contemporary "polar expedition culture" and artists' involvement into four groups: first, artists participating in polar expeditions on a scientific research vessel or research station (within institutional frameworks), thus strongly following the footsteps of artists' presence on historical scientific expeditions; second, artists participating in often more locally anchored "artist residencies" which allow them to stay in geographically fixed places over longer periods of time; third, artists initiating trips to the Arctic and the circumpolar north themselves, often made with the support of local guides or infrastructure; fourth, artists participating in internationally oriented contemporary art exhibitions and events (predominantly biennials and festivals) within or about polar geographical areas for which they are often asked to respond to the geographical, geopolitical and cultural locality.[25]

Within this contemporary polar expedition culture, however, I observe that the preoccupation with the spectacular and the idea of the sublime lives on. Certain exhibitions and events I argue, even slip into spectacle themselves. In 2017, the Russian artist Alexander Ponomarev initiated the Antarctica Biennale which has, to date, only taken place once. For this biennial, artists were invited to travel to Antarctica on board an expedition ship – sponsored by Kaspersky Lab, a Russian multinational cybersecurity and anti-virus provider headquartered in Moscow – to make site-specific artwork at twelve sites. About half the artists participated following an open call, which was announced by Ponomarev: "Antarctica is the last free continent. It belongs to no state and, according to international agreements, is intended exclusively for creative activities and scientific research in the interests of all of humanity. It is pure, hard to reach, and mysterious—like Art itself! The sixth continent resembles a white sheet of paper, upon which artists from different countries might draft new visions for life in the 21st Century" ("Antarctic Biennale announces an open call" 2016). It was further announced that the event brought together

[25] For a list of art-science programmes, residencies and exhibitions/biennials in the Arctic and the circumpolar North, see (von Spreter 2024a).

> more than 100 artists, architects, scientists, researchers, philosophers and technological visionaries from different parts of the world in a 12-day journey to Antarctica, where they were able to perform their art on the *majestic white canvas* [my emphasis] proposed by the Antarctic Continent. … Like art, Antarctica is pure, elusive and mysterious. This *sublime continent is like a white sheet of paper* [my emphasis] in which artists from different countries and nationalities will try to write the new rules of cooperation. ("Antarctic Biennale: The first biennial of performed in Antarctica" 2017)

Terming the polar regions (here Antarctica) a "sublime continent" comparable to "a white sheet of paper" evidences my initial argument that this idea continues to pervade contemporary culture; it is, unfortunately, still largely fostered by men from cultures with an imperial history who are themselves outsiders. This has also been pointed out by Lisa E. Bloom in the discussion of Subhankar Banerjee's art and activism against oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska, where various male politicians torpedoed its protection and argued that this area was comparable to a featureless poster board or blank sheet of white paper, a "flat white nothingness" of bare "emptiness" (Bloom 2022a, 107-108). The Antarctica Biennale, which also positioned itself on a supposedly "white sheet of paper", I argue, is indicative of the traps that artists and cultural practitioners can fall into when engaging with polar regions, possibly because also they get sucked into the idea or dream of the polar areas as still being a destination marked by exceptional, sublime beauty.[26] That these areas can still only be reached by adventurous travel additionally brings forward feelings of prestige and exceptionalism. That such travels in fact contribute to disturbing polar ecosystems including the melting of the polar ice, fades into the background.[27] Projects such as the Antarctica Biennale add to turning not only the event itself into spectacle.

[26] This has also been pointed out by one of the biennale's participants, Dehlia Hannah. Quoted in (Schneider 2024, 116-117).

[27] Expedition ships contribute to damaging the polar environments by disturbing flora and fauna, leaving rubbish, importing invasive species, in case of accidents releasing heavy fuel oil etc.. Increasing restrictions are put in place in the Arctic and Antarctic. In 2022 a law was enforced to prohibit heavy fuel ships sailing into Svalbard. Restrictions regarding number of ships and passengers

But equally the melting ice, one of the most visible consequences of environmental destruction and climate change in the polar areas, has turned into spectacle. As Eyak Alaska Native geographer Jen Rose Smith has pointed out, as a result of endlessly circulating images and documentation in the media, the melting ice becomes "a spectacle on a global scale" (Smith 2021, 158). Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing's work *Ice Watch* (2014) acts a good example here. For the work blocks from free-floating icebergs were harvested in a fjord outside Nuuk, Greenland and "exhibited" at several locations in European cities (Tate Modern, London, 2018; Bloomberg's HQ, City of London, 2018; Place du Panthéon, Paris, coinciding with COP 21 – United Nations Conference on Climate Change, 2015; City Hall Square, Copenhagen, 2014). On location the blocks were split into smaller, but larger-than-life pieces, and arranged in a circle reminiscent of an analogue watch. Visitors could then touch the ice blocks and watch or feel the ice melting away.[28]

From my point of view, it remains to be asked whether projects such as the Antarctica Biennale or *Ice Watch* add to critical reflections about human-centric ideas and actions in times of crisis, and its ecological cost. I conclude that especially the Antarctica Biennale symbolizes *the* final conquest, planting the cultural flag of civilization on, in Ponomarev's words, the "last free continent". The gaze onto the eternal ice is and never has been innocent (Schneider 2024, 120). It does exactly what Ahmet Ögut's artwork *Ground Control* (2007–08) communicated when he had an entire gallery space covered with outdoor asphalt: it offers a symbolic heralding of a (dominating) civilization that eradicates others (Figures 4a, 4b).[29] It is critical artworks such as Ögut's that – in the geographical context of the Arctic and the circumpolar North – my thesis is preoccupied with. From my point of view, these are artworks that evade the "Arctic spectacle", even if the danger exists that they fall into this trap. I rather refer to the artworks analysed as relating to the category of what Lisa E. Bloom had termed the "new polar aesthetic" (Bloom 2022a) and Birgit Schneider had advocated for, an "aesthetics of dissonance" (Schneider 2021). These are artworks

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on board are soon to happen. See https://www.afar.com/magazine/cruises-face-new-rules-in-polar-regions (Accessed 27.08.2024)

[28] For more information on the project and images, see https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/ice-watch-2014/

[29] *Ground Control* was shown at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, as part of the fifth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (4 May – 15 June 2008).

which critically engage with the consequences of environmental destruction, climate change and interrelated issues, such as the issues of gender and colonial legacies.

2.4 Contemporary Art Sensing Destructed Arctic Environments

2.4.1 Sensing Polar Ice Bodies

As outlined in chapter one, artworks have the unique capacity to sensitize us about issues that are otherwise less perceptable. As referenced earlier, Astrida Neimanis argues that artworks act as amplifier and help us connect to our own (watery) bodies and lived experience. "Writing, images, objects, and other art forms can work in these ways," she argues, "giving us access to an embodied experience of our wateriness … to readily sense: a drought experienced at the back of a parched throat, a fishy ancestor swimming up my unfolding vertebrate body, a glacier melting felt in my gut" (Neimanis 2017, 55). From my perspective, this is exactly what Himali Singh Soin's artistic project *we are opposite like that* (2017–2022) does: it sensitizes the viewer about the environmental destruction taking place in the polar regions. It amplifies what is at stake in this period of "Great Acceleration" and the irreversible process of ice melting. Her poetic work instigates me to scrutinize what has contributed to this environmental transformation, how our own watery bodies are entangled with it, and how we can empathize with other bodies – such as those that have largely been excluded from official histories.[30] Thus, I argue that Soin *senses* polar ice bodies to *sensitize* the viewer for the irreversible process of melting ice. In doing so, she *amplifies* a feeling of loss and disorientation but also draws us into her work through her poetic imagery, sound and text. As a result, Soin's work builds a correlation between expeditions, artistic and scientific practices, colonialism and anthropogenic landscapes in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, because Soin's body is not a Euro-American, white, male one travelling to the Arctic and the circumpolar North, her artist and outsider perspective is worth investigating. Her brown, female, "melting", colonized body sensitizes us affectively

[30] Stefan Jonsson takes up this issue when writing on Pia Arke and compares her work to Marguerite Duras's film *India Song* (1975) which is set in 1930s colonial India. Here the excluded brown female body is that of a beggar girl from Laos, who has been raped, abused and treated as an outcast, not least by the colonial rulers and a diplomat's wife suffering from ennui (Jonsson 2013).

about climate change, included and excluded bodies, and how it can help us to envision a liveable future.

In my article (von Spreter 2024b) I read Soin's video work through posthuman feminist concepts that take a non-anthropocentric perspective and work to make visible/sensible what appears invisible and what is in the process of disappearing: the polar ice. Because the polar ice is the main protagonist in Soin's video, and the entire story is told from the ice's perspective, the work enters into an active relationship with the concepts and theories I have applied. These are, referencing my abstract:[31] the disappearance of planetary history through the melting polar ice and with it, the disappearance of the ice as a natural archive; Astrida Neimanis's "figuration" of bodies of water (Neimanis 2017, 5); the mythologies, ghosts and monsters left behind that remain interlocutors for our future (Tsing et al. 2017a); the omnipresence of colonialism in the Arctic; how the relics of historical Arctic exploration still haunt us today; and how, while our situatedness points to our differences and distances from one another, it can also be used as a common feminist and transformative ground for creating other possible worlds (Braidotti 2022, 3, 8). Furthermore, in the article's epilogue I point out Soin's self-proclaimed affiliation with different kinds of futurisms (Indigenous, Afro-, Sino-) which she does through her own version of a South Asian Futurism and invented concept *Subcontinentment*. Because this is Soin's own conceptual alignment, I do not analyse this aspect further but point towards the possibility of building a bridge between futurisms, science fiction and speculative fabulation at the end of my article. I do so because I reason that Western and non-Western concepts must not exclude one another but can work together to understand and find mutual ways of dealing with what, from an Indigenous people's perspective, is already a post-apocalyptic state (Dillon 2012). In building this bridge I aim to make explicit what Indigenous scholars have pointed out in relation to climate change and discussions around the Anthropocene: that they are living in a time in which they have already endured ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration – all as a result of colonialism (Whyte 2018, 226). At the same time this is what makes them rise and practice what Gerald Vizenor has called

[31] https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-39787-5_7#DOI

survivance (Vizenor 2008). In my correspondence with Soin I thus explicitly ask whether she feels this post-apocalyptic aspect in her work, to which she replies:

> It definitely feels like when you notice these cracks in the world, they can either be these fissures in which everything falls apart. Or they can be an opening through which the light is let in, and they can be an opportunity to imagine. And for me they are very much the latter. There seems to be this sense that, especially when you come from a place like the global South, where you just witness always just so much atrocity and where every life is not valued in the same way it is in the global North, then all you are left with is this kind of dream for joy or something. So Subcontinentment is very much rooted in this feeling: Can we afford rest? And how does joy come to us through the layers and the strata of trouble?" (Himali Singh Soin, WhatsApp/email conversation with author, June-July 2022)

Seeing both the cracks and the light opening through them is exactly what is necessary when practicing *survivance* after ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration. But Soin's work is also, I argue, a speculate fabulation by "fictionalizing non/human entanglements" (Skiveren 2022, 5-6 quoted in von Spreter 2024b, 134-135) and thereby not least builds a bridge to other artistic practices discussed in this thesis.

Within the context of this chapter, Soin's practice of speaking "from the non-human perspective of an elder" while clearly embodying the elder herself, makes it possible to take a non-anthropocentric perspective and sense the impact of climate change and environmental destruction for both humans and other-than-humans. In that way Soin's work connects to other, if possibly more sober, artistic practices that sense these aspects "on the ground". These deal with concrete places in the Arctic and circumpolar North that have been subject to exploitation especially since the early/mid nineteenth century - the peak period in which Western explorers and scientists increasingly travelled to the circumpolar North on board expeditions, not least with the mandate to explore the possibilities of resource extraction for an increasingly hungry

population back home. These are places that visibly and invisibly bear the impact of human-induced environmental destruction, foremost through extractivist practices.

2.4.2 Artists Visualizing Extractivism

One prominent example of extractivism, as Demos, Scott, and Banerjee defined it, is found in Giron/Kiruna in Norrbotten County, Lapland, northern Sweden. Here sits the world's largest underground iron ore mine, operational since 1898. Its current average annual output is 26.3 million tons of iron ore (*Annual and Sustainability Report 2022*, 175) which, according to the mine's website presentation, provides 80% of all iron ore in the European Union ("LKAB - What We Do"). To better visualize this number, it has been claimed that the mine's daily output corresponds to the amount of iron ore needed to build six Eiffel Towers (Christensen 2018, 44). The mining operations had and continue to have dramatic consequences for the Indigenous Sámi population and the environment at large. Not only did the Sámi population lose rights and access to their land (as spiritual places, grazing grounds, settlements), the extraction process itself led to widespread pollution and the literal disappearance of landscapes: there was so much extracted that the town of Kiruna began to sink into the ground. As a result, in 2004 the mining company decided to relocate the entire town a few kilometres further away. The moving process has already begun and is supposed to be concluded by 2035. This relocation follows the fate of another of LKAB's nearby mining towns, Malmberget, whose last houses were relocated in 2023. Several artists, both from the region and from outside it, have engaged with the mine's presence and its local impact.[32] In this chapter I examine three artistic practices that are either locally connected to this place (Wajstedt), belong to the Indigenous land where the mine is

[32] The exhibition *Kiruna Forever* (ArkDes, The National Museum of Architecture and Design, Stockholm, 2 June, 2020–7 February, 2021) featured artworks that explored Kiruna's history and challenges. These included Outi Pieski's installation *Ruossalas bálgát – Crossing Paths* (2014), Liselotte Wajstedt's film *Bromsgatan* (2020), Hans Ragnar Mathisen's map *Sábmi with only Sámi place names* (1975), Ingela Johansson's film *Silver tongue, the great miners' strike 1969–70* (2020), Fanny Carinasdotter, Anja Örn and Tomas Örn's photographs *A place disappearing* (2020) and the New Mineral Collective (Emilija Škarnulytė & Tanya Busse)'s film *Hollow Earth* (2013). Britta Marakatt-Labba has also thematised the impact of the mine in her works, several of which on view in her solo exhibition *Moving the Needle* at The National Museum, Oslo (15 March–25 August, 2024). However, this not the only relocation project in the Arctic and the circumpolar North examined through artistic and activist practices. See, for example, the relocation of Kivalina, Alaska (Sze 2015).

located, Sápmi (Grahn), or have a connection to the land through the historical political union between Norway and Sweden (Hermansen).

In 2010, the artist and filmmaker Liselotte Wajstedt published a text and three photocollages in the Norwegian popular science magazine *Ottar* (Wajstedt 2010). Here she describes what it meant to grow up in Kiruna and the emotions that came up after she heard that her hometown would be razed to the ground. In the text she problematizes the predicament of having a father working in the mine and a mother of Sámi descent. In the 1970s and 1980s, she recalls, it was unacceptable to speak the Sámi language, so her mother never taught her to speak it (Wajstedt 2010, 15). The photocollages are visualizations of both her double identity and the overlaid Sámi and Swedish Indigenous and industrial histories embedded in this place. One collage is a hand-coloured photograph of the mountainous landscape around Kiruna juxtaposed with drawings of several birds (ptarmigans) and the outline of a modern house (Figure 5). In the foreground Sámi people gather around a fireplace in the snow-covered landscape. The group is framed by the structure of the house. They appear metaphorically locked inside the structure. The birds fly mid-air with their beaks open, which suggests that they are making noise. On the photograph are written the three Sámi words and their Swedish translations: oavi-huvud, bassi-heligt and giron-fjällripa (head, holy and rock ptarmigan). A Swedish text at the bottom of the collage explains:

> Kiruna is a "Swedification" (*försvenskning*) of Giron, which means rock ptarmigan. From a distance, the two mountain peaks of Llosa and Gironavárri can look like two rock ptarmigans conversing. These days, both mountain peaks are stripped bare. Hence the name Gironvarri, which directly translates as Rock Ptarmigan Mountain. Today, Gironvárri is called Kiirunavaara and is the actual mined mountain [my translation] (Wajstedt 2010, 17).

The collages reappear in Wajstedt's more well-known 2013 film *Kiruna – Rymdvägen* (Kiruna – Space Road) in which she applies the same collage technique to juxtapose historical photographs with animated drawings and her own film material. Personal stories, including her own childhood memories, are intertwined with the history of the mining town and the Sámi histories that lie underneath. Thus Wajstedt takes her

personal connection to Kiruna as a starting point for her work and intertwines it with the larger histories connected to this place. Her position embodies the in-betweenness of being part of two cultures and being largely deprived of one, an issue Wajstedt had already taken up in her earlier documentary film *Sámi nieida jojk* (2007) and through which, she writes, she took back the culture she had lost (Wajstedt 2010, 15).

The same year Wajstedt's film was released, the Norwegian artist Siri Hermansen finished her artistic research project *Terra Nullius* (2013). According to the artist herself, "*Terra Nullius* focuses on the ongoing conflict between the mining industry and the Saami's right to their land. Through microstudies and participant observation Hermansen takes her point of departure in the mining community of Kiruna and the surrounding Sami areas in northernmost Sweden" (Hermansen 2013a). The project is visually manifested through two films and a series of photographs (Figures 6, 7). The photographs are a documentation of the land occupied by the mine and the visible environmental destruction it has caused in the surrounding areas: landslides, cracks, holes, polluted surface waters. Because Hermansen took the photographs in summer when nothing is covered by snow, the extent of the catastrophe is fully observable. Using both aerial and close-up perspectives, the viewer gets an idea of the vastness and monstrosity of the impact, the open wounds in the landscape. The photographs are representations of anthropogenic landscapes. These reappear in the films and function as interludes between an assemblage of interviews, conversations, and documentation of meetings. In both films Hermansen lets different voices speak: the reindeer herder Per Erik Marsja who talks about how his and his people's lives have been physically, economically and spiritually affected by the mining operations; the mining company's information officer Ylva Sivertsen who explains how the mine operates, what causes the landslides and how the town of Kiruna will be relocated; Damian Hicks, director of the Australian company Hannans Reward, who discusses plans to extract copper at Rakkori, a mountain sacred to the Sámi, and how easy it is in Sweden to get access to information on minerals and mining permissions; a documentation of a guided tour through parts of the underground mine; the Sámi poet Stina Inga who reads poetry that communicates her people's belief systems, the sacredness of places and how ancestral traces are to be found everywhere in the landscape; Mattias Åhrén, law professor at UiT The Arctic

University of Norway, who explains in an interview with Hermansen that what happens in Kiruna is "colonization in its purest form" (Hermansen 2013b). Åhrén explains, what is still practiced by European sovereign states today is rooted in post-Westphalian international law that broke with the notion that Indigenous peoples are polities with rights: "International law of the era defined indigenous peoples' lands as territories over which no one exercised political control. Therefore the European powers were free to occupy such lands. The outlined theory is commonly referred to as the *terra nullius* doctrine" (Åhrén 2016, 16). Terming an area *terra nullius* or *no man's land* has indeed often been used in the context of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Here *terra nullius* acted as a prerequisite for making extraction possible while the land was in fact inhabited. McGhee's statement underlines this: "The discovery that outsiders could exert authority over an entire people, and could do so on the basis of the claim that they owned your land and that you were merely a minor citizen of an immense state, came as a shock to most Arctic peoples" (McGhee 2007, 247). As Sámi scholars Patricia Fjellgren and Malin Nord pointed out, what actually happened in many places was that land was stolen from them (*Inifrån Sápmi. Vittnesmål från stulet land* 2021).

Hermansen's work leans towards the documentary, at times journalistic. Nevertheless the work shows that Hermansen remains acutely aware of her own position. This becomes visible through the way she recorded the conversations and interviews in the films: when reindeer herder Per Erik Marsja talks, we hear Hermansen's voice subtly in-between. She asks questions and makes empathetic comments. This is not the case in the other conversations. If the artist's voice is heard at all, it is only for clarifying matters of fact, such as when listening to the mine's information officer. It underlines her own situatedness in the project. In the publication uniting her two projects *Terra Nullius* (2013) and *Apology* (2014), Hermansen clarifies her politics of location by referring to a comparable environmental disaster happening on the Norwegian side of Sápmi, in the municipality of Hammerfest, Finnmark (Hermansen 2018, 107). Here Norway's largest copper deposits have been found. Although the Sámi parliament has not accepted the Minerals Act of 2009 and opposes the mining activity, the investment company Nussir ASA has received a concession for extraction. Not only is the mining area on land that Sámi reindeer use as breeding

and calving grounds. The toxic waste shall also, by recommendation of Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Fisheries, be dumped in the nearby Repparfjord. Significantly, Repparfjord is both an important place for Sea Sámi culture and has been designated a national salmon fjord – a classification given to protect wild salmon stocks from pollution. Protesting and acts of civil disobedience against the dumping of the waste are happening as I write. Recordings of the protests are in fact part of the unpublished material that makes up Terje Abusdal's artistic project *The Darkness and Deep*, which I discuss later on in the chapter "Colonial Legacies".

Hermansen's project differs widely from another artwork that deals with Kiruna's "cracks in the landscape" in terms of methodology, media, aesthetic expression and intention: the sculptural work of Sámi artist Carola Grahn. At the relocated Kin Museum of Contemporary Art, the Norrbotten County art museum for contemporary art in Kiruna, the visitor encounters the work *Markerna* by Grahn, for which she collaborated with Nils-Johan Labba (Figure 8). It is a wooden sphere balancing on a brass ring "draped" with two intersecting engraved bands made from reindeer antlers. The engraving includes a text (in Swedish and Northern Sámi) that the museum has committed to read out at every public event, comparable to, as Danbolt and Pushaw noted, the practice of land acknowledgement (Danbolt and Pushaw 2023, 73):

> We acknowledge that the lands on which we gather are the traditional homelands of the Sami people. Here Sami people have lived and herded reindeer since time immemorial. Now we strive towards respectful relations with all peoples and work for the healing of both land and hearts.[33]

Grahn's artwork clearly seeks to make the viewer unequivocally aware that the mine occupies space in the homeland of the Sámi people. But it is also a call for reconciliation, both with the Sámi people and the land that has been damaged. It urges cooperation; it asks the viewer to imagine a future in which peaceful co-existence and healing are possible. The work is thus a powerful catalyst and sensitizer for achieving

[33] I have here used Mathias Danbolt and Bart Pushaw's translation. See their discussion of the work in *Translation as Transformation* (Danbolt and Pushaw, 2023, 73-79).

the very goal it proposes, encouraging a process of continual engagement in which all parties acknowledge what happened in the past, what is at stake here, and what the solutions require of us. Thus, Carola Grahn works to a greater extent out of her own spiritual and ethnic politics of location. For *Markerna* she collaborated with the Sámi duojár Nils-Johan Labba. Duojár and duodji, the objects the duojár makes, are terms somewhat resistant to simple translation. Sámi curator and duojár Gry-Kristina Fors Spein's reflections, however, are helpful here: "Duodji is the work of hands, and through it, tradition, immaterial cultural heritage, stories, and spirituality can all be conveyed through what is made" (Fors Spein 2022). Fors Spein's reflections thereby help us understand the function and purpose of Grahn's object: from my perspective, *Markerna* acts as a symbol for immaterial cultural heritage; it tells a story; it connects the bodily to the spiritual.

2.4.3 Arctic Fantasies

In the beginning of this chapter (2.2) I noted that Arctic expeditions were possibly the ultimate embodiment of dream, imagination and adventure where future traveller-explorers would dream up an image of the Arctic characterized by sublime beauty and embark on an adventurous travel to a place reserved only for the selected few. It was the starting point for my investigation of artists' roles in polar expeditions and how Western perceptions (heavily represented by the heroic polar explorer) and visual representations were often a prerequisite for mapping and exploiting unchartered territory. I further outlined that contemporary expedition culture follows in the footsteps of historical expeditions, but that there today exist different set-ups and motivations for participation. Artists' human-centric perspectives of the seeing the Arctic as an aesthetic object of sublime beauty gets replaced by non-anthropocentric perspectives and those making aware of the environmental destruction. Nevertheless, I observed that contemporary expedition culture can slip into spectacle, and that certain exhibitions and events have been prone to this pitfall. What is significant, however, is that the spectacular projects which served as examples fall into a period (2014-2018) prior to the circumpolar resurgences I outlined in my literature review. Today, I argue, such projects would be much more scrutinized, even if they still persist. Possibly, or hopefully, this is the reason for the discontinuation of the Antarctica Biennale. Similarly, the exhibition *Arctic* which took place at the Louisiana Museum of Modern

Art in Humlebæk, Denmark (26 September 2013–2 February 2014), I argue, would or should no longer advertise the Arctic as story about dreams, destiny, adventure and beauty (Figure 9) and announce it as

> a multi-faceted autumn exhibition [that] explores a wonderful, fragile, frightening and powerful world. ARCTIC is a story about dreams, destiny, adventure and beauty. It is a tale of fear, fascination, desire, downfall, and survival in spite of everything. A quest for a location, real and imagined, that through the centuries has stirred up strong drives and emotions, fascinating and attracting artists, scientists, writers and adventurers alike. (*Louisiana Autumn&Winter 2013/14* 2013, 129)

Clearly, the exhibition falls into a period in which colonial legacies, anthropogenic climate change and issues of gender were not thematized to the extent they are today. An exhibition that would claim to be about the Arctic should no longer predominantly foreground the stories of only male white Euro-American polar explorers (here Sir John Franklin, Fridtjof Nansen, Frederick Cook, Robert Peary, Salomon Andrée, Knud Rasmussen). Neither should the Arctic be introduced with the thematic section of *The Sublime* and then followed by *Observations*, *The Wide World*, *Voices and Faces*, *Conquest*, *Destruction*, and *Mythology*. Nor should the majority of artworks be by white, Euro-American men and outsiders to the Arctic and the circumpolar North. An *Arctic* exhibition today should at least be balanced and include artworks by locally anchored and Indigenous artists, as well as a higher percentage of women/nonbinary artists.

The artworks by Indigenous women artists participating in the Louisiana Museum's *Arctic* exhibition, namely the photographic series *Tiksi* (2010–12) by Evgenia Arbugeva and Pia Arke's 1993 photograph *Untitled (Put your kamik on your head, so everyone can see where you come from)* would then open new critical

perspectives and concerns – such as those this thesis is concerned with: anthropocentric extraction, gender and colonial legacies.[34]

From today's perspective, Arbugeva and Arke's work can namely be read differently in terms of Arctic dreams and imaginaries: as a ground onto which strong external forces (geopolitical, commercial etc.) project dreams and express "resource fantasies". They can point out how the Arctic and circumpolar North are perceived, as Boetzkes and Diamanti called it, as a "geofetishistic imaginary" (Boetzkes and Diamanti 2023, 10-11).

Even if it might not appear obvious at first, Arbugeva's and Arke's photographs instigate awareness about a land that is inhabited and has a fragile ecosystem, a land that already has been and continues to be subject to exploitation directed both to its human and other-than-human constituents. As earlier mentioned, the consequences of this exploitation include severe pollution, melting ice and permafrost, and generally a loss of habitable spaces and ways of life in balance with, and as part of, nature. All these aspects lurk under the surface of Aburgeva's and Arke's specific works.

Aburgeva's photographs are taken in her hometown of Tiksi which is located above the Arctic circle in Yakutsia, eastern Siberia. While many of her photographs appear to conjure an atmosphere of magic supposedly still to be found in the Arctic (spaces where human beings can still dream and find hide-outs), I argue that beneath the aesthetically attractive photographs, the images clearly bear the consequences of negligent industrialization and resource exploitation. Each photograph is witness to abandonment: a semi-sunken Soviet tanker that has become a viewing platform, a hut built with scrap material from old pipelines, vehicle bodies and other industrial waste, or a "tanker cemetery" moored in the ice that has become a playground for children (Figures 10a, 10b, 10c). Arbugeva's photographs were taken at a time when Tiksi was in a state of decline following the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, in recent years it has yet again become of interest for further exploitation, alongside other places in the Russian Arctic. A nearby military base was re-activated in 2020 and, with the increasingly ice-free Northern Sea Route, Russia plans to develop the Tiksi area into

[34] Out of the twenty-eight participating contemporary artists, twenty-two were white Euro-American men. The remaining six were women of which two had insider perspectives from the Arctic (Arke, Arbugeva).

an important trans-shipment hub following the opening of its port to foreign vessels in June 2023 (Humpert 2023). Presumably further deposits of toxic/military waste and pollution will ensue.

Arke's photograph in turn speaks of alienation and detachment from a place that was formerly her home (an aspect I take up more thoroughly in the chapter "Colonial Legacies"). Arke sits on a stool, her back turned to the viewer, looking out on a photostat of a pinhole camera photograph taken in Narsaq, Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland. Arke's head is crowned with a traditionally embroidered woman's boot, a "kamik". The photograph's title, *Untitled (Put your kamik on your head, so everyone can see where you come from)* is an ironic invitation to Greenlanders to be open about their place of origin, rather than hiding it or fully assimilating, thereby pre-empting prejudices and exclusion. It also plays with the stereotypes Arke was so preoccupied with, namely how Greenlanders had to comply with European ideas of what a Greenlander should look like, what type of art they should make, and how they would fit into the ethnographic box of the primitive and pre-modern.

Paradoxically, the place Arke looks at is far from pre-modern. Until the year Arke was born, Narsaq was an important U.S. military base (operating 1941–58). Since the early 2000s it has gained prominence because it sits close to one of the world's largest deposits of rare earth minerals. Because our modern world needs these minerals for technologies such as smartphones, MRI machines, electric cars and military equipment, a degree of wrestling for extraction permissions prevails (Breum 2020). There is currently a legal dispute between the Australian mining company Energy Transition Minerals (ETM) and the governments of Greenland and Denmark because extraction licenses were put on hold due to environmental concerns ("energy transition minerals. Kvanefjeld project."). Notably, these concerns are pushed by local Indigenous actors (particularly the activist group *Urani? Naamik!*) who could set these on the political agenda following the Act on Greenland Self-Government (coming into force in 2009) and which gave Greenland legal sovereignty over its resources. As Boetzkes and Diamanti have shown in discussing the mining project and *Urani? Naamik!*'s important investigations, geological surveys and extraction interests around Narsaq are not recent. Tracing back Narsaq's and the nearby Kuannersuit's (Kvanefjeld) extraction history to Denmark's geological surveys in the postwar period,

specifically regarding uranium, they show that ETM's "…preliminary geological studies build on colonial archives from Denmark that integrated the vernacular knowledge of land with decades of post-atomic geological surveys" (Boetzkes and Diamanti 2023, 21). It confirms the Arctic's long history of extractivism in which the region is seen as one of "untapped natural plenty" and "up for grabs", and how it is intertwined with the legacy of colonialism (Thisted, Sejersen, Lien 2021, 1).

The fantasies for future extraction and environmental concerns in Narsaq were already expressed at the time the *Arctic* exhibition at Louisiana Museum was on view. Equally Tiksi had already been subject to Soviet exploitation and military activities at the time. When read against the grain, their works become crucial contributions to uncovering not only the damage done to the Arctic environment but also the impact and consequences for human and other-than-human life. Arguably such critical readings of artworks could have entered dangerous territories. For one should not forget that at the time the *Arctic* exhibition took place, human-induced climate change was still largely denied by governments, political and religious organizations, industry and the media (Björnberg et al. 2017). The lawsuit against ExxonMobil, the American Petroleum Institute (API) and Koch Industries for misleading the public over climate change, for example, only happened in 2020. From my own memories, I remember this lawsuit as a turning point in making the public aware, finding parallels in the tobacco industry, that even if the oil industries had known about human-induced climate change and pollution since the 1950s, this information was not only withheld, but actively silenced.

However, what Arke's and Arbugeva's artworks could have instigated in the *Arctic* exhibition, in fact points to a predicament critical artworks are often confronted with. On the one hand they are used to make aware of misrepresentations, injustices, untold stories and so on. On the other, if they become too overt or dangerous, they are tamed by getting safely placed in the art/exhibition circuit. For here they can be more easily contained and controlled, even decontextualized. Bloom has argued, taking an exhibition of Banerjee's work at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC as an example, that decontextualization equals censorship. Through the application of a "static taxonomic aesthetic" (Bloom 2022a, 110) in which background information,

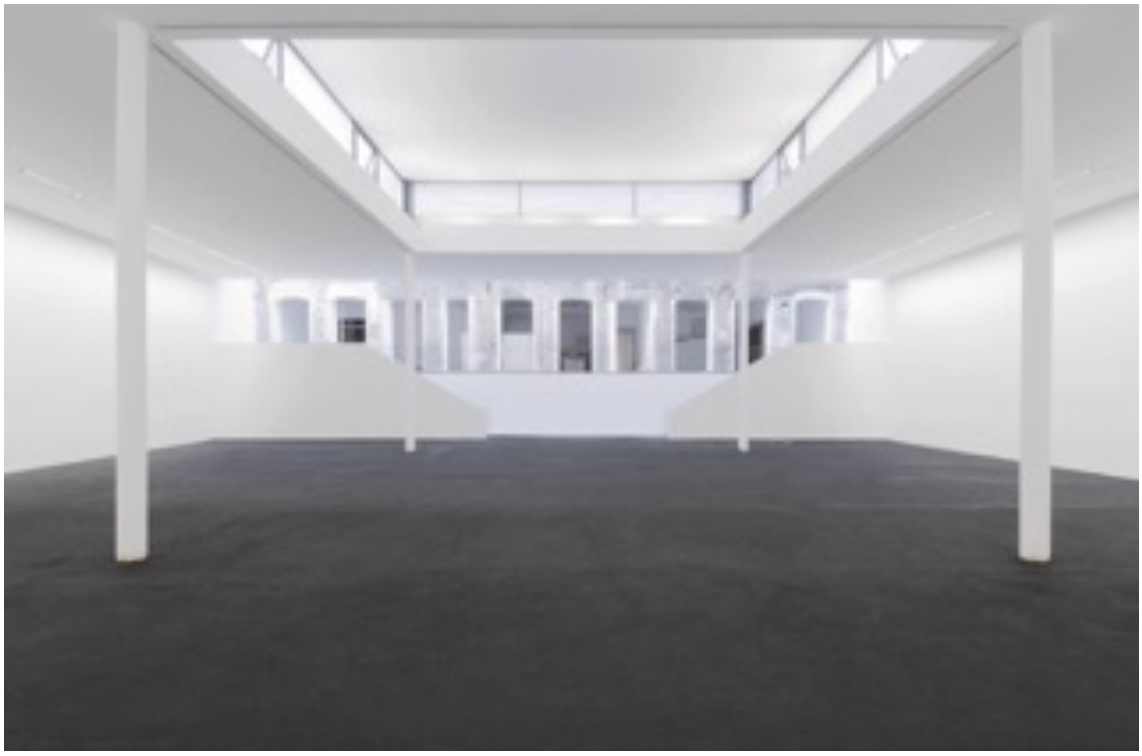
context, and interrelationships are erased, artworks lose their power in communicating the important messages they can convey.

Thus, I see this thesis as an important scholarly contribution in showing that artworks contain important messages that need to be communicated to the broader public. I have earlier pointed out that artworks are important sensitizers and amplifiers. In the context of this chapter, the works of Soin, Wajstedt, Hermansen and Grahn sensitize us about climate change and environmental destruction in the Arctic and the circumpolar North, what or who has caused them and how it is possible to create and imagine a liveable future while keeping that knowledge in mind. Despite their different uses of materials, aesthetics and politics of location, all artists work to render "an experience more accessible, more graspable, more intelligible, in a desire to experience more deeply, more subtly, more intercorporeally" (Neimanis 2017, 61) the drastic environmental transformations we all face, even if not all humans have caused them. My critical reading contributes to this experience and thereby enhances discussions around resource extraction, pollution, military activity and Indigenous/local rights in the Arctic and the circumpolar North, and how they are entangled with one another.

2.5 Figures Corresponding to Chapter 2

Figures 2a, 2b, 2c. Biard, François-Auguste. Frescoes at the vestibule of the Museum of Mineralogy and Geology at the Jardin des Plantes, Paris.

Figure 3. Bradford, William. *An Arctic Summer: Boring Through the Pack in Melville Bay*. 1871.



Figures 4a, 4b. Öğüt, Ahmet. *Ground Control*. 2007-2008.

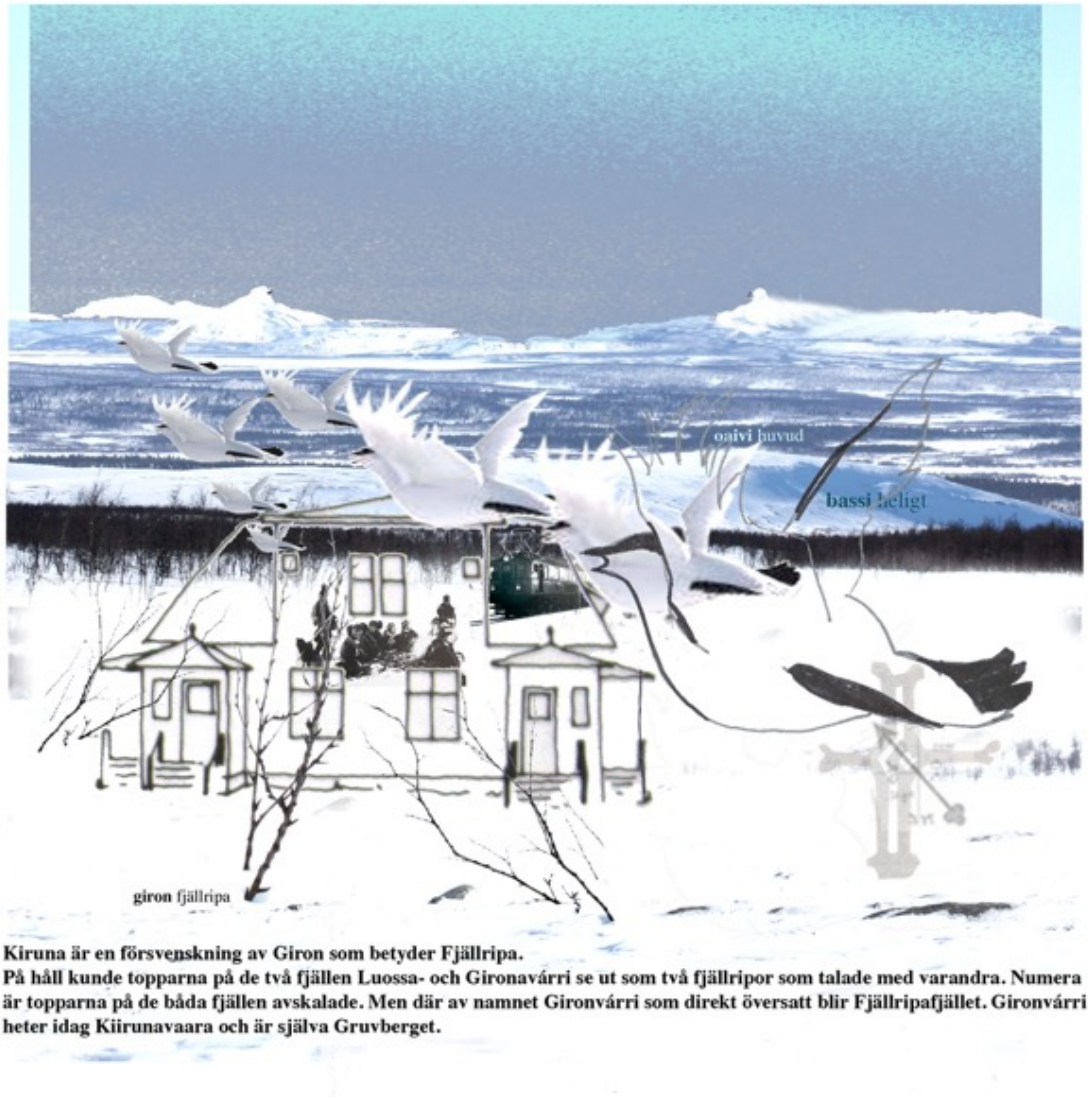


Figure 5. Wajstedt, Liselotte. *Kiruna Rymvägen*. 2010. Photocollage, originally reproduced on page 15 in *Ottar* 4 (282), 2010. Image courtesy: Liselotte Wajstedt

Figures 6a, 6b. Hermansen, Siri. *Ruptures, Kiirunavaara Mountain, Studies of Girjas Samiland (Kiruna) Nr. 12*. 2013. / *Terra Nullius. Part I*, from the project *Terra Nullius*. 2013.

Figure 7. Hermansen, Siri. *Terra Nullius*. 2013.

Figure 8. Grahn, Carola, in collaboration with Nils-Johan Labba, *Markerna*. 2018.

Figure 9. Public poster advertising the exhibition *Arctic* at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark, 2014.

Figure 10a. Arbugeva, Evgenia. From the series *Tiksi*. 2010-2012.

Figures 10b, 10c. Arbugeva, Evgenia. From the series *Tiksi*. 2010-2012.

3 Gendered Arctic

3.1 Introduction

If a photograph that openly refers to portraits of Norway's greatest recognized male polar explorers – Amundsen and Nansen – still circulates in cultural contexts in 2022, then I assume that such portraits representing a specific type of polar masculinity still hold symbolic value. In autumn 2022 (23 September–16 October, 2022) the Preus Museum, Norway's national photography museum, participated in the photography festival *Oslo Negativ* ("Oslo Negativ" 2022) with the exhibition project *Over regnbuen* (Over the Rainbow). Here, the festival visitor was offered a takeaway sticker which was a reproduction of a historical photograph from the museum's collection: Bolette Berg and Marie Høeg's *Marie Høeg som polfarer* (Marie Høeg as polar explorer) from circa 1895–1903. This way, visitors were not only able to take home a souvenir from the exhibition, but also also encouraged to attach it to various surfaces thereafter (Figure 10). In a sense, the visitors were asked to intervene in public and private spaces with an image of a woman's body clad in a fur anorak that resembled the endlessly circulating portraits of Norway's greatest polar heroes.[35] Thus, even more than 120 years after the photograph was taken, *Marie Høeg as polar explorer* still comments on a masculinized polar culture which scholarship of recent decades has seriously questioned, contested and differentiated – a current to which this thesis contributes.

Marie Høeg (1866–1949) and Bolette Berg (1872–1944) were women's rights activists who lived together and ran a photo studio in Horten, Norway, between 1895 and 1903. Their practice remained forgotten until the discovery of photographic material labelled "private" in the 1970s or 1980s (sources diverge as to when this took place). The material contained staged portraits of Høeg, Berg and their friends slipping into various roles, all of which clearly parodying gender stereotypes of their time.[36]

[35] It has however also been noted that this photograph is ambiguous in that the person portrayed, Marie Høeg, appears androgynous and could equally portray a teenage boy (Jenssen 2021, 32).

[36] It is important to note that contemporary interpretations of Berg and Høeg's photographs have almost exclusively been made within a cultural/artistic context with a focus on critical readings of gender stereotypes: on the one hand in relation to iconic portraits representing polar masculinities (Jenssen 2021; Siv Frøydis Berg and Lund 2011) and on the other hand in the context of queer culture ("Over the Rainbow" ; FRANK. Bugge and Storihle 2013; Danbolt 2016; Rawson and Tantum 2020), both because it is assumed that Marie Høeg and Bolette Berg were a couple but could not show this affection in public and because their photographs can be seen as examples of gender-bending and

Since then, their biographies and photographs, including the photograph of Marie Høeg wearing a hooded fur coat, have received increasing attention ("Como un torbellino" 2023; Jenssen 2021; von Spreter 2021b; Rawson and Tantum 2020; Danbolt 2016; Evensen 2014; FRANK. Bugge and Storihle 2013; Stuksrud 2009; Petersen 2007; Moen 2002; Preus and Moksnes 1996). However, I argue, it is only through the reproduction of the photograph in Siv Frøydis Berg and Harald Ø. Lund's influential book *Norske Polarheltbilder 1880–1928* (Images of Norwegian Polar Heroes 1880–1928) that it became strongly contextualized within the cultural history of Norwegian polar exploration. In the book *Marie Høeg as polar explorer* (ca. 1895-1903) is explicitly referenced in relation to the iconic portrait of Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen (1920). Berg and Lund argue that the trope of the hooded polar explorer was already so well-established by the turn of the century that it was possible to parody it prior to Amundsen's portrait (Berg and Lund 2011, 23-24).[37] In the article that corresponds to this chapter, "Feminist strategies for changing *the* story", I relate this trope to Tonje Bøe Birkeland's photographs because she stages herself as a polar explorer reminiscent of Høeg's and Amundsen's portraits.

In this chapter, however, my emphasis lies on the use and recontextualization of Høeg's photograph. More specifically, I argue that the owners of Høeg and Berg's material, Preus Museum, retitled the photograph *after* the publication of *Norske Polarheltbilder 1880–1928* in 2011. According to my research, the photograph was titled *Marie Høeg i selskinnspels* (Marie Høeg in sealskin fur) until 2010. Since 2011 all published material and exhibitions title the photograph as *Marie Høeg som polfarer* (Marie Høeg as polar explorer).[38] Consequently, the image-text interplay that results

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cross-dressing activities, also prevalent in queer culture. I also point this out in my article corresponding to this chapter (von Spreter 2021a, footnote 13). The exhibition in which *Marie Høeg as Polar Explorer* circulated, *Over the Rainbow*, was in fact part of the initiative *Skeivt kulturår* 2022 (Queer Cultural Year) to mark the fifty-year anniversary of lifting article 213 in the Norwegian Penal Code to legally decriminalise homosexuality in Norway ("Queer Cultural Year 2022").

[37] Fridtjof Nansen, for example, was already a well-respected and well-known polar explorer in this time. His portrait by Henry van der Weyde was taken in 1896. His book *Fram over Polhavet* (Farthest North) was published by Aschehoug in 1897 with one of the highest publication numbers in Norway at the time (20,000 copies). The book was translated into other European languages almost simultaneously and published all over Europe and the U.S (see (von Spreter 2021a, 17). Also other polar explorers from Europe and the United States had received prominence before Amundsen's portrait was taken; their stories and portraits circulated through books, lantern shows, panorama exhibitions, collectible cabinet cards, etc.

[38] The photograph was exhibited at Preus Museum for the first time in 1996, titled *Marie Høeg i selskinnspels* (Marie Høeg in sealskin fur). A Wikipedia entry from 2010 stating Preus Museum as

from this revision allows for a much more direct reference to the heightened period of polar exploration – the aforementioned polar expedition culture – in which the male explorer participated and became a celebrity, or "kjendis", as the historian Øystein Sørensen has called the Norwegian explorers (Berg and Lund 2011, 10). It is namely in this period that a particular (stereo)type of polar masculinity was shaped and nurtured: strong, fearless, self-sacrificing, resilient, independent, knowledge thirsty, tamer of nature. All these attributes would be united in the male polar explorer to become a polar hero.[39] If a man could match such attributes, media culture would validate and guarantee this status. He would become the pride of an entire nation. The media spectacles surrounding the expeditions (such as publicly staged departures and homecomings, or news announcing of having reached the pole) were essential in maintaining the explorer's status as hero and celebrity. Explorer-authored books and lantern lectures contributed to these spectacles. The trope of the fur-clad explorer photographed with a stern, assertive gaze, hooded or unhooded, firmly belongs to this media culture. As outlined in the literature review, it is the type of masculinity represented in the photograph that forms the basis for the argumentation that the Arctic and the circumpolar North is gendered and played out contemporary art and cultural practices.

3.2 "Wrestling" with the Polar Hero

Taking the circulation of the photograph *Marie Høeg som polfarer* as exemplary, I argue that contemporary art and culture still today "wrestles" with the male polar hero as the dominant type of masculinity in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. By this I mean that there are artistic and curatorial practices that point to the absence of genders other than the male heterosexual and whose presence has come to dominate polar history writing. I observe a "peak wrestling period" which heavily comments on polar masculinities which I date to the first one-and-a-half decades of the 2000s (with some

copyright holder still uses that title ("Wikipedia entry Marie Høeg i selskinnspels NMFF.000418-13.jpg"). The same applies for other Wiki entries. The museum's website titles the same photograph as *Marie Høeg som polfarer*, published in the rubric "Image of the Week" ("Preus Museum. Image of the Week. Week 48 - 2013").

[39] Roald Amundsen's book *My Life as an Explorer* is a good example of how he presented himself as the person matching those attributes (Amundsen 1927).

forerunners in the 1990s) - even if, as I have shown in my literature review, the wrestling continues to this day.

This chapter focuses on artistic practices that fall into this "peak wrestling period". The practice of Tonje Bøe Birkeland whose work I analyse in depth in my article (von Spreter 2021a), emerges exactly at that time. While still studying for a BA in Photography at the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen (2006–09), she began to invent her so-called *Characters*. These are late nineteenth and early twentieth century imagined Norwegian women explorers, scientists and adventurers who travel to remote and mountainous regions of the earth, fighting for their place in a world dominated by men. Birkeland's work stands central in my research and thesis because her practice has paved a way for my further investigations into which types of masculinities have historically dominated the Arctic, which genders were present through their very absence, which were suppressed, and which were hardly present. Looking at Birkeland's practice led to my investigation into who and what else was suppressed beyond gender, who was not given space, who did not fulfil "the norm", and how this is played out still today. I argue that Birkeland and the other artistic practices discussed in this chapter, those of Judit Hersko, Sophie Calle, Cristina de Middel and Marja Helander, create or reinforce a consciousness about the Arctic as a gendered space. All practices reference historical vernacular photography and representations of the Arctic from the so-called heroic era of polar exploration and weave their oftentimes invented, personal histories around them.

3.3 Contemporary Art Queering the Arctic

In *Queer Defamiliarisation: Writing, Mattering, Making Strange*, Helen Palmer uses the verbs "defamiliarising", "queering" and "mattering" as interrelated concepts in order to create a shift in perception (Palmer 2020c). Although Palmer applies these concepts to the use of language and what she calls the process of "wor(l)ding", I consider them useful in investigating artistic practices that queer the Arctic. These, I argue, shift predominant perceptions about how the Arctic has been and continues to be represented, queering outdated perspectives discussed in this and the other chapters. The contemporary artistic practices I touch upon here question the norm and overcome what Palmer has called "the status of anaesthesia". Queering is defamiliarizing, a

movement of "estrangement," she says, which can restore sensory perception. It can reawaken, reorient and reprioritize the senses (Palmer 2020b, 9). Further, in direct reference to Rosi Braidotti, defamiliarization is a political strategy that helps to shift the anthropocentric perspective that privileges "Man" to radically undertake a repositioning on the part of the subject: "The best method to accomplish this is through the strategy of defamiliarization or critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject (Braidotti 2013, 88, quoted in Palmer 2020b, 5). Thus, this strategy unavoidably also overturns dualistic thought, dissolving a hierarchy between subject and object, mind and body/matter. As Palmer points out, defamiliarization is not only a strategy, it is also a tool: "Defamiliarisation has been formalised as a methodological tool, but as a tool it leads to infinite variance. It is a lens or filter and works like a verb in the same way that queer does. When you queer something you defamiliarise it. … [D]efamiliarisation can be taken up and used in multiple transdisciplinary ways: in a political sense, in a philosophical sense, in a linguistic sense, in an aesthetic sense, but really all of these senses at the same time" (Palmer 2020b, 15).

The contemporary artistic practices I examine in this chapter queer and defamiliarize the Arctic by considering it as a gendered space. Here I specifically explore how artistic practices problematize the Arctic as a space of gender presence (a particular type of masculinity) and absence (such as female, homosexual) and other marginalized groups. Queering and defamiliarizing thereby differs from other artistic methods and strategies of "making strange" such as the surrealist method which defamiliarizes by juxtaposing several seemingly unrelated objects with one another. In my argumentation, however, queering and defamiliarizing is used to create a counter-perspective to what used to be a dominant vision. This means that the defamiliarizing process queers concrete and already existing materials and objects. These are materials and objects that speak of a worldview dominated by a specific type of masculinity – that represented by the historical white male Euro-American polar explorer and the polar history that is so connected with him. The material that is defamiliarized includes historical vernacular photography and objects that fostered the heroic stories of the singular polar explorer as they have been and still are disseminated in museums, through re-enactments, (re)printed travelogues, and other media.

3.3.1 Feminist Strategies for Changing *the* Story

The article that is part of this thesis and relates to this chapter, "Feminist strategies for changing *the* story," analyses a particular work by Norwegian artist Tonje Bøe Birkeland. I argue that this work re-evaluates, re-interprets and re-imagines historical Arctic exploration narratives that have generally been dominated by the white male Euro-American polar explorer (von Spreter 2021a, 1). This re-evaluation, re-interpretation and re-imagining is possible because a defamiliarization process is taking place through fabulation. Entitled *Character I. Aline Victoria Birkeland* (2008/2009), Birkeland's work takes the form of an imagined woman explorer-scientist travelling to Northern Norway and the Norwegian and Russian Arctic in the early twentieth century. Significantly, it is the artist herself who embodies the character, with a few exceptions.[40] Tonje Bøe Birkeland builds up an entire life story for this character, who is set to have been alive between 1870 and 1952. Thus, the character's lifetime is roughly comparable to that of Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) and Roald Amundsen (1872–1928). In addition, aurora borealis scientist Kristian Birkeland (1867–1917) acts as a potential relative and eponym for *Character I. Aline Victoria Birkeland*.

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's work is the story of a woman who follows her path in Arctic exploration and science in a patriarchal society, where she meets resistance on both the private and professional level because she is a woman. It is also one in which she is not afraid to communicate feelings and emotions on this physically and mentally challenging journey. In order to build the character's story, Birkeland uses the artistic media, or "accomplices" as I term them in my article, of staged photography, writing and appropriation of cultural/historical objects (von Spreter 2021a, 1). The staged photographs are set in the Arctic/circumpolar landscape, either with the character performing a task such as chiselling a piece of rock, or in the tradition of sublime representations of the Arctic in which nature appears beautiful, grand, overwhelming, terrifying, or spiritual. The writing is conceived as a memoir in the form of a long letter to the character's granddaughter. Objects including the character's clothing, camera and mineral specimens act as supporting elements to fictitiously document the character's existence and scientific discoveries.

[40] I point out in my article that the artist's mother at times embodies the character as well.

Birkeland's work is manifested in the artist's carefully orchestrated photobook *The Characters* (Birkeland 2016). Here the character's photographs, writing and objects are reproduced and set against four other characters the artist has invented between 2008 and 2016. In my article I argue that Birkeland's work *Character I. Aline Victoria Birkeland* employs two feminist strategies for changing *the* story (i.e. *the* polar (hi)story as told by and about the male explorer): firstly, in reference to Donna Haraway, by storytelling and speculative fabulation; secondly by complying with and disrupting re-occurring Arctic tropes and motifs. Both strategies work together to insert women into that story – if not into that of the past, then surely into that of the present and future. Thus, I argue, Birkeland does not only reveal "which stories about the Arctic are missing and could have been told. She also asks us to imagine how our relationship to the Arctic could have been shaped differently and how, through this process, it is possible to influence a future narrative of a (still) gendered Arctic" (von Spreter 2021a, 1).

3.3.2 Artists' Arctic Fabulations

Through my article I constitute that Tonje Bøe Birkeland's artistic practice is an important contribution in queering the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a space in which certain types of gender have been excluded. Birkeland's setting up of speculative fabulations through storytelling and what I refer to in my article as a Harawayan "String Figure Story", I argue, is a strategy that defamiliarizes historical visual representations and material culture of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. This becomes especially visible when Birkeland "replaces" the male polar hero with her own body (such as photographs of her looking through binoculars, as a scientist at work, as a small figure in the open landscape, in a cabinet card portrait). That way Birkeland speculates on stories that do not exist but could have. As I point out in my article and in the literature review of this thesis, storytelling and "modes of resistance and response" (Foote and LeMenager 2014; von Spreter 2021a, 2) are entangled with one another; storytelling is a political strategy.

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's work does not stand in isolation in queering the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a gendered space. In both literature and contemporary art there exist speculative fabulations about women travelling to the Arctic or reaching the poles, often with a humorous undertone. Some fabulations even parody men's "heroic"

quests in conquering the frozen territory at the "end of the earth" and refer to the absurd struggles these men underwent.[41] The American artist Judit Hersko creates a story comparable to that of Birkeland's through her project *Pages from the Book of the Unknown Explorer* (2008–2015). It is the fictive story of *Anna Schwartz*, an unknown explorer and supposedly the only woman to make it on to an Antarctic expedition from the United States before the 1960s. Like Birkeland's, Hersko's character uses the letter format to describe her experiences and challenges as a woman following her path as a Jewish polar scientist and explorer in the early twentieth century, at a time when Jews were rendered invisible in other places. Photographs work to visualize the character and her scientific findings. Prior to boarding an expedition to Antarctica, for example, *Schwartz* writes: "At this time it is unclear how I will fit in with the rest of the crew. It appears that I may have to pass as a man to the outside world, which makes me nervous. They plan to bunk me separately in the instrument room claiming that I need to use the dark room and type until late at night" (Hersko 2011, 65). Birkeland's character in turn writes, quoting her expedition leader:

> "You may join our expedition. … You will assist the crew and me whenever we are in need of your assistance. Whatever time that will be left, you may use to work with your own theories. … But if you do come up with something – a finding, an observation, anything – whatever you may find belongs to me. … There will be no portrait made of you; your name will not be published: neither before, nor after the expedition. … Those are the conditions". (Birkeland 2016, 14)

Among many other parallels, neither Hersko's character nor Birkeland's character manages to prove that their research was theirs (or hides it) during their lifetime.

[41] Ursula Le Guin's novel *Sur* (1982) for example is a fabulation about a group of women reaching the South Pole. As Elena Glasberg writes, "[f]eminism and the postcolonial are both invoked in "Sur," Ursula Le Guin's 1982 exploration hoax in which a party of South American women achieve the South Pole in 1909, two years before the official claim recorded by Roald Amundsen of Norway" (Glasberg 2002, 99).

Instead, they leave it to a younger generation (daughter and granddaughter, respectively) to finish their projects and fulfil their dreams.[42]

Sophie Calle's work *North Pole* (2009) is exactly that – a daughter fulfilling her mother's dream. Calle writes about her mother: "She had a dream. Go to the North Pole. It was a part of our life: One day she would go. She died two years ago having preserved her dream" ("Cape Farewell Archive Website. 2008 Disco Bay"). In 2008 (25 September–6 October) Calle was invited to participate in an expedition from Kangerlussuaq to Disco Bay, Greenland, on board a research vessel organized by Cape Farewell ("Cape Farewell. Mission"). For this expedition, Calle took along a photograph of her mother and two items that had belonged to her: a red and white pearl Chanel necklace and a diamond ring (which her grandfather had exchanged for a house in Grenoble during the Second World War). All three things Calle buried ceremonially underneath a stone at the bottom of a glacier in the vicinity of Disco Bay. Calle expressed relief that her mother had finally gone to the North Pole ("Cape Farewell Archive Website. 2008 Disco Bay"). Throughout Calle's practice, her own life becomes intertwined with her artwork, leaving it up to the viewer to speculate what is real and what is invented. In this work, even Calle herself speculates:

> I wonder if her glacier will advance or retreat, if the climate changes will carry her to the sea to be taken north by the West Greenland current, or retreat up the valley towards the ice cap, or if she will stay on the beach as a marker in time where the glacier was in the holocene period. And maybe in thousands of years, specialists in glaciology will find her ring and discuss endlessly this flash of diamond in Inuit culture. Or if a treasure hunter or beachcomber will discover it and exchange it for a house in the mountains of Grenoble. ("Cape Farewell Archive Website. 2008 Disco Bay")

[42] I would here like to acknowledge Lisa E. Bloom's in-depth analysis of Judit Hersko's work where she makes a connection between the invisibility of women in polar history and the Anthropocene: "Hersko uses this to make a statement about the invisibility of women in polar narratives and the way the Anthropocene has altered the terms and parameters of perception itself, forcing us to reorganize our knowledge and perceptions to register the world of microscopic matter" (Lisa E. Bloom 2022a, 53).

Now a woman's picture and belongings are buried in the Arctic – with, however, a slightly different, humorously oppositional, twist to other (male) burials or by-now recovered belongings from numerous Arctic expeditions. S. A. Andrée's failed hot balloon expedition to the North pole of 1897 comes to mind here. Both expedition crew and photographic records were buried in the snow. Their remains, including the negatives, were discovered some thirty years later.

The absurd spectacle and heroic yearning that many male polar explorers submitted themselves to has been humorously approached by the Spanish photographer Cristina de Middel with her photobook *Man Jayen* (2015) (Figures 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d). The starting point for this book was a wooden box that the curator and editor of the *Archive of Modern Conflict*, Timothy Prus, ("The Archive of Modern Conflict") had found. It contained glass plates, diaries and some albums from a failed expedition to the Arctic island of Jan Mayen in 1911. It became clear to de Middel that this material belonged to a group of upper-class British and German wannabe explorers who wanted to "rediscover" the island. But due to lack of preparation and dilettantism they never reached the shore. Instead, they staged their landing at their point of departure and return, in Iceland. In an interview, de Middel says: "The Jan Mayen archive was almost complete: everything was there except the movie that they made when they landed on that Icelandic beach to stage the landing that never really happened, so the only thing I could add to the already amazing story was that missing part" (Korzun 2016).

The photobook *Man Jayen* blends the historical photographs with the restaged film stills, as well as maps and the film script. Because all photographic material is printed in black and white (some hand-coloured), and the script is written on an old typewriter, it is almost impossible to distinguish which material derives from 1911 and which is created by the artist over a hundred years later. De Middel blends both worlds and manages to create a story from a story that was already bizarre from the beginning. While the book is a persiflage of male-led Arctic exploration narratives, it also proves how European men tried to invent themselves as polar heroes by staging their story. Significantly, it is only today that we see these stories in an absurd light – but this was not the case at the time. De Middel humorously comments on this fact and reinforces it by titling the photobook *Man Jayen* and placing an invented flag on the

book's covers. *Man Jayen* is of course a pun and can be related to the explorers' dilettantism. The flag is knowingly an important element for the "discovery" of territory and symbol for the manifestation of territorial ownership and heroic merit. De Middel's flag contains three black stars alongside a stylized image of an Austrian cake, the Kaisergugelhupf.[43] Both are set against a dark turquoise background – as if the turquoise colour associated with the Arctic had gone dim. Turning a cake and three stars into vexillological symbols is of course as absurd as staging the heroic re-discovery of an Arctic island, and even that fails.

One might also consider placing a trampoline in a snow-covered Arctic landscape an absurdity, as the Sámi artist Marja Helander did for her video work *Trambo* (2014). In this single channel video (03:32 min), however, the protagonist is not a male polar explorer, but a woman dressed in Sámi traditional clothing (the gákti or kofta). The woman is the artist herself. It is she alone who enters a pristine snowy winter landscape in her bright red gákti, beautifully adorned with colourful patterns and silver jewellery, dragging a large trampoline behind her. Once she has reached the centre of the image frame, she stops, checks that the trampoline is placed in a stable position, climbs on it, and enters the jumping mat through the safety net. After a short pause in which Helander centres herself, she begins to jump excessively until she suddenly stops and ends her performance. She exits the trampoline and pulls it out of the image frame again. Initially, the traces of the heavy trampoline remain. But these soon disappear, leaving the landscape apparently as pristine as it was before. Centring a man-made trampoline in the Arctic landscape is bewilderingly reminiscent of the placement of an (also man-made) tent in exactly that landscape – the tent that has been eternalized in polar expedition photography. The difference, however, is that in Helander's video the viewer witnesses how hard it actually is to transport such an object from place to place, and that it is an Indigenous woman who does the work. In expedition photography, the tent is "already" there. It is as if it had effortlessly or magically reached its destination in order to be looked at in awe by men who are

[43] The story goes that the Austrian emperor Franz Josef I (1830–1916) had a mistress, Katharina Schratt (arranged by his wife, the Empress Elisabeth, 'Sissi', so she could avoid her conjugal duties) who baked a Kaisergugelhupf for him every morning based on a family recipe. The Gugelhupf is baked in a special cone-like form and is a centuries-old traditional dish in the south of Germany and Austria. It came to prominence and became ennobled through this story.

overly proud of their heroic feats. The great difficulty of carrying equipment in the Arctic is hardly visible in this type of photography. This act has rarely been documented by Western explorers. In the case of American explorer Robert Peary (and many others) it was Indigenous men and women assisting the expeditions (who also carried the equipment). Their presence was barely credited. Instead, they were placed at the lowest rank of the expedition hierarchy. Helander's work, I argue, points to this problematic in that her playful jumping on the trampoline constitutes a short respite in otherwise cumbersome circumstances. At the same time, she wears her traditional costume with pride and glows colourfully in the otherwise seemingly monochrome landscape. For it is not a colourless monochrome landscape, a *terra nullius*, as the Western explorers saw it, in which Helander plays out her trampoline scene. It is the landscape in which her ancestors dwelled. It is a landscape full of histories, whose traces are subtle – but they are there. Patricia Fjellgren and Malin Nord write:

> While for the untrained eye it is wilderness, the experienced eye can sense the presence of many generations. Even if the traces are not palpable, they do exist. Those who know what to look for instantly perceive it as a cultural landscape. Memories and history. Here is a site where a lavvu was set up. Here is a former reindeer corral. There is a hearth where reindeer herders halted for both the herd and people to rest while on their way, transitioning from winter to summer lands. But those who expect civilization often only see what is sloppily referred to as wilderness. Untouched landscape. No one's land. Terra Nullius. That is to say: free to conquer and colonize [my translation]. (*Inifrån Sápmi. Vittnesmål från stulet land* 2021, 14)

Thus, what appeared to be empty and without human traces for the historical Western explorer was, in fact, not. His "inexperienced" eye stood for a worldview that neglects other worldviews, the histories and memories nurtured by others over generations. Because his untrained eye could not see the histories and memories of others, these things were excluded from his reality, and the mapping and colonizing of the territories he explored was rendered justifiable.

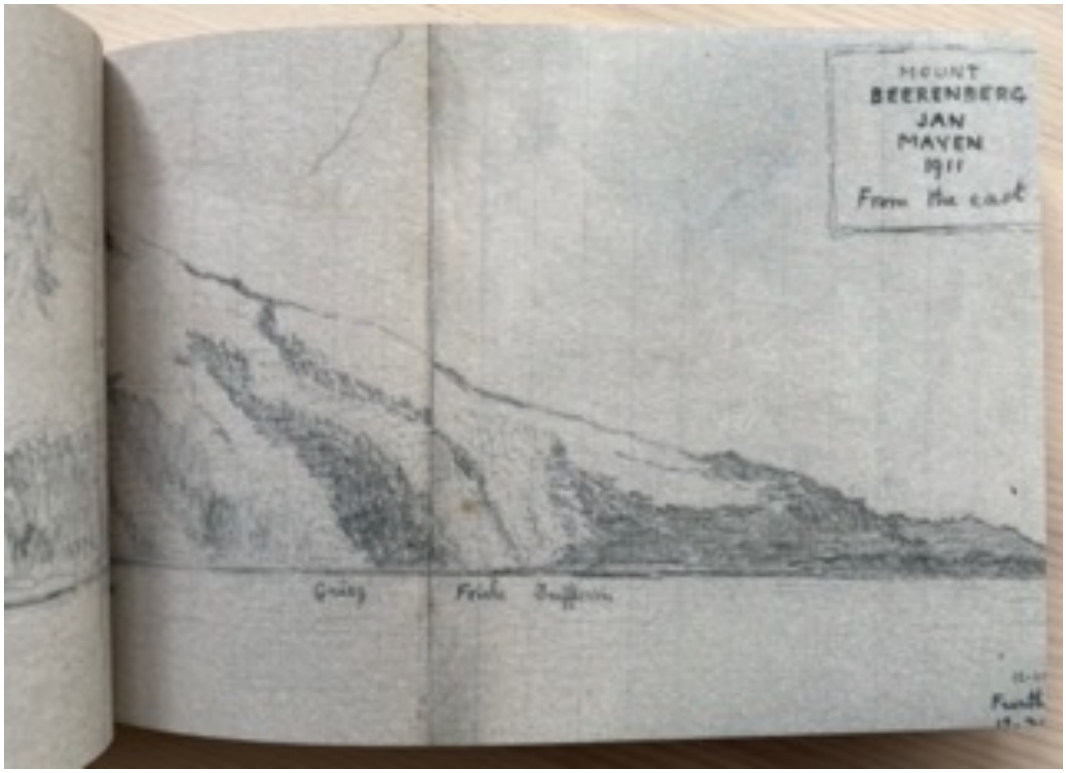
3.3.3 Creating and B(l)ending Possible Worlds

Trambo and the other contemporary artworks I examine in this chapter as well as in the related article, create possible worlds out of the complex and multifaceted worlds that have already come into existence. To refer again to Palmer's concept of queer defamiliarization, the artworks shift predominant perceptions about the Arctic and the circumpolar North by making strange historical representations, imaginations and worldviews that were created, perceived and nurtured by and through the male polar explorer. They imagine and create possible worlds by blending and bending the ones that already exist. In Haraway's use of the concepts, they are worlding worlds and create speculative fabulations. Speculative fabulations (and other futurist cultural practices) are important in creating "elsewhere" worlds with a particular political-subjective applicability: they "afford and create alternative spaces for those denied their place in the spaces already existing" (Palmer 2020a, 101). Thus, they not only create, they also bend – or queer – already existing worlds. They are b(l)ending worlds.

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's and Judit Hersko's works fabulate about worlds in which women polar scientists had a place equal to their male counterparts. Sophie Calle fabulates about fulfilling her mother's wish to go the North Pole by travelling to the Arctic herself and burying some of her relics underneath a glacier. Cristina de Middel fabulates further about a failed but documented polar expedition to make the male dilettantism in this undertaking even more absurd. Marja Helander fabulates about an Indigenous woman whose presence in polar exploration and modernity was/is always there, but made invisible. All works, I argue, are speculative fabulations and powerful tools to change *the* story.

3.4 Figures Corresponding to Chapter 3

Figure 10. Høeg, Marie. *Marie Høeg som polfarer* (Marie Høeg as polar explorer). Ca. 1895–1903.



Figures 11a, 11b. de Middel, Cristina. *Man Jayen*. 2015.

Figures 11c, 11d. de Middel, Cristina. *Man Jayen*. 2015.

4 Colonial Legacies

4.1 Introduction

Pia Arke's long-term artistic research project and the resulting book *Stories from Scoresbysund – Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping* (Arke [2003] 2010) tells the personal histories and memories of ten Indigenous Kalaallit/Greenlandic hunter families who were ripped out of their places of belonging as a result of a colonial "ownership" dispute between Denmark and Norway in the early 1920s. While Danish authorities officially argued that the families needed to be resettled because of famine and illness in their place of origin, the fact of the matter was that the relocation of these families was one method (in addition to others such as using maps and photographs as "documentary" proofs, hence the book's title) for securing Danish colonial sovereignty over northeast Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland.[44] Because the land looked bleak, empty and uncivilised to the colonizers, it appeared unproblematic to resettle a community from one supposedly empty place to another (in this case from Ammassalik in southern Greenland to Scoresbysund/Ittoqqortoormiit, over a thousand kilometres further to the northeast). From today's perspective, it is apparent that the Indigenous community's original place of settlement was in fact a cultural landscape, as previously mentioned in the Indigenous Sámi context (*Inifrån Sápmi. Vittnesmål från stulet land* 2021). The question remains whether this perspective had been available to the colonizer's comprehension. In any circumstance, moving the Indigenous people from their homeland to unfamiliar surroundings had dramatic consequences for their cultural belonging, livelihood, and overall well-being.

Arke's motivation for *Stories from Scoresbysund* was personal and political (Arke [2003] 2010, 13): through her mother, she was a descendant of one of those forcefully resettled families; she used her personal biography to "work through" a colonial history that concerned colonizer (Denmark), colonized (Greenland), and those sitting in between. As Arke expressed it herself: "Scoresbysund is a collection of local stories, woven from the threads of other stories, partly personal and family stories, partly the much broader colonial and global stories. The private, the aesthetic and the

[44] In *Stories from Scoresbysund* Arke's collaborator Stefan Jonsson gives a detailed account as to how the ownership dispute and resettlement process took place (Arke 2010, 92-94, 112-115, 124-128, 158-160).

geopolitical are to some extent intermingled here, somewhere in the middle of it all, *in the middle of nowhere*" (Arke [2003] 2010, 11).

Time and again Arke expressed, both through her writings and visual work, that there existed a need to acknowledge the impact of the explorer, scientist, missionary and colonizer on Indigenous cultures and vice versa, and that it was necessary to lift the silenced histories and colonial legacies out of oblivion. Arke, who herself was a "product" of both colonizer and colonized, used her insider and outsider position to investigate not only what happened in the contact zone but also how colonial encounters shaped both sides, in a fashion recalling Pratt's question in the introduction to her influential book *Imperial Eyes*: "How have Europe's subordinated others shaped Europeans' constructions of them and the places they inhabit? Or Europe's understanding of itself?" (Pratt 1992, 4). Pia Arke explicitly takes up the importance of this question when quoting long-term collaborator Stefan Jonsson in her treatise *Ethno-Aesthetics*: "Going into this field enables us to better understand the cultural traditions of the West itself. At this point, I would like to interject that, more than anything else, this whole matter is about Europe" (Jonsson, quoted in (Arke [1995] 2010, 13)). In relation to this statement Arke argues that her treatise "is an opportunity for dealing with the real thing: European culture with its aesthetics, its ethnography and its reason. It is a way of "involving oneself", a mixed-up way, but first and foremost a possible way" (Arke [1995] 2010, 13).

To this day, I argue, the artistic practice of Pia Arke (1958–2007) stands central in addressing the colonial blind spots of the Arctic and the circumpolar North.[45] In many ways her decolonial methods of working through what I call personal and collective "broken legacies" – the legacies of colonialism that resulted in broken cultures and broken individual identities – can be traced, and parallels found, in a

[45] With this statement I do not intend to minimize the importance of many other artists that equally worked on the colonial legacies in the circumpolar North at the time Arke practiced. In the context of Sápmi, for example, it is important to mention Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001). Also, the work of Sámi/Norwegian artist Geir Tore Holm (born 1966) who started his practice at roughly the same time as Pia Arke should be mentioned here. Focusing on Sámi identity and art, the Máze Group was important. Founded in 1978 by the Sámi artists Aage Gaup, Trygve Lund Guttormsen, Josef Halse, Berit Marit Hætta, Britta Marakatt-Labba, Hans Ragnar Mathisen, Rannveig Persen, and Synnøve Persen, the group was primarily active in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of them continue their individual practices today. In the Danish-Greenlandic/Kalaallit Nunaat context, Jessie Kleemann (born 1959), a contemporary and friend of Pia Arke, continues to be an important protagonist.

younger generation of artists working today. These methods include: long-term research in private and public archives to read the found material (primarily photographs) against the grain; collecting oral histories from persons/descendants that were subject to colonial assimilation processes, forced resettlement, humiliating scientific experiments and other colonial tools of oppression; collaborating with scholars, other cultural practitioners and witnesses/descendants to give them an active voice in their artwork/projects; connecting personal experiences with broader political events or, if from an outsider's perspective, taking a humble but trenchant position to advocate for the need to have the histories of those "others" told; problematizing and defamiliarizing the photographic image as an instrument of colonial power to (re)claim dignity and ownership and thereby finding a way to reconcile with and write what Azoulay calls *potential history* (Azoulay 2019); and finally, to present a research-based body of work that communicates coherent powerful visual imagery, often in combination with words, that reflects on colonial legacies from various perspectives and in all their complexity. It is therefore that Arke's artistic practice and legacy takes a central position in this thesis.

4.2 Unlearning Imperialism and Potential History

The artists' methods, approaches and sensibilities I discuss and interrelate in this chapter, those of Pia Arke, Katarina Pirak Sikku, niilas helander, Hanan Benammar and Terje Abusdal, I argue, show how it is possible to practice what Ariella Azoulay calls "unlearning imperialism", which I here apply to the Arctic and the circumpolar North. The practice of "unlearning imperialism", Azoulay argues, offers the potential of rewinding to the moment prior to the violation and destruction of worlds. There is a need to take off from there. In the context of this thesis, this means to examine how the artworks discussed help to rewind back to a time prior to colonial practices of resettlement, assimilation, exploitation, re-education and classification of human beings in the name of science. It means to look at nature, histories, cosmologies, cultural practices, and transcultural exchange that existed prior and parallel to colonization (I thus slightly divert from Azoulay's position). According to Azoulay this is possible by applying different types of "'*de-*,' such as decompressing and decoding; '*re-*,' such as reversing and rewinding; and '*un-*,' such as unlearning and

undoing" (Azoulay 2019, 10). In this way we can understand which processes lie beneath imperialism and how history unfolded: "Unlearning imperialism is unlearning the processes of destruction that became possible: the knowledge, norms, procedures, and routines through which worlds are destroyed in order for people to become citizens of a differentially ruled body politic" (Azoulay 2019, 11). If we look at imperialism in this way, we notice how knowledge, norms, procedures and routines created moral double standards, generated subalternizing hierarchies of separation (to reference Spivak) and legitimized the application of different values and treatment of bodies, cultural objects and territories. Only once we have understood this process can we seek restitution, reversal, and repair. As Azoulay concludes when explaining her concepts: "Imagined, claimed, and enacted simultaneously by all those who are implicated in imperial violence – victims and perpetrators alike as cocitizens – potential history is the transformation of violence into *shared care for our common world* [my emphasis]" (Azoulay 2019, 57). The "transformation of violence into shared care," I argue, stands central in all the artistic practices I discuss in this thesis. Every artist's individual practice shows that no story is simply black and white and that we all have to come to terms with our common legacies by paying attention to the fact that the line between perpetrator and victim, in Azoulay's somewhat trenchant terms, is never clear. If we do not take this into account, there is no room for agency and empowerment, no way or path to *potential history*.

4.3 Decolonial Artistic Practices in the Arctic and the Circumpolar North

4.3.1 Pia Arke's Arctic Hysteria IV

Pia Arke's photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997), the work I thoroughly examine in the article constituting part of this thesis (von Spreter 2022), is as an essential contribution to creating *potential history*. For the work Arke appropriated seven photographs from Robert Peary's book *Northward Over the "Great Ice": A Narrative of Life and Work along the Shores and up on the Interior Ice-Cap of Northern Greenland in the Years 1886 and 1891–1897* (Peary 1898). Out of these seven photographs, four are full-body portraits of the American polar explorers Peary, Baldwin, Entrikin and Clark. Their portraits are reminiscent of the polar hero images

discussed in the previous chapter. The other three are of naked/semi-naked Greenlandic women, of whom two are photographed within the Arctic landscape and one in the entrance of a tupik, the Greenlander's traditional summer housing. In all seven photographs, Arke left the original captions intact. While the male explorers are captioned with their proper names, the three women are labelled *The Mistress of the Tupik*, *An Arctic Bronze* and *Flash Light Study*. For the artwork Arke did nothing more than blow up reproductions of all photographs to the same size (roughly 79 x 29 cm each), mount them on cardboard, and arrange them alternately according to visible signs of gender. Returning to Palmer's interrelated concepts of defamiliarizing, queering and mattering, Arke's appropriative method renders strange the photographs as they were originally represented. By materializing them as enlarged, almost life-sized photographic reproductions, gazes meet on the same visual plain: those of the polar explorers and the Indigenous women, and those of the spectator standing in front of the work. As a result, the contrast between fur-clad white men and naked Indigenous women becomes striking, almost absurd, and the imbalance in (colonial) power relationships becomes even more evident. In my article I argue that Arke's method is a processual way of working through the trauma these women experienced and that she was, metaphorically speaking, a descendant of those women. I additionally argue that Arke's decision to appropriate and defamiliarize these photographs, is an act of reclaiming dignity and ownership. In that sense, Arke's work is an act of visual repatriation, permitting both reconciliation and the regaining of belonging.

While Pia Arke's artistic practice was pioneering during her lifetime, the re-examination and repositioning of her work in recent years has been significant. This is visible both amongst artistic and curatorial practices, art historical scholarship and art institutions, all cross-fertilizing one another (Boetzkes 2023; Christensen 2024; Gant 2021; von Harringa, 2021; helander 2022a, 2022b; Jonsson 2021, 2017, 2016, 2013; Kold, 2021a, 2021b; Leine 2021; Maude-Roxby 2024; Pedersen 2019; Paulsen 2024; Roxanne 2024; Sandbye 2024, 2016; Smith 2021; Steffensen 2021; Thisted 2016, 2012). This, I argue, is due to Arke's already-mentioned working methods and strong visual language, which I consider decolonial artistic practice *avant la lettre*. The retrospective exhibition *TUPILAKOSAURUS: Pia Arke's Issue with Art, Ethnicity and*

Colonialism, 1981–2006 (2010) and the subsequent publication *Tupilakosaurus. An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research* (2012), both curated/edited by the Danish curatorial duo Kuratorisk Aktion, surely initiated a broader international awareness, acknowledgement and understanding of Arke's practice. The exhibition and book, which contains important scholarly contributions (Jonsson 2012; Juhl 2012; Mondrup 2012a, 2012b; Sandbye 2012; Thisted 2012) have become important reference points. Additionally, Arke's work has since been acquired for important museum collections and exponentially included in international biennials, significant group exhibitions and become subject of solo presentations (von Spreter 2023b).[46] Individual artists, also, cite Arke's work as influential. Sámi artist niilas helander writes that his visit to Arke's solo exhibition *Wonderland* at Kunsthall Trondheim (5 September–10 November, 2019) had made a big impact on him (helander 2022b, 34). Katarina Pirak Sikku has expressed comparable admiration.[47]

The repositioning of Arke's work reflects broader changes taking place in the art world and beyond. As I argue in my article "Broken Legacies. Potential Futures. Artistic Practices in the Circumpolar North" (in the forthcoming book *Transformative Feminisms: Nordic Art in the Global Present* edited by Kerry Greaves and Birgitte Thorsen Vilslev, University of Copenhagen), I in fact witness a radical transformation of artistic and curatorial practices (including engagement with one's own colonial legacies), particularly in relation to the territories and homeland encapsulated in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. It is thus a logical consequence that Pia Arke's work is revisited and has become more visible.[48] These practices are important contributors to the cultural discussion of colonial legacies in the Arctic and the circumpolar North.

[46] For information on which of Arke's works have been acquired by public collections see ("Pia Arke Estate/Public Collections" 2023).

[47] In an email correspondence between Pirak Sikku and the author in September 2023 the artist expressed her adoration of Arke's work and that she was honoured to be mentioned together with her in the author's writings. Pirak Sikku became acquainted with Arke's work by having her work included in an exhibition together with Arke's.

[48] Here I also bring attention to another art world development: I can see an increased search for, and a craving to discover or rediscover, women artists that did not receive the credit they should have received during their lifetimes or at the beginning of their careers. Without being too overtly critical, this seems to be a successful method to guarantee commercial success or increasing visitor numbers at museums. Examples are, limiting myself to the Norway and Denmark, recent solo exhibitions of women artists Louise Bourgeois (Nationalmuseum Oslo 2023), Harriet Backer (Nationalmuseum Oslo, 2023/24), Britta Marakatt Labba (Nationalmuseum, Oslo, 2024), Alice Neel (Munchmuseum, Oslo 2023), Jessie Kleemann (SMK National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, 2023), and last but not least Pia Arke (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, 2021).

They contribute to discussions and events taking place both on scholarly levels and in society at large. As touched upon in my literature review, there is a circumpolar resurgence, an awakening that concerns both the admittance of injustices and inflicted violence (reflected by reconciliation reports, public apologies and government/institution-initiated repatriation projects) and the denouncement of ongoing, more hidden colonialisms (continued denial of Indigenous rights and wellbeing largely related to profitmaking/resource extraction and pollution/nature-culture destruction/climate change).[49] My research and this thesis contribute to this development. In fact, I am convinced that the artistic practices I research are key to advancing an understanding of a region that is undergoing dramatic changes – socially, politically, culturally, environmentally.

4.3.2 Decolonial Artistic Practices and Colonized Subjects

Artists Katarina Pirak Sikku, niilas helander and Hanan Benammar can be termed colonized subjects/bodies, although they differ widely in their conceptual and aesthetic approach. I bring them together because they, like Arke, represent perspectives of bodies bearing colonial legacies and engaging with the geographical area of the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Pirak Sikku and helander are Indigenous to the

[49] Some examples for admitting injustice in the Nordic countries are: in August 2019 Danish prime minister Mette Fredriksen apologized on behalf of the government for the treatment of Indigenous Greenlandic/Kalaallit children in orphanages from the 1950s to 1970s, subject to abuse and neglect. In June 2017 the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) decided to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the Norwegianization Policy and Injustice against the Sámi, Kvens and Norwegian Finns in Norway. The resulting report was published in June 2023. In October 2021 the Government of Finland appointed their Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People. A report has not yet been published. In November 2021, the Swedish government assigned a Truth Commission to investigate the abuses of the Sámi people by the Swedish state. The commission's assignment shall be presented by the latest on 1 December, 2025. Concerning Denmark and Greenland, a report by the Reconciliation Commission of Greenland was published in December 2017. This report has however been criticized for lack of Danish involvement. An expert paper published on the occasion of an International Expert Group Meeting entitled "Truth, transitional justice and reconciliation processes" arranged by the United Nations, states: "Prior to the establishment the Premier of Greenland Aleqa Hammond had asked the Danish Prime minister Helle Thorning Smith for Denmark to take part in the reconciliation process. The Danish Government did not see a need for reconciliation and rejected the invitation" (Heinrich 2022).
An example of the denouncement of continued colonialism and denial of Indigenous rights is the Fosen case in Norway where the Norwegian Supreme Court had ruled in October 2021 that the Norwegian government and profiting companies had violated traditional reindeer grazing areas/ Article 27 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in constructing a windmill park on the Fosen peninsula. Despite the ruling, the Norwegian government has not taken action and has even acted with police interference upon peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins by Indigenous activists at the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy. See ("About the wind farms on Fosen and the Supreme Court judgment" 2023).

circumpolar North and identify themselves as Sámi artists. They provide us with insider's perspectives from this region, inherited transgenerational traumatic experiences of assimilation and humiliating bodily examinations as well as other practices that facilitated the colonization of the Sámi people and their land. Benammar in turn, is not indigenous to the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Nevertheless, her own politics of location as a woman of Algerian descent with an inherited French colonial legacy, always speaks through her work. From this location Benammar is extremely skilled in turning the knife in wounds that many don't want to reopen, or haven't even healed. She lays bare uncomfortable histories, often questioning still present colonial and imperialist epistemologies. The work I examine in this thesis deals with the uncomfortable legacy of Norwegian-born priest Hans Egede (1686-1758) who is considered Greenland's first colonizer.

Similar to Arke's often quoted (feminist) statement that underlines that the personal is political – "I make the history of colonialism part of *my* history in the only way I know, namely by taking it personally" (Arke [2003] 2010, 13) – Pirak Sikku, helander and Benammar equally work outwards from their personal biographies, each in their own way intertwining them with their artistic practice, politics and coloniality. Indeed, helander has said, it is impossible to separate culture and art from politics: for him they are one and the same tool for resistance (helander and Rasmussen 2018, 47). This inseparability of the cultural and political can be considered a significant characteristic of artistic practices dealing with colonial legacies, here in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. On a scholarly level, also Mathias Danbolt and Bart Pushaw pay attention to this inseparability, or rather entanglement. In the concluding publication of the research project *The Art of Nordic Colonialism*, they argue that Nordic colonialism and art history are entangled, and it is critical artistic practices that have inspired and informed their examinations. They further write that the project worked to create connections between scholars, curators, and artists in examining the contact zones between art history and colonial history across the Nordic countries (Danbolt and Pushaw 2023, 69-70). The artistic practices I examine in this thesis are to be found in, or are the result of, meetings in these colonial contact zones. In fact, I argue, colonial legacies resonate in all the works I examine because they are inextricably linked to the artists' personal biographies.

Katarina Pirak Sikku's entire artistic practice deals with her own and collective Sámi experience of shame and humiliation caused by the historical bodily examinations Sámi people underwent in the name of "science". This "science" – which its practitioners called racial biology – was heavily entwined with racist ideologies to justify the classification and treatment of Sámi people as inferior and legally minor. Consequently, this not only had repercussions for the Sámi people in terms of self-affirmation and pride but also facilitated and justified the confiscation of their land, re-education and other assimilation processes. Comparable to Arke, Pirak Sikku researches private and public archives to come closer to a personally entwined collective history. Pirak Sikku's particular attention is directed at the archives of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology which operated between 1922 and 1958. There she finds photographs, measuring tables, correspondences, and scientific treatises. She also travels to the dozens of places where the Sámi people had been examined. She collects and writes down oral histories from witnesses and their descendants, corresponds with historians and other researchers, and traces family genealogies and parish documents. As for Arke, also for Pirak Sikku photography and her own body are important mediums in coming to terms with her own and collective history. For photography was an essential tool in mapping territory and classifying people as "other"; and bodies and "empty" landscapes were the objects of scientific investigation that needed to be photographically documented.

Katarina Pirak Sikku's work *Suoláduvvun álásvuohta/Bestulen nakenhet/Stolen Nakedness* (2013) strongly communicates with Pia Arke's *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997) in terms of making aware of Indigenous women's bodies' violation and objectification, the role of the (male scientist's) gaze on these naked bodies, visual repatriation and reconciliation. However, while both artists work to lift the silences of history and, as Pirak Sikku has expressed, "bite off the head of shame" (Pirak Sikku 2022, 111), their performative methods differ from one another. For *Arctic Hysteria IV* Arke had appropriated and reproduced the three photographs of naked Indigenous Greenlandic women as they had appeared in Peary's book (placed against those of the explorers). Pirak Sikku in turn only references the archival photographs of a naked Indigenous Sámi woman by re-staging what Ariella Azoulay calls the "event of photography" (Azoulay 2011, 74). For photography is, Azoulay writes,

> much more than what is printed on photographic paper. The photograph bears the seal of the photographic event, and reconstructing this event requires more than just identifying what is shown in the photograph. … It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic images. When and where the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted on others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation. (Azoulay 2008, 14)

Pirak Sikku indeed does use time and movement to reconstruct the photographic event, exercising her civic skill to feel, empathize with and understand the pain inflicted on the photographed subject. More specifically, for *Stolen Nakedness* Pirak Sikku re-enacts a photographic event based on images she finds in the archives of the State Institute of Racial Biology. These are of an unknown Sámi woman who was photographed naked in nine different positions: from the front, from the back, from the side, with hands up and hands down, hands in front and behind (Figure 12). “Why nine?” Pirak Sikku asks. “Why not ten?” She wonders whether aesthetic decisions were involved, or maybe if there existed even more photographs she does not know of. And why these positions? Did the racial biologists relate these to Greek sculptural ideals? Could one discover genetic differences through those? Or was this just a horny photographer who wanted to see as much as possible? (Pirak Sikku 2022, 128). There are many questions for Pirak Sikku. She seeks to find answers by letting herself be photographed in the same nine positions. But even if Pirak Sikku’s photographer is a trusted friend and she plans the setup herself (therefore knowing what is going to happen), she soon feels exposed, cold and uncomfortable. She wants the event to be over as soon as possible, although she knows that “her” event takes much less time than the one the anonymous Sámi woman must have gone through. Pirak Sikku had namely made sure to use camera equipment that required a much shorter shutter speed than the large format cameras used at the time, which demanded patience and endurance from the photographed subject. Despite her technological advantages, the

photographs turn out to be of cropped bodies. Nevertheless, she does not want to repeat the event; rather, she abstracts her body even further by translating the photographs into drawings, tracing her bodily outlines with a pencil to turn her figure into a white silhouette and setting it against a grey monochrome background. In this way, Pirak Sikku anonymizes both her own body and references the photographs of the unknown Sámi woman. Thus, she does not literally expose the historical photographs a second time. Through her re-enactment, she nevertheless creates what Lehtola has called a "double exposure" (Lehtola 2018, 4).

Equally *Arctic Hysteria IV* has been read as a re-enactment: "Where the violence of ethnographic humanism is grey in the archival photographs (obscured in a state of repression), Arke overlays her ethno-aesthetic lens onto this history by re-enacting it" (Boetzkes 2023, 400). However, *Stolen Nakedness* differs in that Pirak Sikku's re-enactment is not a process of "greying" the photographs, as Boetzkes has called it. Hers is a re-enactment that does not show the archival photographs at all. As Kristen Dobbin has stated, it is important that source communities (i.e., the communities where the photographs were taken) have access to and control of archival collections (Dobbin 2013). According to Lehtola one method can be to control the context in which they are re-shown or published. He here points to Nils-Aslak Valkepää/Áillohaš who did so by deciding to insert photographs from colonial archives only in the Sámi language version of his book *Beaivi áhčážan/The Sun, My Father* (1988) whereby none of the translated versions contain them. This way it is possible to reveal the "small stories" told by the Sámi people themselves (Lehtola 2018, 1-2). Pirak Sikku, I argue, follows this practice by deciding not to show or publish any of the photographs that would reinvoke pain and shame a "second time" (Hjortfors, quoted in (Dobbin 2013, 140). Additionally, her method recalls what Azoulay advocates as a viable means to access "undercurrent photographic data" – an excess of information not processed and left illegible but nonetheless present in the photograph. This data can be accessed when tracing photographic images with a pencil or scissors and by deliberately not taking the position of the spectator/photographer (Azoulay 2019, xvi). Pirak Sikku uses such a tracing method to gain access to information that is not (yet) processed, namely the painful unprocessed information contained in silenced histories. She transfers the experience of being gazed at and

photographed onto her own body, and then further abstracts it by tracing her silhouette. This is, I argue, a decolonial method to show resistance and regain agency over one's own dignity.

The work of niilas helander, equally, makes use of the method of transference (and refusal to show), yet without physically tracing photographic images with a pencil or using scissors to cut out silhouettes. For helander, everything is explicitly photographic transference and cut-out. This is strongly visible in works that were part of his solo exhibition *No Demands* at Kunsthall Oslo (19 February–3 April, 2022). All works in the exhibition refer to the implementation and consequences of Norway's official assimilation politics (fornorsking) targeting Sámi and Kven people from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1960s (Berg-Norlie 2024). Central to these assimilation policies was the forced abandonment of language, culture, and traditional ways of life among the Sámi and Kven people. This would happen, for example, by prohibiting the use of any other language other than Norwegian in schools (until 1959); taking Sámi/Kven children from their families and placing them in specially set up boarding schools (from 1901) or the denial of property acquisition/rights for Sámi/non-Norwegian speaking people in the Finnmark district (Jordsalgslov, 1902–1965; see (Pedersen 2019)).

Untitled (2022) is a reproduction of the historical document "Instrux for lærerne i de lappiske og kvenske overgangsdistrikter i Tromsø Stift" (Instructions for teachers in the Lappish and Kven transitional districts in the Tromsø Diocese) signed 12 October, 1880 (Figure 13. At the time, Norwegian authorities had established "transitional districts" in areas in which they thought it was possible to generate a language shift from Sámi to Norwegian. These entailed areas from Tysfjord to Western Finnmark and the entire Tromsø district, with some exceptions (Berg-Norlie 2024). The "Instrux" niilas helander reproduced in the exhibition is the third revision of instructions given to teachers on how to teach Norwegian to Sámi and Kven children (the first "Instrux" was published in 1862; revisions followed in 1879, 1880 and 1899). The 1880 version has been considered as marking a significant change in state policies in that they applied stricter rules for teaching and measuring progress in Norwegian language acquisition amongst Sámi and Kven children. Additionally, previous passages allowing children to learn their mother tongue (i.e., Sámi or Kven)

were dropped. From the 1880 "Instrux" onwards, "the silk gloves were taken off" (Grenersen 2015, 631). With helander's decision to transfer this proof of Norway's assimilation policies on an exhibition wall over 150 years later, a strong message is conveyed. By blowing up the instruction leaflet to more than life-size, inverting original font and background colour, and using charcoal reminiscent of a school blackboard to execute the transferral, helander leaves the original "instrux" somewhat intact and defamiliarizes the viewer's perception. This method of defamiliarization recalls Pia Arke's blowing up of historical documents and photographs for *Arctic Hysteria IV*.

Portrait of my father disappearing (2010–2022), a black and white photograph of helander's father placed in a glass jar filled with liquid, evokes associations of dead species preserved in jars in natural history museums around the world (Figure 14). Placing a photographic representation of a person of Sámi descent in such a jar recalls histories of Indigenous peoples exhibited in world fairs, museums and zoological gardens – a soon-to-be-extinct specimen that needs to be preserved. That helander placed the photograph in a type of jar that has traditionally been called "Norgesglass" (Norway's glass), used to preserve food, adds a delicate layer to the work. However, whatever the content, the function of the glass is to preserve. The photograph in the glass jar can thus be seen as a direct reference to the period in which Indigenous people were photographed in the name of science, and that this was done "to immortalise 'a vanishing culture' that was about to give way to civilisation." (Lehtola 2018, 3). In *Portrait of my father disappearing*, this aim is turned into a paradox: the photograph will eventually dissolve. Thus, helander has staged a sort of "double-death".

Another work in the exhibition, *Untitled (Hammerfest 1932)* (2022), is a reproduction of a photograph by the White Star Line photographer Douglas Cornhill. The White Star Line was one of the most prominent transatlantic shipping companies operating from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. Amongst other ventures, it offered transatlantic passages for both upper class travellers (it owned the *Titanic*) and immigrants to the United States and Australia. Cornhill was commissioned to take photographs on such journeys. The reproduced photograph shows a group of children and elderly women sitting in wait, possibly prior to

embarking on a White Star Line steam ship. One of the elderly women appears singled out because she sits somewhat apart from the others. She is the only one that wears a traditional Sámi costume (kofta). The visitor to the exhibition receives no information as to what kind of event lies underneath the photograph, its "undercurrent photographic data" (Azoulay 2019, xvi). Is the physical distance between the women due to a person having temporarily left the queue who will return shortly? Or is a distance created because the Sámi woman is seen as "other"? Was the Sámi woman from Hammerfest or another place? Why did a British shipping company dock in Hammerfest in 1932, and why was this documented? What were the people's motivations and destination? Following a conversation with the artist I did not come closer to my answers. What became clear, however, was that for helander this photograph must be connected to a painful history. In an email conversation he writes that "if you want a closer look just for studies I am happy to send it, but it wont be reprinted anywhere. I gave the print to my niece, but personally I cant even have it on the wall" (niilas helander, email conversation with author, November 2023). I decide to not dig further but to respect the artist's wishes and follow Azoulay's advocation that "local communities should have the right to set rules about who has the right to see and to show, what is known and unknown about imperial violence, and how it could be repaired" (Azoulay 2020). In that context, helander's work *No demands* (2021), a black and white photograph of a person holding a blank sheet of paper up to the camera, can be seen as a statement demanding nothing but the right "not to show" (Figure 15).

4.3.3 External Colonized Subjects

This is Our Body / Dette er vår kropp (2021) was a performance directed by Benammar in the context of the Arctic Moving Image and Film Festival (AMIFF) in Hárstták/Harstad on 15 October, 2021.[50] According to its press release, the performance had as its main focus the colonial legacy of the missionary Hans Egede, marking the 300–year anniversary of his arrival in Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland (1721):

[50] The performance was co-directed by Aqqalu Berthelsen/Uyarakq, with the participation of Dag Erik Enoksen, Bel Chorus, Cynthia Pitsiulak, Maria Daniela Rasch, Hans-Henrik Egede Nissen, Therese Jeanette Jenssen, Arne Bernt Håkonseth and Parnuuna Kristiane Thornwood. It was recorded and is today viewable in video format (Benammar 2021)

> That the field of humanities and knowledge production which includes art and religion, but also science and education can be a "double edged sword", the beholders of enlightenment and perpetrators of destruction, and a potential platform for creating a stronger community as well as space of frictions is at the core of this project. Can one ritualise around a conflictual heritage? How to strengthen collective awareness about our common history of violence?" ("Dette er vår kropp / This is Our Body" 2021).

The performance took place where Egede was born and raised before he left to begin his career as a priest in the Vågan area of the Lofoten Islands. After a period in Bergen, he departed for Greenland in 1721, where he established the country's first colonial mission in what is today Nuuk (and where he became appointed first bishop of Greenland by the Danish king in 1741). Egede is seen by many, amongst them Pia Arke, as the first colonizer of Greenland. He takes a prominent place in Arke's work, such as in her photo series *Nature Morte alias Perlustrations* 1–10 (1994).

The starting point for Benammar's research and resulting performance is a statue of Hans Egede set up in front of Hárstták/Harstad church in 1965 – an exact copy of a statue set up at Trinity Church in Oslo the same year. Up until Benammar's performance, the Harstad monument had received little critical attention.[51] As I argued in my conference paper *Ghost of the Past? The (In)visible Hans Egede Monument at Trinity Church, Oslo* (von Spreter 2023a), Egede's role in the colonization of Greenland is controversial – worshipped on the one hand and condemned on the other – and that this plays out through sculptural manifestations of his persona in Norway, Denmark and Greenland. While monuments located in Oslo, Vågan and Hárstták/Harstad are almost invisible or little scrutinized, two other statues outside of Norway (Nuuk and Copenhagen) received prominent attention by being sprayed with graffiti and the word "decolonize" in 2020. They thereby became subject to global actions and debates around the role of monuments as manifestations of colonization,

[51] A new copy was made for Hárstták/Harstad in 2008 while the old copy was donated to Vågan the same year. Due to delays in restoring the sculpture the old copy was only set up in front of Vågan church in 2018. The new copy for Hárstták/Harstad church was inaugurated by H.M. Queen Sonja of Norway in June 2008.

injustice and suppression (with social media playing a prominent role, as it did in the movements communicated by the tags #rhodesmustfall, #blm, #decolonizethisplace, #decolonizingmonument, #amazingrace, #wrapping monuments, etc.; see also (Skovmøller and Danbolt 2020). In the case of the Oslo monument, I investigated why it had become invisible and argued that it was neither perceived as relevant in the new regime of digitalized urban space that filter what is commercially relevant for the user, nor yet been "awakened" by a public that scrutinizes the (national) ghosts of the past. Benammar's performance *This is Our Body / Dette er vår Kropp*, I argue, answers these questions and concerns. Her work contributes to an awakening and scrutinizing of the ghosts of the past, and possibly manages to do so with more ease as an "external" colonized subject.

Benammar's performance was a combination of ritual, religious service and theatre play. It started with a procession from a former industrial area at Harstad's shoreline towards Trondenes church (where Egede was baptized). The procession was led by Benammar and consisted of a group of men participating in the performance, followed by spectators. Both Benammar and the men were dressed in black with white neck ruffs, like oversized versions of the ruffs Egede has been portrayed wearing in sculptures, paintings and engravings (Figure 16). Each performer carried pieced-together elements of yet another copy of the Harstad statue – this time made from bread baked by a local bakery. Upon entering the church, Egede's body parts were carefully placed at the feet of the Inuk singer Cynthia Pitsiulak who sat in waiting at the end of the corridor. When the entire congregation settled down, the Harstad male choir *Bel Chorus* accompanied by an organ ceremonially led into an event part-church service, part-ritual. A gripping music performance by the Greenlandic electronic musician Aqqalu Berthelsen and the throat singer Cynthia Pitsiulak followed (Figure 17). It built up with such an intensity that it affected the entire body – a sensation experienced, even, when watching the filmed performance (Benammar 2021). A central part of the ritual-service-play was the "sermon" – essentially a letter written by Hans-Henrik Egede Nissen addressed to his ancestor and read out by Benammar. The letter explicitly dealt with Egede's family and colonial legacies. It addressed the current discussions around monuments and how to deal with what the press release

announced as “conflictual heritage” and “our common history of violence”.[52] Egede Nissen/Benammar pronounce: “What has happened, has happened. The past, as it actually happened, is a sphere beyond our influence. … What we can alter, though, is the way we describe it, and the way we permit it to shape us” (Egede Nissen and Benammar 2021). Letting the aches of the past remain visible, they declare, is necessary if there is to be relief – thus monuments must remain as a reminder. This is exactly what Azoulay calls for: to do the work of going back, of rewinding (in this case, Egede’s own writings) in order to understand the past. This also means that it is necessary to understand that history has been shaped by what ensued and by interpretations which do not necessarily correspond to original intentions. Nevertheless, it remains indispensable to listen to the bodies that have suffered. Maybe this is why Egede’s bread body parts are picked up again at the end of *This is Our Body* and brought to the waterfront where a kayaker takes them to the open sea (Figures 18a, 18b). Here they will eventually be dissolved by the water and released from suffering. Egede’s body parts acquire a ghostly presence and become “bodies of water” in Neimanis’s sense. Possibly they travel up North to where the colonization of Greenland began.

4.3.4 Practicing Decoloniality as a Non-colonized Subject

In the previous sections I examined decolonial artistic practices that are closely connected with the artists’ own biographies and the urgency to process the inflicted suffering through their work. There are, however, an increasing number of artistic practices that deal with colonial legacies in the Arctic and the circumpolar North from the position of the non-colonized subject. The long-term artistic research and photography project *The Darkness and Deep* (2017–) by Terje Abusdal, I argue, is such an important work. It brings to the surface the multi-layered aspects and consequences of historical events, here both connected to the atrocities and suffering inflicted by an external force on a sovereign country (Nazi Germany on Norway) and internal suffering inflicted by a majority on a minority (the Norwegian state on its Indigenous population). More concretely, *The Darkness and Deep* engages with the

[52] The letter also took up the problematics of inaugurating a new copy of the sculpture by H.M. Queen Sonja in 2008 and the vandalization of the Egede monument in Nuuk in 2020, or the Lord Wellington monument in Glasgow.

history and consequences of the burning down of Northern Norway's Finnmark and Nord Troms regions by Nazi-German troops in the autumn of 1944. Because the Nazis had used a scorched-earth tactic to prevent the Red Army from advancing, an entire region was wiped off the map. The project's title stems from Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep," which according to Abusdal's research was used by one witness to describe the sheer destruction and darkness resulting from this merciless act (Asbjørn Jaklin 2016, 366, quoted in (Terje Abusdal, email conversation/interview with author, January 2024)). Part of the Nazi's strategic "flattening" of the land was the forced evacuation of its population, mostly to southern parts in Norway. There are estimates that half the evacuated population was of Sea Sámi descent (Bjørklund 2000, 8).[53] Some people managed to resist evacuation and escape to the inland mountains, smaller islands or other more remote places. Thus, the "surface of the deep" not only became devoid of human-built infrastructure and architecture that had existed for hundreds of years; the region was emptied of a people that had nurtured and cultured it for centuries.

At the end of the war the Norwegian authorities established a massive reconstruction scheme called *Gjenreisingen*. The scheme's overall goal was to (re)construct a modern, homogenous Norway which was to be administered from the nation's capital Oslo. Local/regional knowledge, aspirations, and architectural traditions did not fit into the standard government plans developed by bureaucrats and architects in the South. Consequently, also Indigenous Sámi and minority Kven cultures were not taken into consideration. According to the historian Ivar Bjørklund, the entire reconstruction apparatus "was founded entirely on Norwegian cultural premises"; not a single initiative was designed to take account of the region's ethnic diversity (Bjørklund 2000, 9-10). The reconstruction period (1945–65), it has been argued, coincided with Norway's most patriotic phase (Buck et al. 2022, 84). In this period Norwegian assimilation policies continued to be exercised.

The Darkness and Deep lays bare some of the fragments of these histories, which has so far materialized through Abusdal's own photographic artworks, a video, and several sound recordings. A comprehensive publication will complete the project

[53] I was unable to find sources on how many were of Kven descent.

in the future.[54] Abusdal has stated that he attempts to allow these historical fragments to speak for themselves, even if he provides a contextual and artistic framework. In doing so, he aims to leave space for absence, contradiction and disagreement (Terje Abusdal, Email conversation/interview with author, January 2024). Letting other voices speak is an essential method for the provision of these spaces. Abusdal does so by doing extensive research in archives, collecting oral and written histories and travelling to places of origin. Not only did Abusdal spend longer periods of time in Finnmark through artist residencies in Hammerfest, Kjøllefjord and Berlevåg, he also travelled extensively in the region to visit archives, make sound recordings, talk to witnesses, residents and activists, and to meet historians and other researchers specialized in the region's culture, language and history.[55]

Like Arke and Pirak Sikku, Abusdal digs into hidden histories and legacies of a region that has formerly dealt little with (settler) colonialism and state policies of assimilation, resettlement, land confiscation, children displacement, scientific examinations and so on, all directed at the Indigenous populations of the (circumpolar) North. Another common methodology is to take the time, years, to let those histories surface. However, as mentioned earlier, Abusdal is not a descendant of those who have been assimilated, resettled or examined and is thus not a colonized subject himself. Nevertheless, also he, I argue, takes a decolonial approach in making visible the legacies in all their complexity. He does so by listening to others, including researchers, witnesses and local people who live with and tackle the long-term effects connected to (loss of) identity and the search for belonging. These voices get heard through the sound recordings (such as an interview with the historian Marion Palmer, or an oral resuscitation of Sea Sámi words), but are also visualized through his video and photographs.[56] Abusdal has himself expressed that his working method is inspired

[54] Parts of the project have to date been shown at The Museum of Reconstruction in Hammerfest (4 February–11 May, 2021) and Bergen Kunsthall (17 April–9 May, 2021). In Hammerfest Abusdal juxtaposed his own work with archival material and objects from Sea Sámi culture.

[55] The places Abusdal additionally visited are: Seiland, Kvalsund, Repparfjord, Kokelv, Havøysund, Sarnes, Båtsfjord, Vardø, Vadsø, Hamningberg, Tana, Kjøllefjord, Gamvik, Mehamn, Grense Jakobselv and Kirkenes

[56] Palmer is one of Abusdal's close collaborators and author of the book *Bare kirka sto igjen – fortellinger om krigen i Finnmark* (Only the church remained – stories about the war in Finnmark). From the recorded interview with Palmer the listener learns that people from Hammerfest and the Kvalsund area speak about the "Sámi times before the war", that the burning down of Finnmark

by Trinh T. Minh-ha's approach of "speaking nearby" as opposed to "speaking about" and that he is aware of his own challenging double position as both outsider and photographer. For Abusdal "speaking nearby" means, principally, to listen and learn from those he speaks and collaborates with, while resisting the setting up of a finished narrative, as had been done by men with cameras in the past (Terje Abusdal, Email conversation/interview with author, January 2024).

Central to Abusdal's work is his own photography, which always has a strong visual aesthetic to communicate the fragmented histories and unfinished narratives. In that sense, his work connects to Pia Arke's in that it presents "a research-based body of work that communicates coherent powerful visual imagery, often in combination with words, that reflects on colonial legacies from various perspectives and in all their complexity" (page 100). Abusdal's photographs, however, are characterized by a strong play with colour, contrasts and close-ups. The photographs that have so far been publicly shown, are strong visual statements.[57] Each tells a story of a region that has been shaped by nature and historical circumstances: seafaring, trade, polar exploration, assimilation, war, destruction, modernization, immigration, to name a few.

Sandfjorden (2018) is a photograph of a whale bone lying on a shore. *Bybo* (2020) is a close-up of cracks in Hammerfest's post-war architecture that was set up as part of the *Gjenreisingen* scheme. *Kongshavnhula #1* and *#2* (2018) are photographs of cave walls bearing inscriptions and symbols from the people that refused to be evacuated in 1944. *Seiland* (2021) is an image of a weather-torn caravan hooked to the ground, reflecting precarious living situations of refugees that enter the country from the North. *Rakel* (2020) is a portrait of a Sámi woman with a fox fur placed on her head, thereby hiding her face. *Annie* (2020) is an image a woman wearing the traditional Norwegian costume, the bunad, yet photographed that only her back and folded hands are visible. *Ledjon [Steinløva]* (2020) is a photograph of an ancient stone formation evidencing human presence through the centuries.

From these photographs strong but nuanced narratives emerge. Through my own research and my conversations with Abusdal, it is possible to detect histories that

marked the end of "what was" and that the post-war reconstruction years were the dawn of a new Norwegian era.

[57] In the exhibition at the Museum of Reconstruction, Hammerfest, the photographs were shown in the size 106 x 132 cm (each).

otherwise might be difficult to read. In *Rakel* and *Annie* (Figures 19, 20) for example, Abusdal decides not to show the faces of the portrayed. One could argue that he thereby hides their identities. However, both portraits speak strongly of histories connected to national or ethnic identity: the bunad is a strong symbol for Norwegian identity and belonging; the fur refers to the old prejudice that Sámi people have a fox tail. The tale relates to an anecdote from the period of forced evacuation in 1944: when Sámi people arrived in the southern parts of Norway, people expressed astonishment that they didn't have fox tails after all (Lien and Nielssen 2021). Rakel, is in fact one of Abusdal's close collaboration partners and in the process of rediscovering her Sámi identity. Together, they use the story of the fox fur to turn it into a story of self-affirmation and pride. It is this reversal that Abusdal achieves through the photographs. He thereby creates the potential for another history. Thus, I argue, Abusdal's approach makes it also possible to see "photography's other histories" (Pinney and Peterson 2003): the histories that exist beyond and underneath the image of the photograph itself. Although methodologically and aesthetically different to Arke's, Pirak Sikku's and helander's photography, equally Abusdal uses the medium to work against the legacy that has contributed to the vision of people as other, and which renders them colonized subjects and objects of scientific investigation. His aesthetically powerful imagery communicates with the contextual material he has researched and the voices he has listened to over time. Therefore, to answer a question posed by Lien and Wallem Nielsen in a review on Abusdal's exhibition, "Is it possible to recall and visually manifest something that appears to be erased and made invisible?" can be positively answered (Lien and Nielssen).[58] Abusdal's photographs indeed make visible what has been buried and supplanted. *The Darkness and Deep* is an invitation to reflect on how it is possible to contribute to a shift in understanding and coming to terms with one's legacies, both from the perspective of the colonized and non-colonized subject.

[58] The original sentence reads: "Er det mulig å gjenkalle og visuelt manifestere noe som tilsynelatende er utvisket og usynliggjort?"

4.4 Figures Corresponding to Chapter 4

Figure 12. Pirak Sikku, Katarina.

Suoláduvvun álásvuohta/Bestulen nakenhet/Stolen Nakedness. 2013.

Figure 13. helander, niilas.
Untitled. 2022.

Figure 14. helander, niilas.
Portrait of my father disappearing.
2010–2022.

Figure 15. helander, niilas. *No demands*. 2021.

Figure 16. Benammar, Hanan. *This is our body*. 2021.

Figure 17. Benammar, Hanan. *This is our body*. 2021.

Figures 18a, 18b. Benammar, Hanan. *This is our body*. 2021.

Figure 19. Abusdal, Terje. *Rakel*. 2020

Figure 20. Abusdal, Terje. *Annie*. 2020.

5 Conclusion

áddjá[59]
always used to say
“where are all these people going
all the time?”
and this was told and retold
in stories or in passing
and it was repeated
in our mouths
until the various layers of that
short sentence
contained everything we needed
to know
about being and time

áddjá
brukte alltid å si
“hvor er alle disse menneskene på vei
hele tiden?”
og dette ble fortalt og gjenfortalt
I historier og forbipasserende
øyeblikk
og det ble gjentatt
i vår munn
til de forskjellige lagrene av den
korte setningen
inneholdt alt vi trengte
å vite
om væren og tid

niilas helander, berlin, 2020
(*NOMADTEKST niilas helander. dikt - essays - oversettelser* 2022, 11)[60]

This thesis read contemporary artworks in relation to three urgent issues I identified as specific, but not exclusive to the Arctic and the circumpolar North: climate change and environmental destruction; gendered spaces; and colonial legacies. Obviously, these issues are inextricably entangled with one another, which makes a critical reading of the artistic practices examined above plain enough. However, my analytical strategy to split these into three different topics was necessary to not only highlight the importance and complexity of each issue but also helped to amplify these and sensitize the reader to what is at stake. Furthermore, without this analytical strategy I would have risked what I selectively observed in the literature review: that the thesis would

[59] “áddjá” means grandfather in the Northern Sámi language.
[60] The poem was originally printed in Norwegian. I would like to thank niilas helander for kindly making an English translation for this thesis.

have either become part of a large, almost ungraspable discourse or incorporated into one in which artistic practices get lost.

To read the artistic practices in relation to climate change and environmental destruction, I termed it vital to outline how historical Arctic expeditions and artistic aspirations worked together and contributed to turning the Arctic and the circumpolar North into an "aesthetically constituted object". I argued that historical Arctic expeditions were possibly the ultimate embodiment of dream, imagination and adventure. Its visual outcomes, from an outsider's perspective, largely represented the region as spectacular, uncivilized, white, empty, uninhabited, unknown, and sublime. This imaginary image contributed to making the Arctic regions susceptible to being explored, mapped, exploited and colonized – and consequently vulnerable for environmental destruction. What I term "polar expedition culture" thus made an essential contribution to these developments, with artists playing an important role in it. I argued that a "polar expedition culture" in which artists are present continues to this day, if so in different formats such as institutional art-science collaborations, residencies or internationally oriented contemporary art events. Connected to this contemporary "polar expedition culture" there exist on the one hand artworks and art events that (still) turn the Arctic/polar regions and especially its ice, into spectacle; and on the other, ones which I term critical, practising an "aesthetics of dissonance" (Schneider 2021) and "new polar aesthetic" (Bloom 2022a). It is these critical voices that were the focus of this thesis, and which paid particular attention to the dissonant practices geographically connected to my own location.

Writing *with* and listening *to* is the methodology I chose to read these dissonant or critical artistic practices with, even though I am aware that this brought its challenges. Himali Singh Soin's video work *we are opposite like that* (2019) was the result of an expedition to Svalbard that clearly followed the tradition of historical expeditions and the abovementioned visual outcomes. By turning the (melting) ice into the protagonist of the work, it risked becoming what Smith had termed "a spectacle on a global scale" (Smith 2021, 158). However, in arguing that Soin's work represented both an inward and outward gaze, and that of an included and excluded body (icy, female, colonized), I conclude that Soin's work does not follow this trait. Rather, through my method of listening *to* and writing *with*, it was possible to describe

multiple worldviews that evaded this spectacular imagery. As Wendy M. K. Shaw has pointed out, apart from considering the what, where, when, and why in art historical analysis, it is necessary to examine the broader meanings and different worldviews represented by the artwork and its maker: "… how would a person apprehend the world, and art within it, through a worldview distinct from ours?" (Shaw 2024, 164). My reading of Soin's work attempted to answer several "hows": how does a female colonized brown body feel the Arctic which is not her place of belonging? How does an icy body experience anthropogenic climate change and environmental destruction in the Arctic and the circumpolar North? How does another worldview make it possible to point out its causes and effects? How does her artwork relate to other artistic practices that sense and make visible such anthropogenic climate change and environmental destruction? Though it is not my function as an art historian to sense the world in the same way as Soin does, my posthuman feminist reading worked to identify worldviews and silenced histories embedded in her work. This way I could lay out how her work relates to anthropogenic climate change and environmental destruction and Arctic exploration, imperial expansion and mapping, and colonialism. I could detect the ghosts of the Anthropocene (Tsing et al. 2017), slow violence (Nixon 2011) and coloniality at a distance (Neimanis 2017, 165). I conclude that my method of reading Soin's work was not to dismantle it but to see its potential in acquiring a renewed understanding of the causes of anthropogenic climate change and environmental destruction. I could thereby connect to the other artistic practices I examined in this cover article. While my reading of Soin's video worked towards revealing causes of climate change and environmental destruction, in the artistic practices of Liselotte Wajstedt, Siri Hermansen and Carola Grahn I focused on the consequences. Together, I showed how they sense and amplify both causes and effects of climate change and environmental destruction, including resource extraction, pollution and the displacement of Indigenous peoples and other-than-human inhabitants in the Arctic and the circumpolar North.

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's *Character I. Aline Victoria Birkeland* (2009) led my investigation towards why and how the regions of Arctic and the circumpolar North are perceived as a gendered space. As I outlined in chapter three, I observe a "peak wrestling period" in the first two-and-a-half decades of the 2000s in which artistic

practices especially engaged with the Arctic and the circumpolar North as a masculinized space. Selecting artistic practices from this period resulted in a writing *with* that investigated gender differences, particularly in relation to masculinity. In both independently published article and corresponding chapter of this cover article, my reading focused less on gender in relation to issues of race, class and ethnicity. To an extent it disregarded a critical reading of Western feminist practices as potentially complicit with already existing hierarchical structures, deeper lying inequalities and misrepresentations. However, because the examined artworks do represent positions that lay bare how sexual differences are subject to power structures, the construction of (heroic) masculinity or laid claim to the right to be seen, my reading pointed out which other genders were/are absent or marginalized in the Arctic and the circumpolar North. Especially the chapter *Gendered Arctic* and the corresponding literature review paid attention to "man" as a gender category and different types of masculinities. It included scholarly discussions that dismantled the male perspective as equalling the universal experience and considered the norm, which constitutes that "man" formerly was an invisible gender category (Hauan 2021, 21). My reading of the artworks clearly showed that the gender of "man" is not invisible in the Arctic and the circumpolar North but rather the opposite: as a space marked by hypermasculinity (constructed through the image of the polar hero and explorer) and as a space in which other masculinities and genders have been present but received minor attention. Thus, even if my reading of the artworks considered notions of class and ethnicity only to a small extent, it did open up for historical and specific contexts that turned the Arctic and the circumpolar North into a gendered space. Even more, it showed that discussions around gender are not outdated and enter in dialogue with recent scholarship such as *Polare Maskuliniteter* (Hauan 2021) and *Kjønn i isen. Fragmenter til ei ny polarhistorie* (Gaupseth and Hauan 2024 prove. My reading thus showed that it has the potential to speak for our contemporary situation (Elkins 2014, 22).

This potential became equally evident in my re-reading of Pia Arke's work *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997) and in me relating her artistic practice to those of artists active today. As pointed out earlier, the re-reading of an artwork that already had been subject of comprehensive scholarship, placed me in a tenuous position. However, by applying materialist photographic theory (Edwards 2021; Edwards and Hart 2004) the

artwork itself became the focus of my attention, rather than its reception history. This method allowed me to connect to contemporary debates around visual repatriation and trauma-processing. I additionally listened to Arke's contemporaries who had physically seen the work. It is in my conversations with Erik Gant that I first ventilated my standpoint that the term 'lost' should be "decolonized" in relation to Arke's work. The term 'lost' is popularly applied to artworks that have disappeared (in wars, fires etc.) with speculations of their whereabouts. It has also been used by Western archaeologists and explorers when (re)discovering settlements by "vanished" civilizations, often calling these settlements 'lost cities'. This classification becomes problematic if one claims to be the sole authority in discovering something that local people in fact long knew existed (but were never asked about) or who are in fact the descendants of those "vanished" civilizations. The classification is equally problematic if it is claimed that a 'lost' object is a static entity and never subject to (historical) change. *Arctic Hysteria IV* was not static but – as long as its elements were available to Arke – in a constant state of flux. The repeated (re)assembling of the work was, I argued, one of Arke's methods to process her inherited trauma and loss of identity, to connect it to her own body, again and again. This processual, and performative aspect, her use of photography, and the personal and collective entanglements with colonial histories were aspects I set in dialogue with the other artistic practices I examined in the chapter of this cover article. Here I read Arke's, Pirak Sikku's, helander's, Benammar's and Abusdal's works through Ariella Azoulay's concept and method of "unlearning imperialism". Essentially, Azoulay's is a decolonial practice with the aim to use previously experienced injustices as a potential for reconciliation, or at least to practice a "shared care for our common world" (Azoulay 2019, 57). All the artworks point to previously experienced injustices, even violence, as part of colonial histories. At the same time, these works do have the potential to reconciliate, as I have elaborated on in this thesis. Whether this concerns the inherited shame based on traumatic events of physical examinations in the name of racial biology (Pirak Sikku), Indigenous people's forced assimilation (helander), the ambiguous role of the first colonizer of Greenland Hans Egede (Benammar) or the disappearance and resurgence of Sea Sámi culture (Abusdal): all create mutual understanding if one rewinds to those

histories that were formerly invisible, silenced or suppressed. This is what Azoulay called *potential history*.

Writing *with* and listening *to* the artworks were important methods to let formerly invisible, silenced or suppressed stories speak. Both, I argue, are methods for decolonizing art history. They align with other decolonial art historical methods as they have been outlined by art historians Tatiana Flores, Florencia San Martín and Charlene Villaseñor Black: "being and doing", "learning and listening", "sensing and seeing" and "living and loving" (Flores, San Martín and Villaseñor Black 2024). In hindsight, several of their advocated methods confirm my methodological and theoretical decisions. For my thesis worked to challenge my own authoritarian voice as an art historian and applied concepts and methods that go beyond established art historical ones. Creating links between contemporary artistic practices, art history, posthuman feminist, decolonial and cultural theory, and Arctic/environmental humanities discourses, not only proved productive in showing the complex entanglements of each thematic issue but also how they materialized in the artworks themselves. This decolonial art historical method corresponds with what feminist art historians advocate, namely a "shift from the narrowly bounded spaces of art history as a disciplinary formation into an emergent and oppositional signifying space, … across the fields of discourse and its institutional bases, across the texts of culture and its psychic formations" (Pollock 1999, quoted in Greaves 2021, 5). At the same time this way of working allows for what art historian Kerry Greaves has called "close looking in contrast to speeding ahead" (Greaves 2022, 132).

My "close looking", I advocate, is part of the circumpolar resurgence that is taking place, where it is important to look closely to rewind, unlearn and decode (Azoulay 2019). Thus, I see my scholarly contribution aligned with both decolonial and feminist calls and add that it should be seen as a, in reference to Azoulay, *potential circumpolar art history*. This is a *potential feminist circumpolar art history* that practices "close looking" from the country I am myself situated in, Norway, and pays attention to the close historical entanglements with Sápmi, as well as the countries of Finland, Denmark, Sweden, and Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland. It is an art history that takes into account who I am when I am writing art history, how I write it and how I let different voices speak. It is also an art history that sees artistic, curatorial

and scholarly practices in a non-hierarchical relationship, that is open to new or alternative methodologies, and continues to make artistic practices accessible through research.

This thesis, with its three independently published articles, has shown that the field of art historical research anchored in the Arctic and the circumpolar North is unquestionably large. It is, as Palmer has so sharply described large research areas, a "field of unknowable dimensions" (Palmer 2020b, 91). Art historical scholarship of the past two decades reflects these dimensions through its large number of groundbreaking transdisciplinary and transnational research projects, conferences, anthologies, journal articles and so on. This renewed circumpolar resurgence, I believe, is not just a fleeting trend - in adverse to what had been observed about the 1990s. I believe that this resurgence remains sustainable through the firmly grown and locally anchored scholarship and institutions, Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborations, as well as projects in which curators, artists and scholars meet. Thus, I see my scholarly contribution within a field that already is doing groundbreaking work.

However, I still see an enormous potential in researching contemporary art and photographic practices related to the Arctic and the circumpolar North, especially from the perspective of Sápmi and the Nordic countries. Here the role of artists in contemporary polar expedition culture could be subject of further investigation, how local communities are impacted by this culture or what the specific outcomes of art and science collaborations aboard research vessels are. Another focus should be on collaborative research projects between local communities, artists and art historians that take into account the many artistic practices that read archival material against the grain through re-appropriation or "double-exposure" (Lethola 2018), not least in relation to resource extraction and climate change. All potential research requires close readings and time, and not a "speeding ahead". It requires a "staying with" (including the trouble) and "learning from" what has been. Furthermore, in line with academic institutions' increased focus on ethical research guidelines, when doing research it is important to listen to the communities inhabiting the Arctic and the circumpolar North. It is this what I believe niilas helander intended to say with his poem, quoting his ancestor's wise words: "where are all these people going all the time?" We must not

go anywhere all the time. We, including us researchers, need to stay, pay respect and listen to. Then also we can understand what is meant with that knowledge is “about being and time”.

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Article 1: "Sensing Polar Ice Bodies"

Stephanie von Spreter. 2024. "Sensing Polar Ice Bodies." In *Communicating Ice through Popular Art and Aesthetics*, edited by Anne Hemkendreis and Anna-Sophie Jürgens, In Palgrave Studies in Media and Environmental Communication, 123-142. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan / Springer Nature.

Sensing Polar Ice Bodies

Stephanie von Spreter

She is not alone: the ice, too, is animate. (Singh Soin 2020b, 2)

From a larger-than-human-sized ice block, a ghost-like young woman becomes visible: her body and hair is wrapped in Space Age silver foil or, maybe from a more existential perspective, in the material that is used for emergency blankets.[1] Human and glacial body merge; the metallic body visually absorbs the glacial and vice versa. The ice block lies in an open gravelled landscape, with rough mountains in the back, as if it had been deserted following an invasion of some sort. In the distance, several other similarly shaped blocks are scattered around. All of these appear to have floated in the past, which is however no longer possible because the water

[1] In a conversation between the author and the artist, this double-connotation has been confirmed. Soin has additionally expressed that the material reflects the landscape back, and metaphorically also the viewer.

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has retreated. As a result, the ice blocks make up a loose assembly, convening around what remains: a large water puddle or a small stream, revealing smaller rocks from deep geological time (Fig. 1).

The described scene appears in a video that is part of the ongoing work *we are opposite like that* (2017–2022) by Himali Singh Soin (born 1987, based between London and Delhi). Singh Soin's five-year project springs from her participation in The Arctic Circle Residency programme to the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard aboard the barquentine tall ship Antigua in October 2017,[2] as well as a preceding expedition to Antarctica organised by Ibex Expeditions, India (February 2017). The project entails three videos (*we are opposite like that*, 2018; *we are opposite like that*, 2019; *How to Startle the Unbelieving*, 2021); two series of prints related to the first two videos (*we are opposite like that*, 2019; *Inverted Map*, 2020); an artist book

Fig. 1 Himali Singh Soin, *we are opposite like that*, video still, 2019 © Himali Singh Soin

[2] Svalbard was formerly called Spitsbergen. In 1920 Norway was granted sovereignty over the archipelago which resulted in a name change from Spitsbergen to Svalbard. Official maps name only the main island of the archipelago Spitsbergen today. However, Spitsbergen is still often used by (non-Norwegian) lay people for the entire archipelago. In addition, there is Russian disagreement about the naming and Russian officials prefer to use the old name.

(*we are opposite like that*, 2020), a text score print (*Boatness*, 2020); a sound work in three chapters, also published as a vinyl (*Subcontinentment*; *Lady Antigua*; *Antarctica was a queer rave before it got busted by colonial white farts*; all 2020); a tapestry visualising the sound wave of ice crystals smashing into one another (*Mountain, Pixelated in the Water*, 2021); an opera dedicated to the bird Arctic Tern (*an omniscience: an atmos-etheric, transnational, interplanetary cosmist bird opera spanning seven continents and the many verses*, 2022); a marble sculpture of Deception Island and a mandala performance (*Too Much and Not Enough*, 2022) as well as a series of live performances. Thus, *we are opposite like that* takes on a multiplicity of forms and materials, including poetry, sound, video, (still) photography, textile, sculpture, performance and prints.

According to the artist herself, *we are opposite like that* is an "ongoing series of interdisciplinary works that comprises mythologies for the poles, told from the non-human perspective of an elder that has witnessed deep time: the ice. It beckons the ghosts hidden in landscapes and turns them into echoes, listening in on the resonances of potential futures" (Singh Soin). Through this active statement, Singh Soin naturally pre-empts a reading of her work from a non-anthropocentric perspective, while her own self-identified "brown body" (Singh Soin) remains connected with the environment; on the one hand, this environment confirms her alienness, and on the other, her entanglement with it—she is inside the ice and the ice is inside her. As Åsberg and Braidotti compellingly express from a posthuman feminist perspective:

> In this new planetary age of the Anthropocene, defined by human-induced climatic, biological, and even geological transformations, we humans are fully in nature. And nature is fully in us. This was, of course, always the case, but it is more conspicuously so now than ever before: people are entangled in co-constitutive relationships with nature and the environment, with other animals and organisms, with medicine and technology, with science and epistemic politics. We live and die, play, thrive, and suffer by each other. (Åsberg and Braidotti 2018, 1)

This chapter aims to investigate how Himali Singh Soin's work *we are opposite like that* engages with posthuman feminist concepts within an Arctic discourse and in particular in relation to the climatic changes that also lead to the melting of the Polar caps. Its focus is on the gradual disappearance and cultural-ecological transformations of what has long

dominated its landscape and mythologies: the ice. For this investigation, it is important to note that Singh Soin's "mythologies", as she describes them, are not on or about the poles—akin to the history of Western Polar imaginaries—but 'for' the poles (Singh Soin). Her artist book is explicitly dedicated *To Ice*, subtitled *We Tell your Story* (Singh Soin 2020b). Thus, the work becomes a caring dedication to the earth's seismic areas that are essential indicators for the well-being of our planet. In actively taking the perspective of the very material that (still) surrounds the poles, Singh Soin opposes the idea of the Arctic/Antarctic as lifeless, agentless matter. Here ice becomes both agent and metaphor for bodies in flux, in different aggregate states, both human and more-than-human.

In my process of disentangling and re-entangling the themes and concepts, my method uses still images and corresponding poetic quotes/voiceovers from Himali Singh Soin's video (2019)—the latter reappearing in the poem *how she became ice* published in her artist book (Singh Soin 2020a)—as intermissions and guiding storytelling elements. This choice is based on my conviction that the video and related book are central within Singh Soin's larger project. Here Singh Soin's poetry and fictive writing, film and photographic material and use of sound and historical illustrations are carefully woven together. Thus, we are provided with the multi-layered, multi-disciplinary stories, images and historical imaginaries of an Arctic for which Singh Soin advocates in her own description of the project. These quotes/voiceovers and images guide the reader through the work's interconnected themes and concepts from a posthuman feminist perspective, in the spirit of what Åsberg and Braidotti advocate: "Now, the tasks of the more-than-human humanities scholar are then to provide guiding stories with which to tell these stories, and to present adequate maps to the specifically situated historical locations" (2018, 5). These guiding storytelling elements are expanded by conversations between the artist and myself, which started with a 'love letter' I sent to Himali Singh Soin at the beginning of 2022.[3] This initial point of contact led to further conversations via email and recorded WhatsApp messages over the course of several months.[4]

[3] If one would like to contact the artist via her webpage the contact form is headed by the sentence "send me a love letter". See https://www.himalisinghsoin.com/contact (accessed 22 March 2022)

[4] If a below quote is uncited it emerged during the course of Soin and my informal communication between March and August 2022.

My chosen guiding elements map out the different themes and embodied concepts—or "figurations" as Neimanis calls them (2017b, 5)—that I identify in Singh Soin's project. These include the disappearance of planetary history through the melting Polar ice, and with it, the disappearance of the ice as a natural archive (Frank and Jakobsen 2019); Astrida Neimanis's figuration of bodies of water that I relate to bodies of ice (2017b, 5); the ghosts and monsters that haunt (Arctic) environments and are interlocutors for our present and future (Tsing et al. 2017b); the omnipresence of colonialism in the Arctic, including a type of delayed colonialism or slow violence (Nixon 2011) that affects the environment and its human and more-than-human inhabitants, more often than not carried north by a weather-and-water world of planetary circulation (Neimanis 2017a, 36); how the relics of historical Arctic exploration still haunt us today and how our situatedness points to our differences and distances from one another, but can also be used as a common feminist and transformative ground for creating other possible worlds and mythologies (Braidotti 2022, 3, 8). Thus, Singh Soin's mythologies sensitise the viewer/listener/reader to think with and learn from transforming Polar ice bodies—in relation to Neimanis's advocation to do this with water (Neimanis 2017a, 22)—to thereby equally transform ways of perceiving, feeling, knowing, understanding and re-imagining Polar landscapes and the unjustness felt in anthropogenically damaged environments.

> For historians the present had lost itself over time. (Singh Soin 2019, 00:22–00:26)

There is one image in Singh Soin's video that frequently re-occurs, though each time juxtaposed with different voiceovers: a rugged Arctic glacier reflected in surrounding water, seen as upside down to the viewer (Fig. 2). Because of its repetitive use, the image acts like a refrain in a poem, which not only creates rhythmic structure and familiarity, but makes it assume a central position within the video.

As a reflection in the water, the image of the glacier is blurred, making its surface not only appear carved by nature's forces but also reminiscent of sacred marble structures chiselled by humans. The glacier's colour hues—greys, beiges, light turquoises—enhance these marble-like qualities and evoke religious architecture from Singh Soin's native India, such as a

Fig. 2 Himali Singh Soin, *we are opposite like that*, video still, 2019 © Himali Singh Soin

Jain temple located in Ranakpur, Rajasthan. Temples are architectural structures that are simultaneously worldly and spiritual, material and immaterial, manifestations of belief systems and cosmologies and in movement towards spiritual worlds. Highlighting the carved, marble-like qualities of the glacier thus does not appear accidental. With Singh Soin's decision to film it as a reflection in the water—where boundaries between ice, water and sky blur—the image becomes a metaphor for the material and immaterial, of structures that are made and unmade by humans. Structures that we aim to control but ultimately get out of hand. Possibly that is why Singh Soin also included her own filmed footage from a former marble mining settlement on Svalbard later on in the video. Though abandoned, it is a popular place to visit. It tells the wondrous story of British-born venturer Ernest Manfield who, in the name of his co-founded Northern Exploration company, set foot on Svalbard in 1904 to search for precious metals and minerals. Following his claim to have found marble deposits, he set up a mine and called the settlement Ny London (New London). His endeavour, however, proved unsuccessful: once the marble was shipped and entered a warmer climate, it crumbled and turned to nothing but dust (Arlov 1989). Nevertheless, the mine operated (without profit) until 1920. Today, remnants of the settlement including some huts

and disintegrating industrial tools speak of Svalbard's long history of extraction and exploitation of natural resources, as well as its human entanglements.

The blurred and inverted image of the glacier with its marble-like qualities then speaks about its past, its entanglement with human bodies and its gradual disappearance. It attends to the material interconnections between the human and more-than-human world, in what Alaimo would describe as trans-corporeal *bodily natures* (Alaimo 2010). While the glacier itself is a body that transforms into and enters other bodies through the process of melting, the pixelated image in the video metaphorically visualises this process. According to Singh Soin, this visualisation became intentional: "but I was really fascinated by it looking like pixels and [...] by this feeling that it looks like the very technologies that have created it are in fact creating its death; that is to say climate change is essentially created out of the pixelation of the environment". In this sense, the pixelated view points to the need to acknowledge our responsibility for the unmaking of our environment.

This 'glacier death' has also consequences for history-writing. Because of irreparable environmental damage, we find ourselves at a historical threshold. Singh Soin expresses in the voiceover to the pixelated glacier image: "For historians the present had lost itself over time", while the rhythmic sound of plucked cello strings evokes a slow but continuous dripping of melting ice (Singh Soin 2019). What does it mean when the present had lost itself over time? If the present has lost itself, is a future even thinkable? How can historians then grab a present that is soon to be history, and a present that is supposed to shape the future? It appears that the present, and with it, its past, slips through historians' fingers. It melts away before their very eyes.

In their introduction to *Arctic Archives: Ice, Memory and Entropy*, Frank and Jakobsen consider the Polar regions to be the knowledge archive of our planet (2019). Here ice acts as a memory medium to form a natural archive that provides us with information on climate history and deep time. However, when it melts, it wipes out the histories it formerly stored. Consequently, Frank and Jakobsen argue, climate change not only threatens our future but also evidence to what lies buried from the past. Thus, we are standing at this threshold, or tipping point, where both our past and future are about to collapse. Once the ice melts during this time of "Great Acceleration", it will no longer be possible to retrieve those hidden histories in its material form (Frank and Jakobsen 2019, 16). Thus,

historians are met with a dilemma. Their primary source material disappears.

Ice and permafrost, Frank and Jakobsen explain, differ from other natural archives in terms of which ages they conserve and in what form that happens. While stone receives only very old layers, the ice preserves younger layers of geological and historical facts. It allows for an extremely precise dating and protectively preserves atmospheric conditions and life-forms of the past. However, it is the most vulnerable and unstable natural memory medium because it depends on sub-zero temperatures (Frank and Jakobsen 2019, 9–10). Thus, when bodies of ice melt also the primary historical evidence 'dies'. Singh Soin's filmed glacier then sensitises the viewer for standing at this threshold where temporalities collapse and distinctions between the human and more-than-human blur; the glacier is a ghostly, disappearing icy body where nature and culture merge. Singh Soin's video thus not only communicates how this icy body makes nature and technology collapse, but also how historical evidence disappears and thereby we ourselves threaten to become a barely traceable history.

> The ice moved through her for a few hours. A mineral messenger. (Singh Soin 2019, 05:25)

In the meantime, the silver-wrapped Polar ice body has moved on, the ice block having become a shadow of itself. "The ice has moved through her for a few hours", the voiceover tells us (Singh Soin 2019). And indeed, the silvery brown body begins to wander through the darkening Arctic landscape, no longer encapsulated in the ice. Now the silver foil appears like an enveloping protective layer, like the emergency blanket meant to keep the body warm—warm enough for the ice to become fluid and move through her as a "mineral messenger" (Singh Soin 2019).

In *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, Astrida Neimanis advocates rethinking and re-imagining embodiment from the perspective of our bodies' wet constitution, inseparable from the planetary crisis we find ourselves in. Consequently, we have to give up the idea of our bodies as autonomous, as they are always also—materially and conceptually—more-than-human (Neimanis 2017b, 1–2). Water moves through our bodies and determines our specific situatedness. Water contains information, it contains life-giving and (human-made) toxic substance(s) that enter and leave our bodies to again enter and leave other (more-than)

human bodies. In its frozen state, water is considered a mineral; thus this mineral messenger carries stories, substances and data from one body to another. We are situated bodies of water.

> Ice, a shadowy interlocutor of what has been, what is, and what will come, is the phantasmagoria of an alien otherworld. (Singh Soin 2019, 07:41)

The Arctic has been subject of myths and mythologies since human existence; an imaginary place that for those who lived far away or tried to reach it—such as for the ancient Greeks—was "[…] a fabled land where myth and geographical theory fused" (McGhee 2007, 22). For them the North Pole and the Pole Star always earned an important place in geography and mythology. In Ptolemy's cosmography, for example, the poles were considered oppositional fixpoints for holding the earth together on its central axis within the cosmos. The poles were the mythical origin of time and space. Even Polar explorer Robert Peary, who claimed to be the first to reach the North Pole in 1909, considered the North Pole to have mythical powers, despite firm beliefs in technological and scientific progress. According to Michael Bravo, Peary saw the giant Antaeus—son of the sea god Poseidon and earth goddess Gaia—as a symbol for this mythical power emerging out of the Polar ice (2019, 191, 188). Singh Soin juxtaposes this image of the rising Antaeus with historical aurora sketches (*Observations faites au Cap Thordsen, Spitsbergen, par l'expédition Suédoise*, 1882–1883) and her own film footage of Svalbard's topography in her video (Fig. 3). In the historical image, Antaeus appears as the creator and guardian of the land. Both the ice and the aurora lights frame his figure, placing him centre stage. This central position is further enhanced by his headgear, a laurel crown and an icicle pointing towards the sky. His young face and figure are veiled, heightening the perception that he is a mythical figure with great powers, ruling over the North Pole and its surrounding land of ice.

Other ancient texts also considered the poles' mythological and life-giving powers. In the Hindu Puranas, a sacred mountain is imagined at the centre of Hyperborea (Mount Meru). The mountain rests on four pillars made of gold, iron, silver and brass, each of which points to the cardinal points of the compass. High up in the sky above, at the feet of Vishnu near the Pole Star, the River Ganges originates. The celestial and

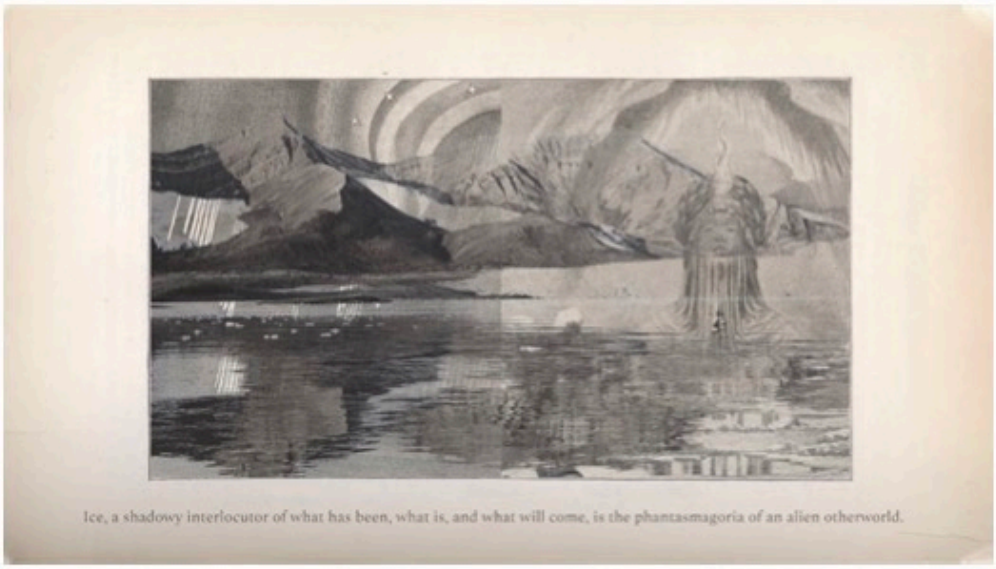

Fig. 3 Himali Singh Soin, *we are opposite like that*, video still, 2019, © Himali Singh Soin

terrestrial area around the North Pole becomes the physical location of the source of life (Bravo 2019, 138).

Within local indigenous mythologies, however, the North Pole and the Pole Star play a minor role. With shifting horizons at high latitudes, the fixed Pole Star and the geographical North Pole are not useful for navigating a system of trails on the ice. Rather, the surrounding, moving stars—in dialogue with the icy landscape/horizon line—play an important role for navigation. Here myths and legends are crucial for survival, naturally and culturally:

> Sometimes, the story of a trail will involve or take the form of a myth or legend that may give meaning and shape to a trail. Similarly, the trail of a constellation that can be tracked across the night sky is described in a myth that explains this movement. However, rather than thinking of these myths as a stationary form of mapping, one wants to keep in mind that Inuit travellers are using a moving frame of reference that changes as they themselves move. If one thinks of the Inuit world in terms of the fluid movement of people, animals and spirits across intersecting or connected systems of trails, one begins to gain a better sense of how the stars figure in their navigation tradition. (Bravo 2019, 20–21)

Thus, the icy myths that might appear to outsiders as the phantasmagorias of an alien otherworld are an integral element of survival for northern indigenous populations. The ice—the shadowy interlocutor—is in dialogue with the elements in the sky, serving as a cultural and historical messenger and guarantor of the continuity of life. However, with climate change, also these myths and tools of survival are threatened. Recent interviews with Inuit hunters and elders reveal that:

> over the course of their lifetimes it appears that the world has tilted on its axis. Accustomed to watching the sky for weather patterns amid diurnal seasonal changes, the Inuit have noted longer periods of daylight, even as much as a full hour longer, in the short days of winter. […] And while the sun rises from the same location it always did during the calendar year, it appears to set at a different location on the horizon than it did a generation ago. […] the sun seems to be higher and hits more directly since the tilt. Hunters are especially conscious of the daylight hours and the quality of light because of the narrow margins of opportunity to hunt and fish in the winter. So while it is possible to measure global warming through ice core analysis and sea temperature changes, the fundamental changes of orientation for the Inuit are taking place in the sky and atmosphere, the site at which they "read" and perceive the landscape. (Boetzkes 2018, 135)

In Singh Soin's video the ice becomes an interlocutor between divergent worldviews and mythologies. It is the protagonist and the 'elder' that has served, witnessed and provided both indigenous and external cultures in the Arctic with "what has been, what is, and what will come" (Singh Soin 2019). It is metaphor, mediator and material at the same time. And, as Singh Soin formally demonstrates in the video, it is where contemporary and historical material, Arctic imaginaries and Singh Soin's own filmed, overlaid footage merge into one another. These are also the images of an Arctic environment which show how colonisation and anthropocentric worldviews are 'ever present' ghosts of the past and in fact contribute to creating the monsters of our present.

In their introduction to *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* Bubandt, Gan, Swanson and Tsing write: "Our monsters and ghosts help us notice landscapes of entanglement, bodies with other bodies, time with other times. They aid us in our call for a particular approach to noticing—one that draws inspiration from scientific observation alongside ethnography and critical theory" (2017a, M7). In this endeavour, they advocate slowing down and listening to the world, empirically and imaginatively at the

same time. They encourage us to think that ghosts and monsters can help us find our way when there is environmental damage, in fact trace them. In Singh Soin's words, we must realise that ice is a phantasmagoria of an alien otherworld. But the truth is that we are already inside this alien otherworld in which we are and create the monsters. And the melting bodies of ice become their shadowy ghosts.

> The viscous material of an encroaching ice sheet is haunted by colonialism calving. (Singh Soin 2019, 08:44)

If the alien otherworld is a world that is not so alien after all, but that we are right inside it—which we can see through sensing its ghosts and monsters—we come to understand how the "viscous material of an encroaching ice sheet is haunted by colonialism calving" (Singh Soin 2019). In employing the word calving, Singh Soin references the terminology used when glaciers lose part of their mass. In this process, a large chunk of ice at a glacier's edge crashes into the water, resulting in a booming sound and large waves. Like a cow's calf, the resulting iceberg then moves into the world. The 'ice calf' floats, melts and merges with its environment, with other bodies. In Singh Soin's work, however, it is not the glacier calving, but colonialism, chunks of which are carried further into the world. And it is indeed the ice sheet, and Arctic, that is haunted by these colonial and imperialist chunks, still today. As Neimanis has expressed, colonialism can be remote: "Indeed, the Anthropocene may also index an important mutation in forms of colonial power, where colonisers need not physically occupy a place with their discrete bodies for the environmental effects of (neo)colonial power to be felt" (2017a, 163). Neimanis uses several examples of how life and the environment in the Arctic are affected by this coloniality "at a distance" (2017a, 165), such as the fact that permafrost degradation raises the mercury levels in the Arctic food chain. Another scientifically proven example is the bioaccumulation of various anthropogenic contaminants that make their way north from warmer regions, which then become entrenched in the fat of Arctic sea mammals. As a result, they enter the food chain of Inuit women, who, in turn, transfer the toxic waste to their children through their breastmilk. Neimanis calls this effect "body burden" (Neimanis 2017a, 36, 164) which is socially, culturally and gender determined. She further underlines:

> While the Arctic is "generally considered to be one of the last pristine regions on Earth", its populations (human and more-than-human) again bear the brunt of global human imperialism. This kind of incursion 'at a distance', precipitated by massive fossil fuel burning, consumption, and toxic release into planetary waters and weathers (out of sight, out of mind), traces new vectors of coloniality, and emerging markers of vulnerability and survivance (Vizenor 1999) across difference. (2017a, 165)

Equally Tsing et al. note this Anthropocentric presence of the ghosts in our environment and use the example of human-made radiocesium that travels in water and soil, and gets inside plants and animals (Tsing et al. 2017b, G2). We cannot see it, although we can trace it throughout ruined landscapes.[5] This effect is comparable to Neimanis's coloniality "at a distance" (2017a, 165), which in turn is related to the process of 'slow violence', a term coined and defined by Robert Nixon as a violence that "occurs gradually and out sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, 2).

In Soin's video, the sentence "The viscous material of an encroaching ice sheet is haunted by colonialism calving" appears as a caption underneath a wood engraving by Gustave Doré, which Singh Soin appropriated from the book *London: A Pilgrimage* (1873) (Fig. 4). The engraving shows a man sitting on a boulder at the uncultivated shore of the Thames with a drawing board and pen in hand, overlooking a London in ruins on the other side. Depicted in profile, the viewer can see that the man has a goatee beard and is dressed in an oriental cloak and head cloth—none of which were fashion amongst English noblemen at the time. Clearly, this man is not a Western body from the Victorian civilisation that is now found in ruins. Rather, this is a man who comes from the colonial periphery to its centre. As a colonised body he brings the 'calving' effects of colonialism back to its instigator. Doré's engraving is entitled *The New Zealander*, and there are different interpretations as to why it bears this

[5] Michael Bravo uses further examples of slow violence/ghostly environmental damage in the Arctic: "The Barents Sea off the coast of Norway and Russia is reportedly the most radioactive in the world, largely as a result of nuclear atmospheric tests carried out during the Cold War, emissions from reprocessing plants and the accident at Chernobyl. To the north and east of the Greenland and Barents Seas, high concentrations of old plastic arrive from the Atlantic Ocean by thermohaline ocean circulation, which acts as a 'plastic conveyor belt' from distant sources" (2019, 212).

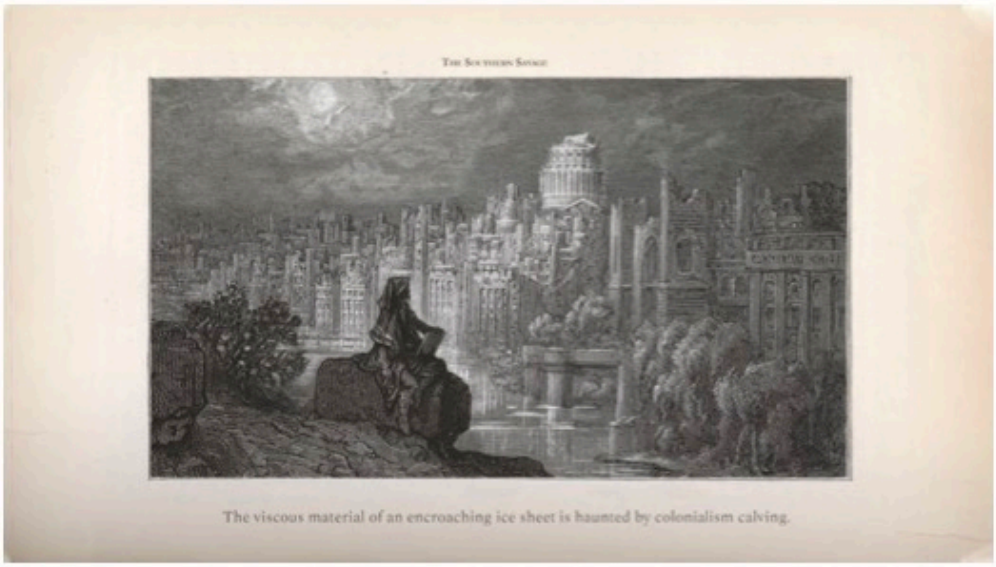

Fig. 4 Himali Singh Soin, *we are opposite like that*, video still, 2019 © Himali Singh Soin

title, while all point to the biography of a person coming from the British colony (Arnold 2017; Dobraszczyk 2017; Skilton 2014). In the video Singh Soin replaces this title with another—*The Southern Savage*—and thus takes a more overt and critical stance as to how the colonised body is perceived from a Eurocentric perspective. At the same time, this body becomes witness to the ruins of Western civilisation, taking a chunk of colonialism and its destructive forces back to its origins. Singh Soin expresses in our conversation: "In the Global North I suddenly become a brown body that is representative of many brown bodies and the loss that they have encountered". So how should one act as a colonised body in the ruined landscape of the Arctic with which Singh Soin technically animates Doré's engraving? The Southern Savage has pen and paper in hand. Maybe he imagines another future, worlds another world? Singh Soin expresses: "There seems to be this sense that, especially when you come from a place like the Global South, where you just witness always just so much atrocity and where every life is not valued in the same way it is in the Global North, then all you are left with is this kind of dream for joy or something".

> Her broken chronometer preserved in ice, still recording two types of error: the imperfection of the image exposed / and the great distance it represented. / When examined with a telescope it proved to be our distance from one another. (Singh Soin 2019, 09:18–09:32)

As much as colonialism haunts the Arctic and colonised bodies, there are objects coupled with it. The marine chronometer might appear to be an insignificant scientific object at first, yet it is not. Only when this precision timepiece was invented in the early eighteenth century, did it become possible to determine a ship's position on the meridian, which happened by calculating the difference between Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and the ship's local time (which in turn could be calculated with the help of a sextant). Together with the ship's latitudinal position—in the Northern hemisphere determined with the help of the North Star (Polaris), a compass and a quadrant—a ship's precise coordinates could be verified. This made it also possible to determine further destinations. Thus, the chronometer proved to be an essential Western invention to enable the Age of Discovery and imperialist expansion via the oceans. It thereby also—if not exclusively—contributed to the acceleration of colonialism, resource extraction and subsequent (environmental) damage.

On 1 July 2002 the Norwegian government enacted a law that all remnants of human activity on Svalbard prior to 1946 are classified as cultural heritage. These must not be removed from its premises and are automatically the property of the Norwegian state. The law, Svalbardmiljøloven (Svalbard Environmental Protection Act), applies to both fixed elements (such as trapper's cabins, coal mining rails etc.) and loose objects including those that emerge arbitrarily or via excavation (Lovdata 2022). With the melting of the ice, loose objects from historical Polar expeditions formerly preserved in the ice or underneath in the ocean now also emerge.[6] The 'Arctic archive' releases these objects in almost the same condition as

[6] In 2014 and 2016 for example, the ships HMS Erebus and HMS Terror were found in the Arctic Ocean, having been lost for over 160 years. Used under the command of Sir John Franklin in search of the Northwest Passage, it is documented that they were abandoned in 1848 and the crew was never seen again. This lost expedition triggered the largest search and rescue endeavour seen in Arctic history, with 32 directly motivated expeditions embarking between 1847 and 1859 (Ross, 57). With the retreating ice it was finally possible to find the two vessels with archaeologists finding many objects on board that are almost intact. Many of these objects are today found at the Royal Museums Greenwich.

when they were in use. Since the chronometer was one of the most important scientific instruments on board expedition ships, and often having several on board in fear of becoming dysfunctional, a broken chronometer—as Soin imagines it in her poetic voiceover—can well appear from the ice.

Singh Soin's/the ice's broken chronometer, however, is not visible in her video. Instead, we are forced to imagine what the chronometer would look like and in fact wonder how a time-measuring instrument used for determining one's longitudinal position can expose an (imperfect) image. In Singh Soin's video, we witness the mountainous landscape of Svalbard passing by as if we were on a ship, overlaid with organic, almost transparent ice formations. The landscape appears as if it were from out of space, far away. Technically, the ice acts like a lens on top of the landscape, blurring and distorting it. Maybe this is what Singh Soin describes as "the imperfection of the image exposed" (Singh Soin 2019): an image that appears—because of the 'ice lens'—out of focus and which thereby puts an imaginary distance between the Arctic landscape and us. Or maybe the chronometer measures the temporal and geographical distance between the ice and our physical bodies, revealing how distant yet connected our realities are. The telescope, besides being another important scientific instrument for maritime navigation, observes this poetically described condition of distance.

The video's final scenes again show Singh Soin (as the elder) moving through the Arctic landscape. Still wrapped in a silver blanket and turban, we observe her eyes fixing a point in the distance. It appears as if she imagines another world to exist in, another reality (Fig. 5). Maybe here the ice becomes the carrier-bag in which—as Ursula K. Le Guin has expressed in her carrier-bag theory for science fiction—Singh Soin's imagined chronometer can tell the time and place of another world (1986). However, while Singh Soin imagines a futurist otherworld, it is clear that these spring from the very real politics of location we find ourselves in. As Braidotti makes aware, we differ in terms of locations, our access to environmental, social and legal entitlements, technology, safety, prosperity and good health services. She says that "we" are "'we'-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-we-differ"; and even more that: for posthuman feminists "we" means "'we'-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-together" (2022, 8). But in order to prove that these differences exist and instigate changes we

Fig. 5 Himali Singh Soin, *we are opposite like that*, video still, 2019 © Himali Singh Soin

need science and its instruments. Scientific research in(to) the ice not only discloses that climate change is human-induced, but also uncovers how its effects are unevenly distributed and often connected to race, class and gender, as I have shown is also the case in the Arctic. It can measure how toxins travel in and through bodies of water and are found in bodies of ice. It can, in fact, make visible the ghosts from the past. And it can make science connect to art and fiction in order to imagine, in Singh Soin's words, a less alien otherworld.

Epilogue

Soin's artistic practice aligns itself with futurisms, science fiction and speculative fabulation. In fact, Soin calls her South Asian futurism 'Subcontinentment', a word created from 'subcontinent' and 'contentment'. It 'aligns' itself with Afrofuturism, Sinofuturism, Ethnofuturism and Indigenous Futurism (Singh Soin 2020b, 17). For Singh Soin, Futurism is not related to

> European Futurism which is so much linked to speed and acceleration and the violence that comes with that. But instead, is a kind of Futurism that looks back at the past and says: how do we move forward with these certain wisdoms that we may have accumulated. But also letting go of the prejudices that came with that timeline.

In *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* Grace Dillon puts forward that in Indigenous Science Fiction literature the Apocalypse has already happened, and that it is in that sense post-Apocalyptic. She writes:

> It might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of 'biskaabiiyang', an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of "returning to ourselves", which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. (Dillon 2012, 10)

Thus, this kind of storytelling shows ruptures, scars and trauma but also provides healing. It aims to return to a state of balance through the condition of resistance and survival (survivance, as coined by Gerald Vizenor). It does have the capacity to envision native futures, indigenous hopes and dreams recovered by rethinking the (colonial) past in a new framework (Dillon 2012, 2).

Similarly, the use of fiction and speculative fabulation in posthuman feminism and feminist new materialisms are used as tools for empowering the dispossessed and impoverished, a "decolonial and radical struggle to affirm positively the differences among marginalized people(s). […] It means creating other possible worlds" (Braidotti 2022, 3). Tobias Skiveren underlines that these tools are particularly attractive to transcend anthropocentric regimes of truth:

> Fictionalizing non/human entanglements, then, allows new materialist thinkers to, at least momentarily, sidestep questions of falsehood and truthfulness, while at the same time proposing new post-anthropocentric ontologies by imaginative and affective means. The stories adapted here are supposed to convince, not because they are true, but because they do not have to be. Readers are provided an opportunity to imaginatively and affectively sense a world in which the non-human is partly human, and the

> human is partly non-human, without having to believe that a spool of thread can run and talk in any literal sense. (Skiveren 2022, 5–6)

I advocate that Singh Soin's artistic practice aligns with both. As a protagonist and more-than-human storyteller, the Polar ice instigates affect and assumes the role of being a knowledgeable agent, material and immaterial at the same time. But of course, it is Singh Soin herself who embodies the ice through her own brown body. Singh Soin fabulates about a world elsewhere because she knows it does not exist in the here and now. But it can be imagined. She says: "it definitely feels like when you notice these cracks in the world, they can either be these fissures in which everything falls apart. Or they can be an opening through which the light is let in and they can be an opportunity to imagine." It is this imagination that can open the cracks and can communicate (scientific) knowledge about a colonialism that is not so distant after all, while it can also open up visions of future worlds beyond climate change.

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Article 2: "Feminist strategies for changing *the* story"

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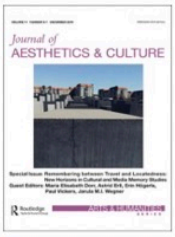

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Feminist strategies for changing *the* story: re-imagining Arctic exploration narratives through (the staging of) photographs, travel writing and found objects

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Feminist strategies for changing *the* story: re-imagining Arctic exploration narratives through (the staging of) photographs, travel writing and found objects

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ABSTRACT

This article shows how contemporary artistic practice seeks to re-evaluate, re-interpret and re-imagine (historical) Arctic exploration narratives that have generally been considered gendered and dominated by men. It particularly examines the work of contemporary Norwegian artist Tonje Bøe Birkeland, whose entire practice emerges from embodying and staging imagined turn of the century woman explorers. One of Birkeland's explorers travels to the Arctic and the circumpolar North and explicitly references persisting narratives deriving from the so-called heroic era of polar exploration. In order to change these narratives, I argue, Birkeland employs two feminist strategies: firstly, by storytelling and speculative fabulation (Haraway); secondly, by simultaneously complying with and disrupting re-occurring Arctic motifs and representations. Photography, travel writing and found objects are hereby her primary artistic mediums and "accomplices" in fulfilling these strategies, carefully orchestrated in a photobook in order to establish her story and view on the Arctic world. As a result, Birkeland not only reveals which stories about the Arctic are missing and could have been told. She also asks us to imagine how our relationship to the Arctic could have been shaped differently and how, through this process, it is possible to influence a future narrative of a (still) gendered Arctic.

KEYWORDS

Gendered arctic; polar exploration narratives; feminist strategies; storytelling; speculative fabulation; contemporary art; photography; photobook; tonje bøe birkeland

Introduction

When considering the polar regions as a gendered space, a direct reference is made to the so-called heroic age of exploration during the period of high Imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More concretely, the polar regions have been considered a testing ground for white male European and North American explorers, scientists and adventurers alike (Reeploeg 2019, 6; Hansson and Ryall 2017; Aarekol 2016; Kjeldaas 2015; Glasberg 2012a; Bloom 2010; Berg 2006; Glasberg 2002; Bloom 1993). Not only were women generally excluded from these explorative endeavours, thus turning these into male-only homosocial conventions. But also, the frozen terrain itself (or the prospect of reaching it) acted as a mould or device in the rite of passage for becoming a fearless heroic explorer in which a sort of heroic self-fashioning was taking place (Thompson 2011, 174). To have the courage and strength to discover and conquest the supposedly uninhabited, frozen and dangerous place on earth was seen as an act of manliness deserving heroic merit. Lisa Bloom writes:

> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, polar exploration narratives played a prominent part in defining the social construction of masculinity and legitimized the exclusion of women from many public domains of discourse. As all-male activities, the explorations symbolically enacted the men's own battle to become men. The difficulty of life in desolate and freezing regions provided the ideal mythic site where men could show themselves as heroes capable of superhuman feats. (Bloom 1993, 6)

While motivations for the polar expeditions in which these men participated varied, many scholars have pointed out that these male endeavours frequently combined commercial, national and imperialist motives (Ryall 2019, 179; Stam 2019, 79–80; Thompson 2011, 173–179; Bloom 1993; Arlov 1989).[1] One can thus infer that more recent academic research related to the history of the Arctic and polar exploration pays attention to the lack of agency and representation by women, while there is also a focus on the missing voices of indigenous Arctic peoples and nonhuman actors.[2] All point out that primary agency was generally attributed to selected (non-indigenous) men who at the same time often acted as representatives of larger commercial or national entities, and were thus not only driven by obtaining scientific knowledge but also by prospects of territorial ownership and securement of resources, often in the wake of nation-building processes. The polar

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regions were treated as terra nullius, or "no man's land", a blank space just waiting to be examined, measured, mapped, extracted and/or territorialized.[3] This supposed blankness, in combination with general inaccessibility and geographical remoteness, was also an important factor in treating the polar regions —especially the Arctic—as spaces open for speculation and fictionalization, which the long history of Arctic myth-making processes reflects (Frank 2015; McGhee 2007, 20–33).[4] As Lund and Berg have shown in the Norwegian context, these myth-making processes were still at play and consciously used in the period of heroic polar exploration, despite, at the onset of modernity, manly endeavours to strive for scientific and objectivist truths. In fact, these processes were an essential element in constructing the modern heroic image of the white male polar explorer and in which paradoxically enough also photography, as the supposed truth-bearing medium, played an essential role (Berg and Lund 2011, 23).

In her artistic practice, contemporary Norwegian artist Tonje Bøe Birkeland (born 1985) Birkeland 1985) refers to, plays with and re-evaluates these narratives and fictionalizing processes to disclose women's lack of representation in historical polar narratives. Birkeland does this by speculating which stories about the Arctic have not, but could have been told. She encourages us to reflect on who and what has shaped or still shapes the image of the Arctic and how it is possible to shape it differently. In an interview with the author Birkeland re-confirms: "One could say that I am imagining what could've been, what probably happened but was never retold. It is what we retell and how we tell it that shapes our shared, universal history" (Birkeland 2019).

I argue that Birkeland employs two feminist strategies to re-evaluate past and present representations of the Arctic: firstly through storytelling and speculative fabulation (Haraway 2016); secondly, by simultaneously complying with and disrupting Arctic motifs and representations and with it, male polar narratives. According to Foote and LeMenager "[…] storytelling is a narrative and argumentative strategy that provides adaptable points of view, ways of seeing the world that can be picked up, pieced apart, borrowed and bricolaged into modes of resistance and response" (Foote and LeMenager 2014; Blum 2019, 32). Storytelling and "modes of resistance and response" are thus closely entangled with one another, and are, as I will show, detectable in Tonje Bøe Birkeland's practice. Photography, text and appropriated objects are hereby her primary artistic tools and "accomplices," carefully orchestrated in order to establish *her* story and communicate that it is possible to imagine alternative views on the Arctic world.

The Characters and *Character #I Aline Victoria Birkeland*

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's artistic practice emerges exclusively from the construction of so-called *Characters* which personify imagined woman explorers during the heroic age of exploration. So far Birkeland has constructed six characters, each travelling to remote and/or mountainous regions of the world: Northern Norway/Svalbard/the Arctic (*Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland*), Mongolia (*Character #II, Tuva Tengel*), Orkney Islands/New York (*Character #III, Luelle Magdalon Lumiére*), Greenland (*Character #IV, Anna Aurora Astrup*), Bhutan (*Character #V, Bertha Bolette Boyd*) and the Swiss Alps (*Character #VI, Golette Grepp*). The stories of the first four characters have been united in the photobook *The Characters* and present the viewer with a visual and textual narration of each woman's explorative travels (Birkeland 2016). The accounts of three consecutive travels to Bhutan (2016, 2017, 2018) by *Character #V* have been published as a photobook in 2021 (Birkeland 1985). *Character #VI* has so far only become visualized through a public art project at a primary school in Hamar, Norway.

Character #I Aline Victoria Birkeland is the woman explorer I closely examine in this paper. This character travels to regions that are most thoroughly bound to the Norwegian territory and polar history (Bergen, Tromsø, Finnmark, Svalbard), where not only I situate my own research but which is also the artist's experiential space.[5] Although polar exploration was an international (meaning: Euro-American) enterprise, here specific references to Norwegian polar history abound, such as by referral to Norway's biggest declared polar heroes Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen.[6] However, Tonje Bøe Birkeland's practice not only references the carefully constructed visual and textual self-representations of these (and other) male polar heroes, she also plays with a wide range of visual and literary genres and motifs that disclose the Arctic as a gendered space. The photobook *The Characters* hereby becomes my main object of analysis, since it is here where Tonje Bøe Birkeland most comprehensively weaves together text, photography and objects to tell the story of her characters, including *Character #I* (Figure 1). Significantly, the photobook is the artistic medium that prominently lays bare that these characters are fabulations on the one hand, yet quite "real" on the other: it is namely the artist herself who embodies each of them, dresses up in the period's attire she refers to, physically travels to all the places recounted and "documents" them in the book.[7]

Figure 1. Illustration of Tonje Bøe Birkeland's photobook *The Characters*. Courtesy the artist.

Storytelling and speculative fabulation to change *the* story

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's *Characters*, I argue, are an artistic materialization of Donna Haraway's invocation to use storytelling and speculative fabulation as feminist strategies to re-think, re-evaluate and, ultimately, change *the* story. That is: what and how the past was written, how to shape the present, as well as what is to come. For Haraway, the String Figure is a metaphor for "worlding" and "storying" and which, through the use of the acronym SF, opens up for practicing different forms of thinking-with, becoming-with and entangling-with for changing *the* story. Here SF not only stands for "String Figure" but also its entangled threads: Speculative Fabulation, Science Fact, Science Fiction or So Far. Like in the String Figure game, different threads entangle and intersect, create patterns, assemblies and relations—a sympoeisis in which (feminist) world-making takes place across myriad temporalities, spatialities and entities. Thus, according to Haraway, storytelling is a so-called "SF" or "String Figure" thread and an essential practice: "[…] one more SF thread is crucial to the practice of thinking, which must be thinking-with: storytelling. It matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what stories tell stories." (Haraway 2016, 39).

Although Birkeland does not explicitly refer to the current climate crisis (which however knowingly dramatically affects the space in which Birkeland's first character is set) as Haraway does in relation to storytelling practices to "stay with the trouble", I term this approach relevant in showing that Birkeland's fabulated characters are a feminist strategy to "think-with" and that it "matters what stories tell stories" to influence how we act in the future. Birkeland's character can be seen as a "String Figure" in which different temporalities and spatialities are at play and different artistic mediums, disciplines and genres interweave (photography, text, appropriated objects, staged photography, travel writing, photobook, visual art, literature, science). Through speculative fabulation, Birkeland's work becomes what I call, in reference to Haraway, a "String Figure story" that actively enters into Arctic discourses and seeks to unravel how records of heroic polar narratives and representations of the Arctic lack women's voices and whose assymetry is still reproduced today.[8]

Shifting perspectives

The structural setup for telling the story of *Character #I*, similar to the other characters in the photobook, is the following: a marbled cover page stating full name, birth/death date and a short characteristic description of the character (*Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland (1870–1952) The Unknown Adventurer*); a "JOURNAL" section containing a short narrator's text that introduces the character followed by the character's first-person narrative in the form of an autobiographical letter; a section with eighteen photographic colour plates "documenting" the character's explorative travels in and near the Arctic; an "OBJECTS" section with photographic reproductions of personal objects and findings that supposedly belonged to the character. Altogether, reminiscent of a chapter, the different elements form a unified body of work separate from other characters' stories in the book. An epilogue entitled *A Curious Collection of Endnotes & images* provides the reader with different background material from all of Tonje Bøe Birkeland's travels/characters, including "behind the scenes" thumbnail photographs, small anecdotes, written reflections by collaborators and the artist herself, as well as a GPS tracking map from her trip to Greenland related to *Character #IV*.

Within this structural setup the contemporary viewer/reader becomes entangled in a (life) story that is marked by constantly shifting spatial and temporal perspectives. Already the photobook's design and layout leads the reader/viewer through different time periods: elaborate linen cloth-binding, embossed book title, marbled front- and endpapers and a serif typeface formally refer to nineteenth and early twentieth century published literature in general and travelogues in particular. The JOURNAL and OBJECTS sections appear as if they were the facsimile of an already published travelogue: text and photographs are printed on faded light-blue pages which are in turn "inserted" into the larger cream-coloured pages of the photobook (Figure 2). That way the book mimics historical (polar) travelogues, examples of which are Roald Amundsen's *My Life as an Explorer* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927) and *Nordvestpassagen Beretning Om Gjøa-Ekspeditionen 1903–1907* (Kristiania: Aschehoug 1907 and Kristiania: Aschehoug 1908) Fridtjof Nansen's *In Northern Mists* (London: William Heinemann, 1911),

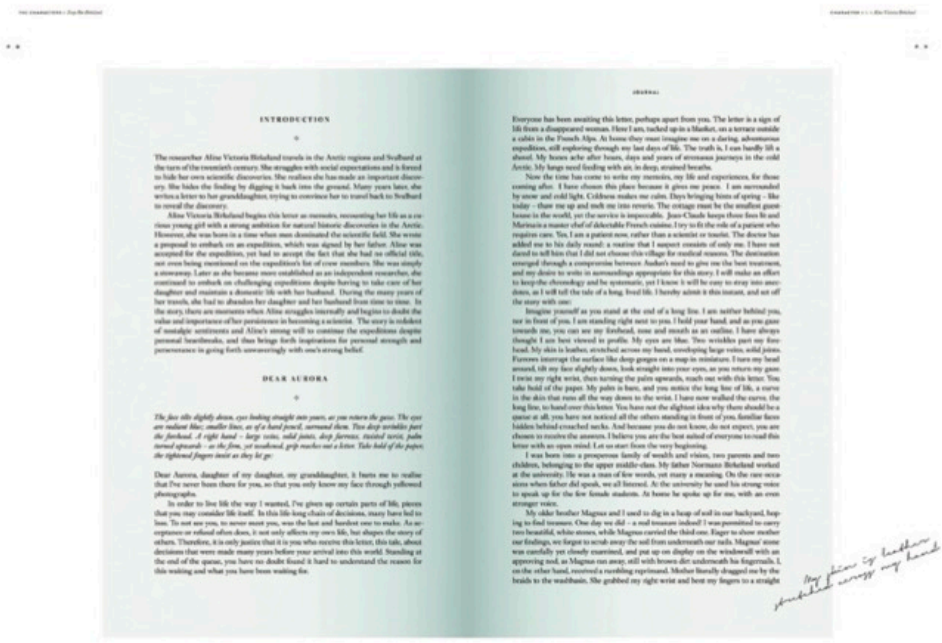

Figure 2. Reproduction of double-page from the JOURNAL section in Tonje Bøe Birkeland's photobook *The Characters*. Courtesy the artist.

Farthest North (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897) and various versions of *Eskimo Life* (1891–1893) (Figure 3). On the other hand, characteristics such as the photobook's size (considerably larger than historical travelogues with its 31.5 × 22.5 cm), crisp and almost full-spread colour photographs, and paper (Munken Lynx, an uncoated paper with a smooth surface and high colour saturation, which has seen popularity among contemporary photobooks) firmly indicate that the book belongs to the expanding artistic genre of the—often self-published and limited edition—photobook.[9]

Speculative travel writing and discursive pressures

These formal qualities establish an introductory reference to already published exploration narratives, like a prelude to the written and visual work which then thoroughly moves the reader/viewer through the story. The letter, which the character addresses to her granddaughter—and thus to a generation found among the contemporary reader—is a supposed primary source to disseminate the character's biographical information: family background (upper middle-class, a supporting father, a mother constrained by women's/girls' societal expectations), hometown (Bergen, Norway), geographical locations of her travels (Tromsø, Finnmark, Svalbard/Grumant, Belkovsky Islands, Severnaya Zemlya), research areas (geology/glaciology), scientific discoveries (crystallization processes), family situation (married to a member of her first expedition, a daughter she has an alienated relationship with, the granddaughter the letter is addressed to) and most importantly, her expedition accounts. In many sections of the letter

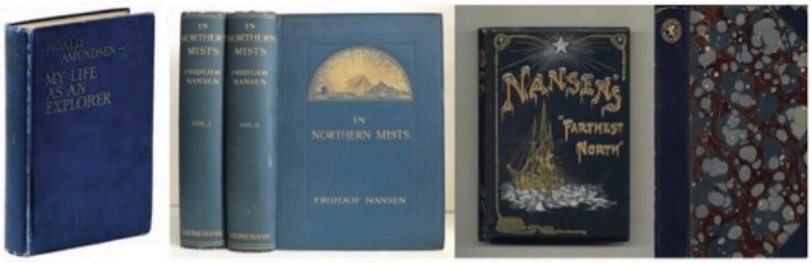

Figure 3. From left to right: Book cover illustrations of Amundsen's *My Life as An Explorer*, Nansen's *Northern Mist, Farthest North* and *Eskimo Life* (the last one Longmans, Green and Co. edition of 1893).

the reader is confronted with the character's struggle with family expectations and as a woman scientist in a field dominated by men. *Aline Victoria Birkeland*'s letter is presumably written shortly before her death in 1952. At that time, the character hopes, a woman no longer needs to fear that her scientific discoveries are questioned or attributed to somebody else. She thus urges her granddaughter to "re-discover" and publish her scientific theory—based on an uncommon ice crystal she found but buried back into the ground during her final expedition. However, the letter ends with the statement "If you are not careful with how and where the finding is presented, it can easily disperse into the scientific discovery of your contemporaries" (Birkeland 2016) which expresses mistrust in that changes have taken place in the field and society at large.

The letter is a fictive text by a fictive character. It is a speculative fabulation on what it would have been like to follow a scientific career as a woman and publish her accounts at the time when explorers like Fridtjof Nansen, Roald Amundsen, Robert Falcon Scott, Robert E. Peary or Frederick Cook were taking centre stage in polar exploration narratives and scientific discourses. Mocking her text as an already published journal, Birkeland not only uses it as a device to tell the story of a woman explorer that could have existed. The text points to the discursive pressures women had to negotiate when publishing their travel writing at the time, as Sara Mills has noted (Mills 1991). Here especially the bourgeois woman—which Birkeland's character is—met pressure both in terms of how to produce writing and how it was received. As also Griselda Pollock has argued in relation to visual art produced by women in the same period, women had to navigate the spaces and discourses they had access to and which consequently made visible which ones they were denied (Pollock 2003). The bourgeois women's "spaces of femininity" were primarily the private and domestic spaces that in turn were connected with the attributes of (child)care, the emotional and the subjective. The public, professional and adventurous life was reserved for men, and their attributes associated with strength, rationality, objectivity and authority. As a result, visual and literary genres more open for the emotional and confessional became the cultural spaces women could often more easily navigate. In travel writing this meant that diary and letter formats were preferably used by women, especially if they were to step aside from masculine literary domains to guarantee publication—even if male critics still doubted the veracity of their acccounts (Thompson 2011, 184–5; Mills 1991, 5). Mary Wollstonecraft's letters from Scandinavia (Wollstonecraft 1796/2004) and Mina Benson Hubbard's accounts from Labrador in 1908 (Hubbard and Grace 2008) are striking examples, and especially Hubbard's shows how they were discredited at the time: "When Mina returned south, she gave interviews and slide lectures and published articles about her expedition. Nevertheless, male opinion proved intransigent: one man, a clergyman who spoke with great authority, assured the public that she could not have done what she claimed in the time she had taken." (Grace 2008, 5). Birkeland steps exactly in this discursive field with her character, even reinforces it by studding the letter with emotional and confessional elements in her struggle, such as conveyeing a sense of emotional loss following the decision to prioritize her work over family relationships (Birkeland 2016, 8) or admitting that her Arctic expeditions had a strenuous effect on her weakening body, now being rather a patient than a scientist or tourist (Birkeland 2016, 9). Such emotions and confessions indeed rarely appear in men's polar exploration narratives as the example of Roald Amundsen's first-person narrative *My Life as an Explorer*—also a memoir that looks back at a life of exploration—shows. Here strives are completely absent. Instead, Amundsen expresses what the core virtues of a polar explorer entail, namely (apart from physical) mental strength: "Man's triumph over nature is not the victory of brute force, but it is the triumph of the mind." (Amundsen 1927, 269). Accounts of weakness are completely absent, both in relation to past expeditions and in the aftermath. Amundsen and many of his male contemporaries were in fact extremely skilled in presenting themselves as the strong, rational, invincible explorers where bodily and mental weaknesses had no place. But, as many scholars have noted, one should be careful to take these at face-value and read them as truthful accounts and representations of the self (Gaupseth 2017, 33–35; Ryall 1989; Stam and Dean 2019, 49; Berg and Lund 2011; Thompson 2011, 27–28).

From a post-colonial and feminist perspective, Birkeland's subjective position is exactly what makes her differ from the supposedly disembodied, objective accounts of her male counterparts. In her influential book *Imperial Eyes*, Mary-Louise Pratt has identified the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" scene, which she claims is one of the most gendered tropes in travel writing during the period of high Imperialism (Pratt 2008, 197–223). In this scene, there exists only one perspective, namely that of the (male) European traveller and explorer (and colonizer) whose perspective is the only one that is "objectively" valid. His is the one that determines how the virgin landscape (which Pratt equates with the other/female body) and its inhabitants are treated, which steps to take, and not least to map, name and ultimately possess it. In a similar vein, Donna Haraway coins the notion of the "god-trick" (Haraway 1988) in which she dismantles claims to objectivity that are traditionally asserted by

the male, "disembodied" scientist in the quest for truth and knowledge. This claim, however, tricks us into believing that his view is the only legitimate and truthful one and that therefore the final (god-like) authority remains with him. *Aline Victoria Birkeland*'s account is the opposite of that. It is a counter-narrative in which no claims to objectivity are made, no places mapped, no stories of flag planting told, no condescending language towards others used—in spite of her striving for the same goals: knowledge and scientific truth, for "Science Facts".

It matters what stories tell *whose* stories

While Tonje Bøe Birkeland's written travel narrative is a speculative fabulation on the life, work and challenges of a female polar scientist around the 1900s, her photographs are a visual manifestation of inserting women into *the* story. They are an act of taking control to demonstrate that it "matters what stories tell stories," to which I would add: it matters what stories tell *whose* stories. The photographs namely reveal that Birkeland is both photographer and model, narrator and protagonist, director and actress, author/producer and publisher. She is immersed in the (imagined) past and firmly anchored in the present. Out of the eighteen photographic plates, thirteen show the artist alias *Aline Victoria Birkeland* dressed up in historical attire within the Arctic/Nordic landscape, where any modern equipment is left outside the frame. In turn, Birkeland's use of colour photography and accompanying captions reveal that all photographs were taken very recently (2008/2009). Information on size (varying from 90x90cm to 100x150cm) indicates that the photographs exist as three-dimensional aesthetic objects outside the book and show that they belong to a photographic tradition established at the end of the twentieth century when such large-scale photography made their entrance into the contemporary art circuit.[10]

Birkeland's approach to photography and gender representation clearly connects to the deconstructive work such as Cindy Sherman's staged photography. Not only are there parallels to the use of terminology borrowed from other cultural media, namely film and literary fiction, but also in their awareness of gender stereotypes disseminated through the media and how they feed back into the construction of new fictions and realities. But while Sherman slips into the role of various female stereotypes that primarily result in singular photographic artworks, Birkeland's strategy is to comprehensively build up her character through different mediums and formats to make it as plausible as possible. In a sense it is her own "character", or personality, that merges with her fictional character and becomes her alter ego. In the introduction to the photobook Birkeland writes: "The tale became my quest, conscience and concern. I would like to say it was my fantasy, dreams and desires, but as this hunt is my work, my artistic practice, it was far more real, physical and bothersome than a dream. One could say it bordered on an obsession." (Birkeland 2016, 5). This merging of the fictional character with her own persona, bordering on obsessiveness, establishes parallels to the work of Sophie Calle, especially her book *Double Game* (Calle 1999). Here Calle plays out a fictional character from one of Paul Auster's novels but also alters it by inserting her own personality and real actions back into the novel. This double game provides Calle both with the freedom to interpret but also invent the fictional character to her own ends. This playful approach to fiction and reality is also inherent in Birkeland's character: on the one hand it is a fictive persona with a fictive biography and on the other it is the artist herself who makes the story come to life, shapes and physically experiences it—not least because she is a trained mountaineer familiar with and/or aware of the challenging territories she travels in.

The inaugural photograph in Birkeland's photographic series, *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #1 Aline 2009* (Figure 4), is a striking example. It shows the character in close-up looking through binoculars, with a snow-covered landscape providing its backdrop. Although the viewer's gaze directly confronts the character, she does not gaze back. Instead, her vision is directed at something or somebody that lies outside the picture frame and to which the viewer is denied access. This double-denial of the viewer's gaze prevents the character from being objectified and therefore "figures as the subject of her

Figure 4. *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #1 Aline 2009*. Courtesy the artist.

own look," as Griselda Pollock has pointed out in relation to art historical representations of the same motif (Pollock 2003, 109). Here Birkeland/the character controls *her* own story. But more than that: Birkeland places the character in a landscape that previously was "reserved" for the male explorer who determined what there was to be seen. Thus she both metaphorically invades his territory and literally replaces him. This switching of roles reveals the astute playfulness in Birkeland's work in which she both changes *the* story and alters the conventional framing spaces (here: the Arctic landscape) Pollock refers to when problematizing the positioning of women within art historical discourse (Pollock 2003, 78–93).

Role reversals, complicity and disruption

There exist several variations of the same motif—woman with binoculars—in the series (Plates #1, #11, #15, #16). This "impertinent" reversal of roles and framing spaces is detectable in all of Birkeland's photographs. However, Birkeland's strategic and most playful role reversal is found within the OBJECTS section of the book (Figure 5). In the photographs "documenting" the character's "Personal Belongings" there is a family photo album typically used in bourgeois households in the late nineteenth century (Figure 6). In this yellowed album there are five cabinet-card sized photographs bearing portraits of the artist/character of which four re-enact iconic motifs found in historical photographic representations of the male polar hero: firstly the full-length portrait of the explorer fully dressed in fur and equipped with props such as a rod or weapon; secondly the half-length portrait clothed in a dark fur coat and thirdly the fur-hooded half-length portrait (embodied in two cards). Under the heading "Kabinettkorthelter" (Cabinet card heroes), Lund and Berg trace the genealogy of the first popular type to selected international explorers, especially the Americans Robert E. Peary and Frederick Cook. The Norwegian polar explorers Eivind Astrup and Roald Amundsen (Figure 7), they claim, followed their footsteps (Berg and Lund 2011, 34–37).[11] The other cabinet cards in the album reference two particular half-length portraits, one of Roald Amundsen (hooded) and one of Fridtjof Nansen (fur coat). Amundsen's "hooded portrait" from 1920 shows him dressed in clothing "borrowed" from the indigenous populations of the Arctic, the Greenlandic *anoraq* (Figure 8). Nansen's portrait of 1897 in turn shows him dressed solely in a fur coat, returning a stern gaze at us (Figure 9). Apart from that these cabinet cards were sought-after collectibles at the time, a phenomenon dubbed "cartomania" (Teukolsky 2015), Amundsen's and Nansen's portraits have additionally been endlessly reproduced in various contexts.[12] They are thoroughly inscribed into a male-centered polar history.

Birkeland reproduced all three iconic types with great attention to detail. Not only in terms of motif (dress, props, pose and background) but also in terms of their original material properties (faded black-and-

Figure 5. Reproduction of OBJECTS section in Tonje Bøe Birkeland's photobook *The Characters*. Courtesy the artist.

Figure 6. Detail from OBJECTS section ("Personal Belongings") in Tonje Bøe Birkeland's photobook *The Characters*. Courtesy the artist.

Figure 7. *Portrett av Roald Amundsen i polarutstyr* (Portrait of Roald Amundsen with polar equipment), cabinet card, Daniel Georg Nyblinn photo studio, 1899, Courtesy National Library of Norway, Oslo.

Figure 8. *Roald Amundsen Wearing a Fur Lined Parka, Nome, Alaska*, 1920, photographed by Lomen Bros., Courtesy National Library of Norway, Oslo.

Figure 9. *Fridtjof Nansen*, albumen print, photographed by Henry Van der Weyde, 1896. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London.

white photograph/albumen print, cabinet card format). The stern and condescending gazes that characterize the original portraits are also repeated in her re-enactments. Amongst the five cabinet-card sized photographs, the only "odd one out" is a small colour photograph of a friendly-looking child in a modern snow overall and fur hat, which appears to be a non-staged childhood photograph of the artist. It nevertheless presents her as a "snow and ice native". In speculating herself into the same genealogical tree as the strong and heroic male polar explorers, Birkeland's work becomes both homage and persiflage, complicit and disruptive. Her performative act inverts the gender role of the heroic Arctic explorer while she also, in this act of disruption, deconstructs the photographs as carefully staged, myth-making acts of self-representation.[13]

Staging of the self

Studio photography and its resulting collectible cabinet cards played a major role in disseminating the image of the invincible male polar explorer. But such constructed acts of self-representation were also rehearsed in the open, preferably snowy, landscape, and often closer to the explorer's home. This was the case for Roald Amundsen's infamous portrait on skis which the print media widely disseminated when the news arrived that he had reached the South Pole in 1911 (Figure 10). The portrait had in fact been taken prior to departure at the shore of Amundsen's villa Svartskog south of Oslo by the photographer Anders B. Wilse, just waiting to be disseminated together with the news (Berg and Lund 2011). Two of Birkeland's photographs, *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #4 Gullfjellet 2009* and *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #5 Gullfjellet 2009* (Figure 11) repeat such an act of self-representation: here the character is photographed doing field work, with hammer and chisel in hand, surrounded by a rocky mountain. The captions however reveal—at least to a Scandinavian audience—that the photographs were taken at Gullfjellet ("The Golden Mountain"), a mountain in the vicinity of Birkeland's/the character's hometown, Bergen, which lies about 1200 km south of the Arctic Circle and about 2000 km south of the Arctic archipelago Svalbard. At the same time, Birkeland's double-performative act plays with a motif frequently found in illustrated expedition narratives, as Fridtjof Nansen's *Farthest North* or Herbert Ponting's *The Great White South* show (Figure 12).[14] It is the motif of the polar explorer engaged with taking measurements, collecting specimens or doing other fieldwork. This trope, especially in photography, was an important element

Figure 10. *Roald Amundsen på ski*, 07.03.1909, photographed by Anders Beer Wilse, Courtesy National Library of Norway, Oslo.

Figure 11. *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #5 Gullfjellet 2009.* Courtesy the artist.

in the documentation and justification of explorative endeavours (and important to finance new expeditions). Following Fridtjof Nansen's influential publication *The First Crossing of Greenland* (1890) many subsequent exploration narratives in fact meticulously list the equipment taken on board the expedition ship, and often mention scientific instruments separately.[15] Here the explorer was in his own element and could show his expertise. When the equipment was used and this act photographically documented, the explorer's authority could be confirmed. Thus the photograph not only served as a document, but also provided a further platform for self-staging and confirm the explorer as an authorative figure.

Photography and surviving objects as storytelling elements

For the modern polar explorer, photography became a major tool for constructing the mythological and iconic figure of the polar hero on the one hand and proof of "having-been-there" and as an "objective" eyewitness account on the other. As soon as technical developments allowed for it, the camera became an essential item to be included in the explorer's packing list to document the explorer's life in the Arctic (Larsen 2011). It also became the perfect tool for freezing the one essential element that could not be taken home: snow and ice.[16] What did return with the explorers, however, were the surviving, often personal objects used during the expeditions, and which are treasured like sacred relics in polar museums and collections to this day.[17] Together with the photographs, they are important storytelling elements, or props, to recount the expeditions and in which singular male heroic explorers continue to take centre stage (often attributing minor roles to other crew members). This is exemplified by an exhibition at the Polar Museum of Tromsø which is dedicated to Amundsen's last journey in 1928, when he tried to rescue Umberto Nobile's airship expedition but himself disappeared in the ice (Figure 13). Here the museum's website communicates that Amundsen's story takes a central place in the museum and his personal objects and photographic material are essential elements in telling his story.[18]

Museum displays are important discursive spaces that, once the headlines are gone, continue "[…] to formulate, give shape to and communicate the narratives of the exploration of the most inaccessible places in the world" (Houltz 2013). In their informative and affirmative role, as Houltz has further pointed out, they are not only shapers of a narrative but are also shaped by the narratives of display. This might also be a reason why in one case, when Tonje Bøe Birkeland exhibited her work at a museum of cultural history, her character was perceived as real:

> With *Character #I Aline Victoria Birkeland*, I got to prove how little we actually know about the women explorers, when the Norwegian Polar Institute got in touch with Bergen Museum making inquiries about Aline [where the artwork was shown in 2009]. I never attempted to trick anyone. Perhaps that is what makes *The Characters* convincing. That a very big part of their stories happens, for real, it happened

Figure 12. From left to right: *Magnetic Observations* and *A Chronometer Observation with the Theodolite* published in Nansen's Farthest North (Westminster: Constable, 1897); *Dr. Simpson at the Magnetometer*, published on page 115 of Ponting's book *The Great White South* (1924).

Figure 13. Exhibition views from the exhibition commemorating Roald Amundsen's disappearance into the ice 1928, Polar Museum, Tromsø.

> to someone in the past – or – it happens to me during the process of creation. (Birkeland 2019).

Within the context of the Bergen Museum, but also in Birkeland's photobook, textual and visual elements (surviving objects counted among them) take on reciprocal supporting roles to advance the explorer's story. The visibly nagged clothes, vanity objects and travel equipment, like in the polar museum, are presented as the surviving relics that further "prove" the character's existence, while the "Geological Findings" support the character's credibility as a scientist. The geological objects of course also refer back to the field work executed in Plates #4 and #5 and in fact make a direct reference to historical archiving practices, as a comparison with historical geological collections shows.[19] The Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris, for example, houses a collection of minerals brought back from one of the most elaborately documented expeditions to the Arctic and Northern Norway (including Svalbard, *Aline Victoria Birkeland*'s expedition focus), the *La Recherche* expedition from 1839 and 1840. Here, similarities are striking in terms of labelling, arranging and use of specimen trays from their collection in comparison with *Aline Victoria Birkeland*'s findings (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Drawer with geological specimen from the E. Robert collection deriving from the *La Recherche* expedition to Scandinavia, Laponia, Spitsbergen and the Faroe Islands 1838–40. Courtesy / Copyright Pierre Sans-Jofre / Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris.

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's "String Figure story" thus re-evaluates both museum displays, collections and published travelogues that continue to shape the narratives of the male polar explorer. However, whereas specialized museums are traditionally geographically bound to a limited physical audience (though that has changed with the corona pandemic), the published travel narrative I would argue is the most popular, widely distributed and permanent record used to disseminate the story of the male polar explorer. Evidence is here found in the—still surviving—infinite number of published first-person exploration narratives, which usually were disseminated within a short period following the explorer's return. Publishers were eager to secure publication rights for such narratives and often pressured explorers to make their accounts available as soon as possible, smelling bestseller material.[20] Translated editions were also largely negotiated at an early stage, reflected in the almost simultaneous publication and distribution in other European countries.[21] In public libraries, and especially those with a polar focus such as the library of the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromsø, numerous shelves are filled with these surviving male-authored narratives. Also, in the open market rare first editions, new editions or reprints as well as secondary literature on male polar explorers still abound.[22] Thus these polar exploration accounts were not just a visible part of the media landscape then, but still remain with us today. Together with the prevailing visual representations of the Arctic, they are the most pertinent intertextual continuations that connect past and present narratives and continuously feed—despite the climate crisis and the dramatically changing reality of the Arctic—into contemporary Western perceptions and further explorative approaches to the Arctic.[23]

Untouched Arctic landscape?

In telling her "String Figure story", I argue, there is not a single element in which references to historical polar narratives and visual representations are absent. It confirms that it is impossible to engage with the polar regions and escape references to previous representations; it is our collective memory and imagination that influences our current views on the Arctic landscape.[24] But Tonje Bøe Birkeland shows that it is possible to disrupt them. When she inserts herself into the genealogy of polar hero portraiture and thereby subverts gendered roles and spaces, this disruption becomes very obvious. Her strategy becomes somewhat subtler when she references other common Arctic tropes: that of the sublime Arctic landscape devoid of any living being and that in which a solitary figure is seen in the distance. Here Birkeland specifically builds on Arctic tropes that are firmly inscribed in our collective consciousness since the onset of Romanticism, but are today increasingly perceived as sites of mourning and loss.[25]

Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #8 Von Post 2009 (Figure 15) is a panoramic photograph of a glacier emerging in all its grandness. Photographed from a distant and elevated vis-à-vis position, the glacier appears majestic and subtle at the same time, rising above a sea of clouds while pushing back the cloudy sky in the background. Variations of white, light grey and turquoise tint the glacier's rugged surface, a mountainous icescape revealing cracks and gorges. Like a castle in the air, the glacier's

Figure 15. *Character #I, Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #8 Von Post 2009.* Courtesy the artist.

bottom and end are concealed by clouds of similar colour hues, leaving it up to the viewer to imagine where it may end. Nothing seems to disturb the pristine scene, no human or animal traces visible.

The photograph makes clear references to motifs found in the tradition of Western Polar landscape painting which, according to Samuel Scott, lasted between the 1830s and 1930s (Scott 2008). In this period, concurrent with the scientific and popular interests in the polar regions and its expeditions, the Arctic landscape was frequently represented as untouched, sublime and mysterious, often with a spiritual undertone—which did not obstain fearless men from investigating it. There are diverging views as to how the Arctic/Northern landscape was represented during this period, depending on its (national) perspectives. Spring and Schimanski argue that in Austria-Hungary descriptions of landscape and fauna were largely based on symbolic forms of fiction and fantasy, while in Norway it is argued there were more profane descriptions because the Arctic was seen as a working place and economic resource (Spring). Contrary, Sigrid Lien argues that landscape representation in the Norwegian context was overtly symbolic and that until the beginning of the twentieth century, imagery—including photographic—was following the footsteps of national romantic painters, whose motifs were dramatic, nationally charged representations of glaciers, fjords, mountains and waterfalls. Lien, however, detects a representational shift in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Norwegian nation-building processes were heavily pushed and Norway also wanted to represent itself as a modern nation (Lien 2014).

Norway was not alone in building its national image during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and romantic representations of the Arctic/Northern landscape as sublime was a popular genre across national boundaries. Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (Wanderer above the Sea of Fog) from ca. 1817 is an early example of this romantic tradition, with the sea of fog acting as an amplifier to perceive the mountainous landscape as mysterious and sublime (though it is not necessarily an Arctic/Northern landscape). In a Norwegian context, Peder Balke's *Kystlandskap* (Coastal Landscape) from ca. 1860 (Figure 16) and Harald Sohlberg's *Vinternatt i Rondane* (Winter Night in the Mountains) from 1914 (Figure 17) even show that the Romantic tradition, despite their overtly different styles and use of artistic materials, expanded over a considerable period of time and well into the twentieth century.[26] Russell Potter expresses that, especially in the context of the Arctic, representations of the sublime outlasted the period of Romantic painters and additionally extended well beyond painting into the illustrated press, magic-lantern shows and circular panoramas, as well as photographic representations and film (Potter 2014). Oftentimes painting and photography also worked together:

> In the context of time, the painting and the photograph worked in concert, each reinforcing each other. The painting, accepted as the most refined medium of visualization, validated the polar subject matter as worthy of cultural contemplation while at the same time capturing the surprisingly vibrant colors of the polar environment. At the same time, the photograph irrefutably established the veracity of

Figure 16. Peder Balke, *Kystlandskap* (Coastal Landscape), presumed 1860s, oil on paper, glued on wooden plate, 34 × 52 cm. Photo: Børre Høstland. Courtesy The National Museum of Norway.

Figure 17. Harald Sohlberg, *Vinternatt i Rondane* (Winter Night in the Mountains), 1914, oil on canvas, 160 × 180 cm. Photo: Børre Høstland. Courtesy The National Museum of Norway.

> the painting as an "authentic" depiction of polar conditions. (Scott 2008, 9)

Birkeland's photograph merges this approach: its tableau-like character and the nuanced and precise use of colour photography makes painterly references, while the photographic technique itself relates to the idea of "veracity" to convey an image of the Arctic "as-it-is".

This is, however, far from the truth. Birkeland's photograph in fact depicts one of the most visited glaciers of the Svalbard archipelago, the Von Postbreen. Debouching into the Tempelfjorden (earlier called Temple Bay) on the archipelago's West coast, the glacier became popular as a tourist destination already from the late nineteenth century, in addition to being a place of investigation for numerous scientific expeditions. The tourism industry for the upper classes took off in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is argued that the first midnight sun cruise to Northern Norway was organized from London as early as 1874 (Serck-Hanssen 2005, 24). Svalbard (then still called Spitsbergen) soon became a popular tourist destination, too, and subject of interest for different tourist "types": the singular adventurer exemplified by persons such as mountaineer and art historian Sir Martin Conway; the wealthy magnate who also happened to combine his trip with commercial interests, exemplified by persons such as John Munroe Longyear (Arlov 1989) or the larger tourist groups participating in organized luxury cruises and excursions.[27] A photographic postcard with a view of Tempelfjorden from the period between 1910 and 1920 located in the archive of the Norwegian Polar Institute, gives a good indication that this area was already an established tourist destination at the time, thus far from inaccessible and untouched.[28]

Tourism, however, should be considered one of the latest invasions of Svalbard, following a long history of what Robert McGhee has called "The Rape of Spitsbergen" (McGhee 2007, 173–189). Although Svalbard is not inhabited by a human indigenous population, its land and fauna has been subject to colonization and exploitation through resource extraction—both animal and fossil—early on, documented since the sixteenth century. By the early twentieth century, a large number of animal populations were almost extinct and today we see a further disappearance of wildlife through climate change. Also, fossil resources are mostly exhausted (at least the licensed ones). In addition, numerous scientific expeditions investigated the archipelago, which the nineteenth century art historian and Arctic adventurer Sir Martin Conway argued had begun in earnest in the mid 18th century (Conway [1906] 1995). The already mentioned French *La Recherche* expedition from 1838–40 is emblematic of these endeavours, resulting in a 26-volume scientific report and five large pictures atlases (Knutsen et al. 2002). Though few exhaustive accounts of the number of expeditions to Svalbard and the Arctic exist, in the light of singular written and visual material it is evident that especially Svalbard has been of long-standing interest to people as diverse as whalers, hunters, trappers, capitalists, adventurers, explorers, tourists, politicians, geologists, archaeologists, geographers and other scientists, as well as photographers and artists. To represent Svalbard as pristine, untouched and unattainable then appears to be a paradox when realizing that men have visited and subjugated the archipelago and its surroundings over centuries.

Also, the photograph *Character #I Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #12 Hiorthfjellet 2009* (Figure 18) plays with the motif of the Arctic sublime, though in this case a small solitary figure is added. The photograph shows the character standing in the vast, snow-covered landscape at the foot of a mountain. It presents us with a clichéd image of human presence in the Arctic—nature is big, and we are small—and has, similar to the image of the sublime, empty landscape, been circulating as a recurrent motif in different visual media including painting, drawing, lithography and photography. According to Susan Barr:

> During most of the nineteenth century, however, there is a tendency for both landscape painters and photographers in Norway and abroad to emphasize the romantic aspect of the wild, polar nature: the contrast between small, insignificant people and large and powerful nature, and between light and dark as portrayed by land and sea compared with

Figure 18. *Character #I Aline Victoria Birkeland, Plate #12 Hiorthfjellet 2009.* Courtesy the artist.

> snow and ice. […] Although the scenery appears recognizable and naturalistic, there is scarcely an image that does not show tiny people amongst the high, sheer mountains or deeply-crevassed glaciers, or even the ultimate symbols of man's misguided attempts to penetrate the Arctic wilderness, crosses and shipwrecks. (Barr 1997, 48).

Both tropes repetitively appear in visual representations of the polar regions that were to a large extent executed by trained photographers, illustrators and artists. These were often either integral members of expeditions such as Herbert Ponting who was part of Scott's expedition team to the Antarctic, engaged in tourism such as Anders B. Wilse for luxury cruises to Svalbard, or hired in the aftermath to make lithographs, drawings or paintings based on explorer's photographs or sketches such as in the case of Roald Amundsen or Fridtjof Nansen.[29] Less frequently artists took their own initiative to travel to the polar regions, such as British-American painter William Bradford (1823–1892) whose travels to Greenland in 1869 resulted in one of the most elaborate photobooks to this day, *The Arctic Regions* (Bradford 1873).[30] Other artists in turn did not travel to the polar regions themselves but based their artworks on the available mediated narratives and foregoing visual representations. The motif of the small human figure in the vast polar landscape (Figure 19), however, proved to be a recurring theme and became especially prevalent in photographic representations of the explorer in the "eternal" ice. This trope, Elena Glasberg argues, has helped to establish what she termed the "Heroic Age aesthetic" (Glasberg Glasberg, 2012b, 91–92).

Conclusion

Tonje Bøe Birkeland's practice of embodying imagined turn of the century woman explorers establishes direct references to textual and visual narratives deployed by historical Arctic explorers and their derivatives. At first glance this approach could be solely interpreted as an homage, with an uncritical reflection on their motivations for Arctic exploration and their self-fashioning activities. One could thus argue that Birkeland not only re-enacts their heroic stories but is also complicit with a male-centered canon that has dominated polar history for far too long.[31]

However, such a position would appear undifferentiated. It would not pay attention to an artistic practice that not only represents a different worldview than that of the male explorers Birkeland refers to, but also to a practice that raises questions of gender roles and representation, today. Birkeland's character/alter ego communicates a subjective, situated, embodied worldview that, even if cloaked as a white European woman, opposes the idea that the world is there to be mapped, measured, extracted, conquered, colonized; in short, as Achille Mbembe

Figure 19. From left to right: *The Home of the Echoes*, published on page 149 of Ponting's book *The Great White South* (1924); *Isbarieren*, 1911 (reproduced by Anders B. Wilse from Amundsen's South Pole expedition); *Seal Hunting. The Captain on the Lookout*, published on page 213 of Nansen's book *The First Crossing of Greenland* (1890); Detail from William Bradford's book *The Arctic Regions* (1873).

pointed out, a worldview commonly found among Europeans that sees the Earth as belonging to them (Mbembe 2020). Birkeland's position as an artist is not a "disembodied" one, and not one that claims authority and subordinate "other" voices. Whether this concerns the written descriptions of her own position as a woman and her experiences, or her impressions of the other persons she meets, neither judgmental language nor objectivist claims can be detected. Also, at no moment her character maps and names the territory she travels in. On the contrary. Like the fictional heroines reaching the South Pole in Ursula K. LeGuin's short story *Sur*, Birkeland leaves no traces in the landscape; the only thing that remains is her fabulated "String Figure story" told through text, objects and photographic images. And although Birkeland references iconic motifs that were largely disseminated by the explorers and their expedition members, she also consciously excludes others. There are no photographs of successful animal hunts with slaughtered polar bears or seals; no photographs of other, lower-rank expedition members; no photographs of dramatic ship scenes or everyday homosocial activities on the ship; no photographs of indigenous peoples. In this context, Birkeland's representation of the Arctic, and in particular Svalbard, as empty and untouched could even reversely indicate that the empty landscape is as a result of long-lasting exploitative human activities. Also, the small human figure in the vast Arctic landscape can be read differently in this context, where the human becomes insignificant and at the brink of disappearance. In that sense, the situated knowledge acquired in the process of following the character's story is one that asks as to rethink, to reconfigure the Arctic as a gendered space in order to speculate: what if women had had a larger role in Arctic exploration narratives? What if alternative worldviews had dominated European societies in the long nineteenth century? What if scientific discourses had not claimed to be objective? What if fictional figures can help us to speculate about a future that is liveable and shared by all? Birkeland invites us to fabulate about the answers.

Notes

1. More specific motivations include the search for the Northwest/Northeast Passage; the search for lost expeditions; reaching the poles; scientific research; territorial expansion; resource extraction; trade; adventure etc.
2. In the context of UiT The Arctic University of Norway, see SARP—The Sámi art research project (2009-2013), Arctic Modernities (2013-16) and Arctic Voices (2020-2024).
3. Defining the polar regions as "terra nullius" or "no man's land" has in Arctic discourses most often been applied to the Svalbard archipelago, which was not under any legislative rule until the Svalbard Treaty 1920. Surely, also the widely published book *No Man's Land* by Sir Martin Conway following his travels to the archipelago (Conway [1906] 1995) contributed to equating Svalbard with this term. However, also other (circumpolar) areas have been termed "no man's land". Regarding Greenland see (Jonsson 2010 (2003)). Regarding the opinion that the circumpolar north was still seen this way in the post-war period see (McGhee 2007, ch.7).
4. It was only discovered in the eighteenth century that there was a correspondent icecap to the Arctic in the South (Scott 2008).
5. I explicitly refer to Griselda Pollock's "matrix of space" which determines the production and reception of an artist's work. The experiential space is the social space from which the representation is made whereby the "[…] producer is shaped within a spatially orchestrated social structure which is lived at both psychic and social levels." (Pollock 2003, 92).
6. In 2011 Norway celebrated the "Nansen-Amundsen-Year" on the occasion of Nansen's 150th birthday and Amundsen's 100th anniversary of reaching the South Pole. As part of the celebrations, the 1911 race to the South Pole was re-enacted, with both "teams" in place (Amundsen's and Scott's). The only major difference was that the impersonated Amundsen was greeted by the Norwegian prime minister upon arrival at the pole, in addition to numerous journalists. This re-enactment shows that Amundsen's achievement is still relevant to Norway and the expression of a national identity. Houltz writes: "Re-enactment rituals such as this one show with great clarity that century-old narratives of polar exploration are still relevant in modern society, both culturally and politically. They remain important tools for justifying polar ambitions and for incorporating them in processes of national identity-making." (Houltz 2013).
7. There is so far only one exception: in four photographs of *Character #1* the artist let her mother embody the character (Plates #1, #6, #9, #11).
8. One example is the recent MOSAiC Expedition, for which the RV Polarstern drifted in the Arctic ice for one year from September 2019 to October 2020, openly referencing Fridtjof Nansen's achievement 1893-96. See https://mosaic-expedition.org/expedition/.
9. *The Characters* exists in a limited edition of 300, published by Bergen Kjøtt Publishing which the artist runs herself.
10. The photobook is one of Birkeland's main artistic mediums. In an exhibition context her photography takes the most prominent place.
11. I would like to point out that Lund and Berg published their findings in 2011, while Birkeland's *Character #1* was already executed in 2009/2010, thus prior to publication and pointing out this genealogy.
12. Examples are: museum displays, webpages informing about polar histories, memorial lectures etc.
13. Birkeland's photographs can also connect to a tradition of cross-dressing and queer photography as it was already practiced in the late nineteenth century. Many such photographs often remained in the

private sphere, presumably because they did not conform to normative gender representations. An exhibition shown at the Rencontres d'Arles in 2016 entitled *Sincerely Queer. Sébastien Lifshitz Collection* was one of the first large-scale public presentations of queer photography from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that more closely examined the switching of gender roles and the subversive aspects of photography. See https://www.rencontres-arles.com/en/expositions/view/106/sincerely-queer (accessed 18.08.2021). In 1996 the Norwegian National Museum for Photography showed photographs that belonged to the photographers and women activists Marie Høeg (1866-1949) and Bolette Berg (1872-1944) who ran the photo studio Berg & Høeg. The photographs were found by coincidence in the 1980s in a box labelled "private" and had never been shown. It contained a number of staged photographs taken by and of Marie Høeg and Bolette Berg between 1895 and 1903. All photographs show the two women acting out different gender stereotypes of bourgeois society, all of them with a humorous undertone. Amongst the photographs there is also a portrait of Marie Høeg dressed up as a polar explorer in a hooded fur coat, clearly referencing Nansen's portrait. See https://www.preusmuseum.no/nor/Oppdag-samlingene/Fotografer/Bolette-Berg-og-Marie-Hoeeg (accessed 18.08.2021).

14. Some illustrative examples in *Farthest North* are found on pages 163 (Magnetic Observations. From A Photograph), 203 (Chronometer Observations), 293 (Observing Eclipse of the Sun), 281 (Reading the Temperature with a Lens), 302 and 369 (Taking Water Temperature); In *The Great White South*, such imagery is found on pages 96 (Probing a crevasse), 115 (Dr. Simpson at the Magnetometer, and Sending up a balloon to test the air currents), 173 (E.L. Nelson at his biological "hole").
15. In *The First Crossing of Greenland*, Nansen dedicates an entire chapter to equipment (Nansen 1890a, 66-69). Also Amundsen dedicates a chapter to equipment in his South Pole travelogue (Amundsen 1912).
16. This was first done on a large scale by the artist Olafur Elliasson with his work *Ice Watch* (2014) when twelve free-floating iceblocks from the Greenland icesheet were transported to London, Paris and Copenhagen. See https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK109190/ice-watch (accessed 18.08.2021).
17. There are in fact also other ephemeral objects that tell stories of and from the Arctic such as ship newspapers that largely disintegrated in the frozen seas and that previously have not received large attention. These more ephemeral objects have been traced by Hester Blum in her recent book *The News at the Ends of the Earth: The Print Culture of Polar Exploration*. Here it is also revealed that cross-dressing took place amongst expedition members when they set up theatre plays to motivate the crew and avoid depression and ennui. Because there were no women on board, men embodied the female characters. The ship newspapers announced the plays as if they were large public events (Blum 2019).
18. See https://uit.no/tmu/utstillinger/utstilling?p_document_id=398854 (accessed 18.08.2021).
19. Tonje Bøe Birkeland actually hunts, in a race against time, for these historical objects herself at flea markets, online auctions, private attics and derelict museum collections.
20. Historical sources reveal that the Norwegian publishing house Aschehoug & Co. competed with another publisher (John Grieg, Bergen) to secure the rights of Nansen's *Fram over Polhavet*. He succeeded by offering Nansen a fee of 88,000 Norwegian kroner, in addition to a percentage of the sale. Records show that Nansen received a total fee of 112,926 Norwegian kroner, which according to the Norwegian National Bank would correspond to roughly 8,950,000 Norwegian kroner in 2019 (https://www.norges-bank.no/tema/Statistikk/Priskalkulator/). The number of copies set for the first edition was 20,000. In comparison, other authors connected to Aschehoug received a considerably lower fee and lower print-run (on average around 2,000 kr or less, print-run 3,000 copies or less). Nansen's extraordinary fee and the decision to print *Fram over Polhavet* in an edition of 20,000 was based on the earlier sales success of *Paa ski over Grønland* and fierce competition amongst publishers. For detailed information see (Rudeng 1997; Tveteås 1972).
21. Examples of numerous reprinted editions are, limiting myself to the publications written by Norwegian explorers and first editions/translations: Fridtjof Nansen, *Paa Ski over Grønland*, 2 vol. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1890), first English edition *The First Crossing of Greenland*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), first Swedish edition *På skidor genom Grönland* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1890), first Finnish edition *Suksilla poikki Grönlannin* (Helsingissä: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava, 1896), first French edition *A travers le Grönland* (Paris, 1893), first German edition *Auf Schneeschuhen durch Grönland* (Hamburg: Verlagsanstalt und Druckerei AG, 1891, 1898); Fridtjof Nansen, *Fram over Polhavet: den norske polarfærd 1893-1896* (first published Oslo: Aschehoug, 1897), first English editions *Farthest North* (London: George Newnes 1897 / Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897 and 1900 / London: Macmillan, 1897 / London: George Newnes, 1898), first French edition *Vers le pole* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1897), first German edition *In Nacht und Eis: Die Norwegische Polarexpedition 1893-1896* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1897); Roald Amundsen, *Nordvestpassagen Beretning Om Gjøa-Ekspeditionen 1903-1907*, 2 vol. (first published Oslo: Aschehoug, 1907), first English edition *The North West Passage: being the record of a voyage of exploration of the ship "Gjøa" 1903-1907*, 2 vol. (London: Archibald Constable, 1908); Roald Amundsen, *Sydpolen: Den Norske Sydpolsfærd Med Fram 1910-1912* (first published Oslo: Dybwads, 1912), first Danish edition (København: Gyldendal, 1912), first English Edition *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the "Fram", 1910-1912* (London: John Murray, 1912); first German edition *Die Eroberung des Südpols: Die norwegische Südpolfahrt mit dem Fram 1910-1912* (München: Lehmann, 1912), first French edition *Au Pôle sud* (1913).

22. Between 2012-2015 for example, Cambridge University Press republished no less than 202 Polar exploration books under the series "Cambridge Library Collection—Polar Exploration". See https://www.cambridge.org/core/series/cambridge-library-collection-polar-exploration/A74356110B19FE39ECE2FB41463BC531#, (accessed 11.12.2020).
23. Two recent examples are the Russian "flag planting performance" on the seabed underneath the North Pole in 2007 and the already mentioned MOSAiC Expedition 2019-20.
24. I here refer to Simon Schama's argument that there exists an intimate link between terrain, mythology and culture and that "[…] inherited landscape myths and memories share two common characteristics: their surprising endurance through the centuries and their power to shape institutions that we still live with" (Schama 1996, 15).
25. A physical manifestation of such a site of mourning and loss is the ceremony commemorating the disappearance of the Okjökull glacier in western Iceland in August 2019. A similar ceremony took place at the former location of the Pitzol glacier in Switzerland in September 2019.
26. *Vinternatt i Rondane* was in fact awarded the title "Norges nasjonalmaleri" (Norway's national painting) through a public vote initiated by the Norwegian national broadcaster NRK in 1995. See https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/samlingen/objekt/NG.M.01185 (accessed 20.08.2021).
27. The image archive of the Norwegian Polar Institute holds a number of photographs of Tempelfjorden from a cruise with the ship S.Y. Irma to Spitsbergen in summer 1925. The archive also states that the Norwegian photographer A.B. Wilse photographed the area by commission of the cruise company in the years between 1905 and 1913. See https://bildearkiv.npolar.no/fotoweb/archives/5000-Bilder/?q=S.Y%20Irma%27s%20cruise%20tempelfjorden (accessed 24.08.2021). Still today tourist agencies offer guided boat tours to the glacier.
28. Owned by the image archive of the Norwegian Polar Institute, see https://bildearkiv.npolar.no/fotoweb/archives/5000-Bilder/NP_bilder/NP030000/NP025085.jpg.info#c=%2Ffotoweb%2Farchives%2F5000-Bilder%2F%3Fq%3DNP025085 (accessed 24.08.2021).
29. This was for various reasons: the first Kodak portable camera (#1) was sold in 1888, meaning that prior to that photographing in the polar regions was even more of a challenge, being in need of a mobile darkroom; thus, drawings were integral to a visual documentation of the polar regions, and subsequent lithographs and woodcuts essential for a larger visual distribution. Also, it was not until the early twentieth century that printing techniques were developed in a way that publications could entail a large number of photographic illustrations. For a detailed investigation of this subject, see (Larsen 2011).
30. Illustrative examples can be found in Herbert Ponting's *The Great White South* (Ponting 1924), William Bradford's *The Arctic Regions* (Bradford 1873) and Fridtjof Nansen's *Paa ski over Grønland* (Nansen 1890b).
31. One could even argue further that Birkeland weaves on the complicity of bourgeois women within a colonial context, as has been raised in more recent scholarly literature, investigating the relationship between women, travel writing and Nordic colonialism (Reeploeg 2019).

Notes on contributor

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Article 3: "Pia Arke and 'Arctic Hysteria'"

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Pia Arke and 'Arctic Hysteria': Visual Repatriation and the Problematics of a 'Lost' Artwork

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Abstract:
This article examines Pia Arke's artistic practice that engages with the phenomenon of 'Arctic hysteria', which apparently gripped large parts of the female indigenous population in the Arctic during the early contact era. By focusing on the 'lost' photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997), I aim to show how Arke's method of re-appropriating photographic material from colonial archives can be seen as an act of visual repatriation, of "working through" and reclaiming the repressed histories of indigenous Kalaallit women.

Keywords:
Pia Arke, Arctic hysteria, visual repatriation, photography, social biography, colonial archive

In spring 1995, Danish-Kalaallit artist Pia Arke (1958–2007) travels to New York where she visits the Explorers Club. Here she stumbles across a photograph of two white male Arctic explorers forcefully holding back a 'hysterically' screaming, semi-naked Kalaallit woman. Arke found the photograph among the *Peary Arctic Club* archive collection, which contains expedition documentation by American polar explorer Robert E. Peary (1856–1920).[1] According to the Club's curator – Arke recounts in an interview four years after the visit – the photographed woman experienced a fit of 'Arctic hysteria' or *pibloktoq*.

In autumn 1995, Arctic and Inuit history scholar Lyle Dick publishes an article that critically investigates the discourse around exactly this phenomenon: a Western-termed psychopathological illness, which apparently gripped large parts of the female indigenous population in the Arctic during the early contact era. He writes "Beyond what it might say about hysteria, this intriguing aspect of High Arctic history offers the potential to enhance our understanding of European as well as Native behavior in the Arctic, and the historical construction of relationships between these two groups."[2]

It is not known whether Arke and Dick were aware of each other's findings, yet there are significant parallels in their attempts to problematise how entire scientific discourses on non-Western cultures were constructed by the European explorer/coloniser while their presence and impact remained largely undiscussed. In her treatise *Ethno-Aesthetics*, published in Danish in 1995 (translated into English and reprinted 2010), Arke develops this stance out of her own hybridised position. With a particular reference to Clifford's critical analysis of late nineteenth and early twentieth century emergent social sciences and Western modernist art, Arke notes: "The only people actually present are the people, i.e., the Europeans, that are not on display."[3]

Ethno-Aesthetics does not problematise or contextualise the occurrence of 'Arctic hysteria' in the colonial contact zone, allegedly because at the time of writing Arke was not yet aware of this phenomenon.[4] However, her conceptual artistic approach to 'Arctic hysteria' following her New York visit is already theoretically anticipated in the treatise. Here Arke states that "ethno-aesthetics can be analysed as an event combining ethnocentrism and anthropological humanism" where Western appropriation and marginalization of the alien is constantly at work. Also 'Arctic hysteria' can be posited there: at the intersection between late nineteenth and early twentieth century Euro-American patriarchal scientific discourses (in this case: treatment of women and/with hysteria) and Western conceptions about indigenous peoples as primitive and without agency. Dick's article corresponds:

> When American explorers first witnessed episodes of "pibloktoq," their perceptions were conditioned by then-current Western conceptual frameworks. … Euro-American semantic associations surrounding the term "hysteria" formed an important part of the perceptual repertoire which American observers carried with them when they first witnessed episodes of "pibloktoq".[5]

Arke in fact still detects these frameworks within global modernity and to make these visible, she proposes:

> To the extent that such global modernity can be found, it will have to include us Greenlanders. Indeed, we have to abide by the same general terms as the rest of the world and we only have the same pieces to move around. At one moment, therefore, we have to cling to the authentic values cultivated by the anthropologists and let our cultural capital work for us. And that is perhaps precisely what we are doing when at the next moment we turn towards anthropological humanism to study it studying us, re-appropriating its conceptions of our selves. The alien element that is at play is ourselves, we say. And this can, if nothing else, explain why we throw ourselves with such energy into the game.[6]

In this article, I aim to show how Arke threw herself "with such energy into the game" and both conceptually and literally moved the same pieces around to not only make visible these still prevalent frameworks, but also process traumatic historical events that Arke had not directly experienced herself, yet whose effects reverberated in her own biography. I will focus here on Arke's photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* (1997, ill. 1) to show how her method of appropriation, reappropriation and recycling of photographic material from the colonial period can be seen as a post-memorial act of empathizing with and "working through" what Arke's long-term friend and collaborator Stefan Jonsson has called the repressed world history of "brutalised women – materially and mentally violated, racialised, objectified and dehumanized."[7]

Ill. 1 Pia Arke: *Arctic Hysteria IV*, 1997. Yellow toned b/w photomontage, framed (reproduction), 79.3 x 202.5 cm. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk.

In this argumentation, I will challenge the commonly used (art) historical classification of 'lost', which has also been applied to *Arctic Hysteria IV*.[8] While 'lost' postulates that the work was intended as a permanent, commodified artwork, I instead argue that this and other 'lost' works should rather be seen as what I call performative 'ephemeral materializations' of processes leading to visual repatriation and reclaimed ownership. In that sense, *Arctic Hysteria IV* can be read as both a metaphor for loss, recuperation and regained belonging.

Theoretical Approach

In this endeavour, I will read *Arctic Hysteria IV* from a material perspective whereby I draw my inspiration from Elizabeth Edwards's and Janice Hart's approach, who argue that photographs "are both images *and* physical objects that exist in time and space and thus in social and cultural experience (italics in original)."[9] Without denying the importance of the image content, their main argument is that we cannot understand photographic images without paying attention to their materiality. Photographs are things made, used, kept, stored, transported, relocated, dispersed, damaged, torn, cropped and so on. As reproducible objects, they belong in a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning. They are objects enmeshed in social relations and not merely passive entities.[10] As material objects, they have 'social biographies', or, as Edwards more recently noted, "objects with active biographies in a constant state of flux."[11] Although this analysis of photography primarily relates to museological and archival contexts as well as vernacular photography, I term this approach useful in reading Arke's work because it appropriates material from exactly those contexts: the colonial and private archive. By tracing the appropriated material's and the 'finished' artwork's 'social biography', I aim to show how both have 'travelled' from one format and context to another and how they are in turn reframed and re-owned by Arke. Here I will first trace back the original context of the appropriated material then investigate what Arke does with it and how it publicly (re)materialised, to finally arrive at a contemporary reading of the work.

In doing so, I will build upon Arke's own published writing as well as existing research and scholarly literature, most notably the thoroughly assembled and to date most comprehensive publication edited by Kuratorisk Aktion. The majority of the published material problematises and reflects on how Arke's work cannot be read without considering the impact of colonialism on her identity and practice. Thus, her statement "I make the history of colonialism part of *my* history in the only way I know, namely by taking it personally," which

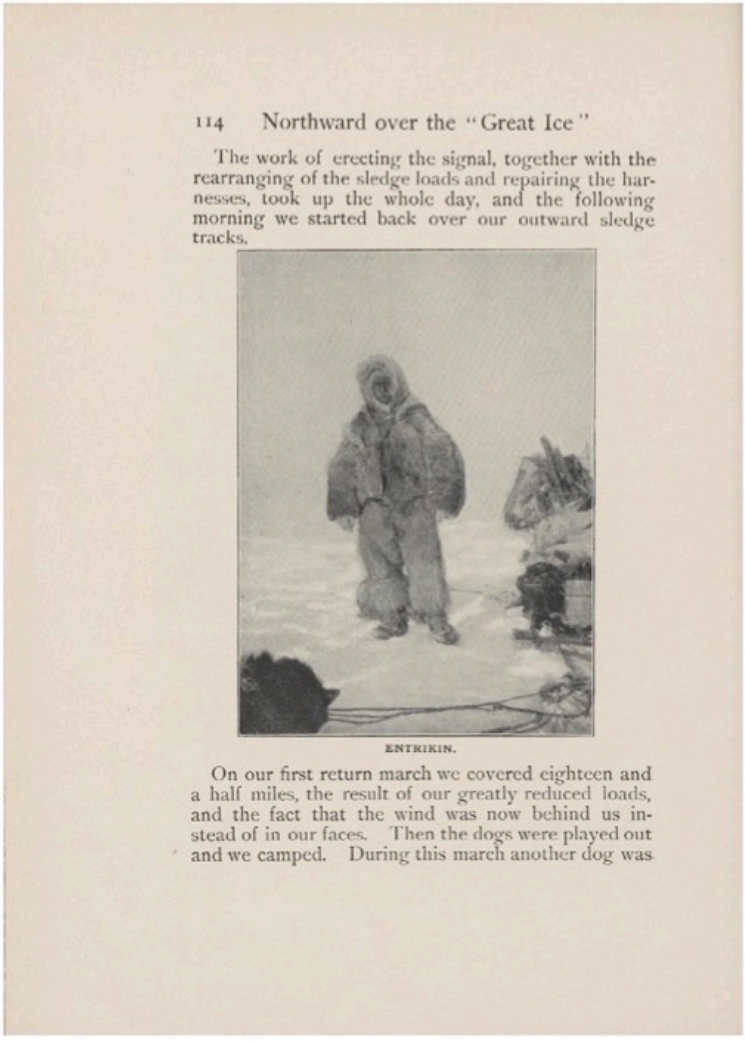
originally appeared in *Stories from Scoresbysund*, has since become the most cited quote in literature on Arke.[12] Within these postcolonial analyses also performative and auto-ethnographic aspects are highlighted, including notions of self-representation and the violated female body.[13] My research contribution builds particularly on Jonsson's and Sandbye's analysis of Arke's work, focusing on the one hand on the female subject from the colonial margin and on the other on a post-semiotic analysis of photographs as objects, and as instigators and performers of social and affective relations.[14] The performative aspect of the very material used by Arke (thus not the performative aspect within the works) will become especially evident in the latter part of my re-reading of *Arctic Hysteria IV*, while the violated indigenous female body is the focus in the former. However, to date Arke's work has not been read in the light of visual repatriation and post-traumatic recuperation processes in connection with the (im)material aspects of her work.

Arctic Hysteria IV

The photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* appears to be Arke's last in a series of works that refers to the invented psycho-pathological illness she stumbled upon in 1995.[15] For the work Arke reproduced seven black-and-white photographs from the second volume of Robert Peary's

Ill. 2 Installation view from the group show "MAP: In Differences", Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki (3 October – 2 November 1999). Photo: Pia Arke. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

book *Northward over the "Great Ice": A Narrative of Life and Work along the Shores and up on the Interior Ice-Cap of Northern Greenland in the Years 1886 and 1891–1897.*[16] Four of these are full-body portraits of American polar explorers Peary, Baldwin, Entrikin and Clark, indicated through their captions. Dressed in a full fur outfit within a snow-covered landscape, the explorers alternately frame three naked or semi-naked Kalaallit women, their captions reading: *The Mistress of the Tupik* (left), *An Arctic Bronze* (middle) and *Flash Light Study* (right). Arke blew up the reproductions to almost life-size dimensions. The only alteration she undertook was to slightly crop each original photograph on the sides, resulting in a coherent composition with a frieze-like character, as seen from an exhibition in 1997 (ill. 2).



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The work of erecting the signal, together with the rearranging of the sledge loads and repairing the harnesses, took up the whole day, and the following morning we started back over our outward sledge tracks.

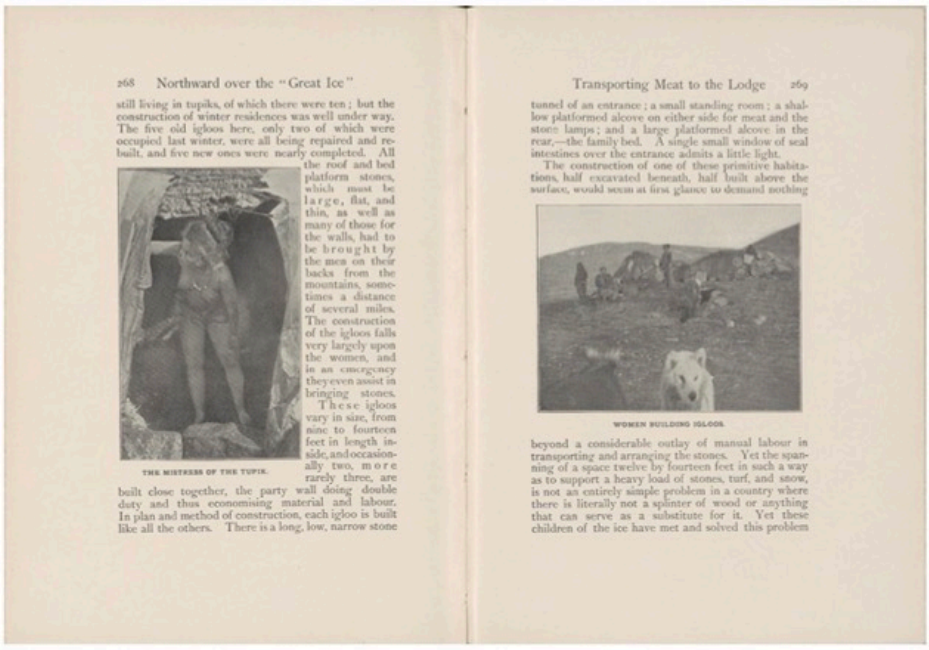
ENTRIKIN.

On our first return march we covered eighteen and a half miles, the result of our greatly reduced loads, and the fact that the wind was now behind us instead of in our faces. Then the dogs were played out and we camped. During this march another dog was

Ill. 3 Page 114 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice". A Narrative of Life and Work along the Shores and up on the Interior Ice-Cap of Northern Greenland in the Years 1886 and 1891-1897* (1898).

The portraits of all four explorers appear in the fifth chapter of part III, *On the Great Ice (continued)* (pages 114, 116, 118, 119). It recounts the story of Peary's unsuccessful trip to the Inland Ice in March/April 1884. In the book, the photographs were inserted into the text and showed the men with their equipment and/or sled dogs (ill. 3).

The photographs of the Kalaallit women, in turn, do not just appear in one chapter but are spread over different ones in the book. *The Mistress of the Tupik* shows a woman with a loosened hairdo and barely covered by her clothes, revealing her breasts, legs and the rest of the upper body. She holds the opening of a tent and gleams to the side. The photograph originally appears in *Transporting Meat to the Lodge* (Part IV, chapter IV) (ill. 4).



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still living in tupiks, of which there were ten; but the construction of winter residences was well under way. The five old igloos here, only two of which were occupied last winter, were all being repaired and rebuilt, and five new ones were nearly completed. All the roof and bed platform stones, which must be large, flat, and thin, as well as many of those for the walls, had to be brought by the men on their backs from the mountains, sometimes a distance of several miles. The construction of the igloos falls very largely upon the women, and in an emergency they even assist in bringing stones.

THE MISTRESS OF THE TUPIK.

These igloos vary in size, from nine to fourteen feet in length inside, and occasionally two, more rarely three, are built close together, the party wall doing double duty and thus economising material and labour. In plan and method of construction, each igloo is built like all the others. There is a long, low, narrow stone

Transporting Meat to the Lodge 269

tunnel of an entrance; a small standing room; a shallow platformed alcove on either side for meat and the stone lamps; and a large platformed alcove in the rear,—the family bed. A single small window of seal intestines over the entrance admits a little light.

The construction of one of these primitive habitations, half excavated beneath, half built above the surface, would seem at first glance to demand nothing

WOMEN BUILDING IGLOOS.

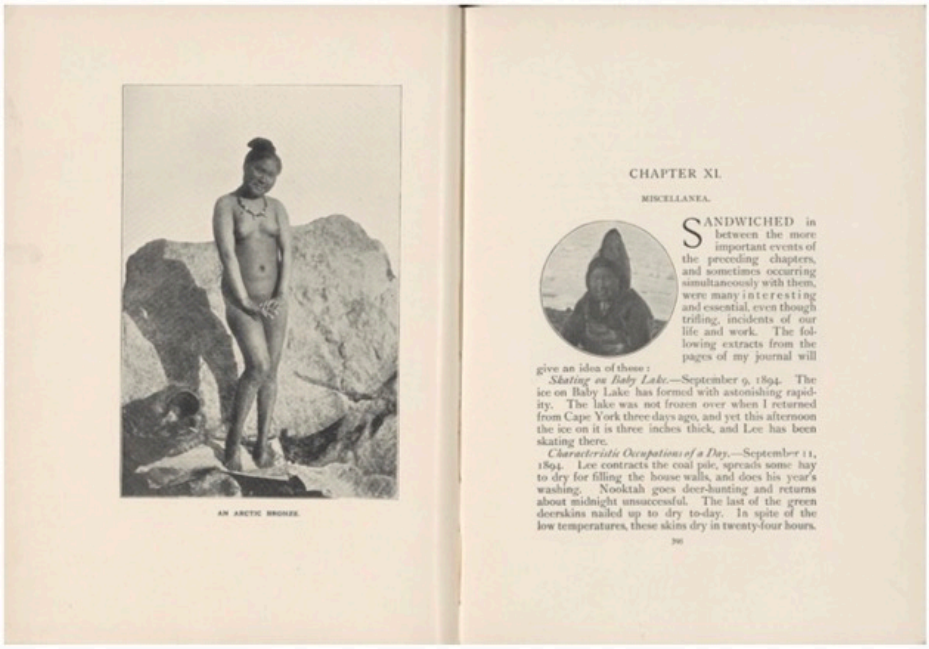
beyond a considerable outlay of manual labour in transporting and arranging the stones. Yet the spanning of a space twelve by fourteen feet in such a way as to support a heavy load of stones, turf, and snow, is not an entirely simple problem in a country where there is literally not a splinter of wood or anything that can serve as a substitute for it. Yet these children of the ice have met and solved this problem

Ill. 4 Pages 268–269 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).

When reading the entire chapter, one finds no indication of whom this woman might be, what her name is and why Peary has photographed her. Peary instead describes his stay at the village Karnah and how the Kalaallit families start to prepare for the winter – shifting their housing from *tupiks* (tents) to igloos. We thus presume that the photograph was taken there. Other photographs and related descriptions indicate that the temperature inside tents and igloos was considerably higher than outside and thus, when being inside, the inhabitants were often quite lightly or barely clothed. This was probably the case here also. Peary must have then photographed the woman "spontaneously" when she looked out of the tent. However, through Peary's caption *The Mistress of the Tupik* this assumption is diverted. Instead, the woman is turned into an object of male desire, as if she were in attendance of her lover who will soon be granted access to her 'love cave'.

The second image is of a full standing nude, only adorned with a neckless and her hands

shyly folded in front of her genitals. She stands in front of a rock, otherwise nothing distracts from her nudity. *An Arctic Bronze*, as Peary titled the photograph, originally appears in *Miscellanea* (Part IV, chapter XI) (ill. 5).



AN ARCTIC BRONZE.

CHAPTER XI.

MISCELLANEA.

SANDWICHED in between the more important events of the preceding chapters, and sometimes occurring simultaneously with them, were many interesting and essential, even though trifling, incidents of our life and work. The following extracts from the pages of my journal will give an idea of these:

Skating on Baby Lake.—September 9, 1894. The ice on Baby Lake has formed with astonishing rapidity. The lake was not frozen over when I returned from Cape York three days ago, and yet this afternoon the ice on it is three inches thick, and Lee has been skating there.

Characteristic Occupations of a Day.—September 11, 1894. Lee contracts the coal pile, spreads some hay to dry for filling the house walls, and does his year's washing. Nooktah goes deer-hunting and returns about midnight unsuccessful. The last of the green deerskins nailed up to dry to-day. In spite of the low temperatures, these skins dry in twenty-four hours.

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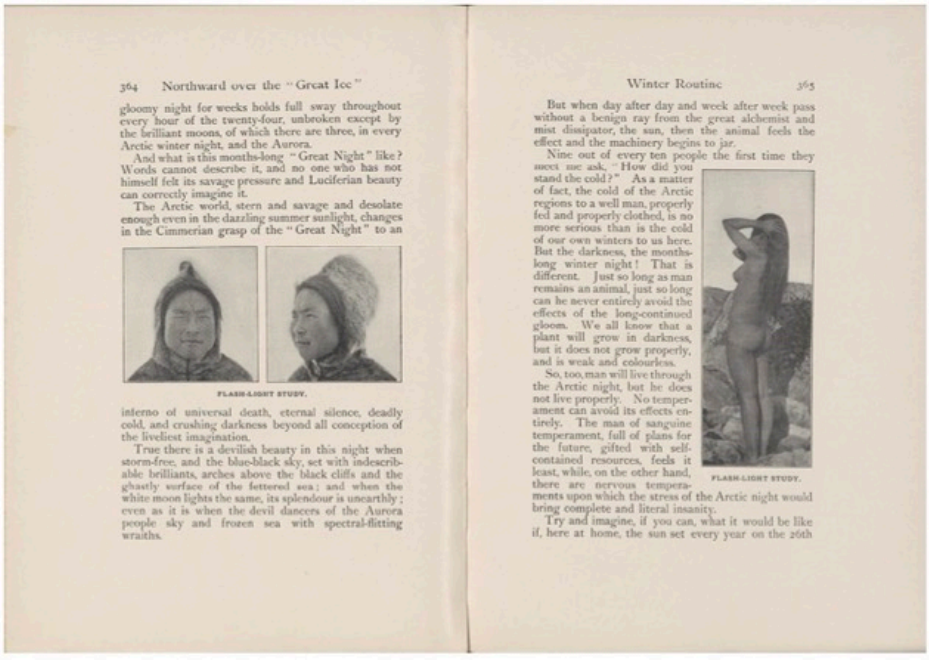
Ill. 5 Pages 394–395 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).

The chapter is a description of events that, according to Peary, did not fully fit in with the others. Like in *The Mistress of the Tupik*, there is no hint at whom this young woman might be. However, there are two narrated episodes in the chapter that catch attention: On 10 November 1894, Peary writes that he is left by his male companions (who go for a hunting trip) and that he is put "in the somewhat embarrassing position of being left, alone and unprotected, with five buxom and oleaginous ladies, of a race of naive children of nature, who are hampered by no feelings of false modesty or bashfulness in expressing their tender feelings." Peary reasons, "My years, and at present semicrippled condition from a fall on the rocks, will, I trust, protect me".[17] The next episode in the chapter tells of a fourteen-year-old girl called Alakahsingwah who had frantically escaped the camp in the middle of the night to reach the settlement of Karnah. Peary expresses bewilderment and cannot find an explanation for this behaviour.

Sources exist that prove Peary and his companions had Kalaallit mistresses. It is known that Peary's mistress was Alakahsingwah, with whom he had also fathered two children.[18] According to Arke's own research, the photograph entitled *An Arctic Bronze* was in fact her, which is surely one of the reasons why Arke included her centre-stage in the montage. With this information at hand, the story of the girl that frantically – or should I say hysterically – escaped to Karnah needs to be read against the grain, with speculations arising whether their relationship was consensual. Here, Dick's article again sheds light on the uneven power

relationships between the explorers and the Kalaallit: Dick points out that for Peary's expeditions to be successful, he placed women at the bottom of the hierarchy and organised his "crew" along racial and gender lines. According to Peary himself, native women were a necessity not only to cause "greater contentment but as a matter of both physical and mental health and the retention of the top notch of manhood …"[19] In the article, Dick goes on to quote from Baldwin's diary – one of the explorers accompanying Peary and appearing in Arke's photomontage – which describes how there were "repeated attempts by four Americans to coerce Inuhuit women into sexual relations," how he compared their lodge to a "whore-house" and recounts scenes in which young native women, mere girls, were crying following attempts to "have them submit to their [the explorers'] carnal desires". In the same diary entry, Baldwin notes that this behaviour was known to Peary yet that he did not act upon it. Thus, sexual abuse of Kalaallit women was not just silently accepted, but more than that, it was seen as an explorer's basic 'right' to submit these native women to their desires in order to preserve their manhood. From this perspective, *An Arctic Bronze* raises doubts about the woman's voluntariness of being depicted in this pose. The photograph rather points to (Peary's) male desire and interrelated European modernist conceptions about the primitivist female nude, as is also mirrored in the modernist Western art historical canon.

The photograph of the third woman, entitled *Flash Light Study*, is a nude in semi-profile yet slightly turned away from the onlooker. Her left-hand breast is visible, but not her face. Her hair is not tied up in the hairstyle common at the time but falls down on her body. The pose appears as intensely private, yet this appears unlikely. Knowing that the average summer temperatures in Nuuk around the time were around 5.5 °C (while Peary was further northeast where it was colder), it would be unlikely to feel comfortable without clothes in such temperatures. Furthermore, the question remains whether female nudity in the open Arctic landscape was common practice then. *Flash Light Study* appeared in *Winter Routine* (Part IV, chapter IX) (ill. 6).



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gloomy night for weeks holds full sway throughout every hour of the twenty-four, unbroken except by the brilliant moons, of which there are three, in every Arctic winter night, and the Aurora.

And what is this months-long "Great Night" like? Words cannot describe it, and no one who has not himself felt its savage pressure and Luciferian beauty can correctly imagine it.

The Arctic world, stern and savage and desolate enough even in the dazzling summer sunlight, changes in the Cimmerian grasp of the "Great Night" to an

FLASH-LIGHT STUDY.

inferno of universal death, eternal silence, deadly cold, and crushing darkness beyond all conception of the liveliest imagination.

True there is a devilish beauty in this night when storm-free, and the blue-black sky, set with indescribable brilliants, arches above the black cliffs and the ghastly surface of the fettered sea; and when the white moon lights the same, its splendour is unearthly; even as it is when the devil dancers of the Aurora people sky and frozen sea with spectral-flitting wraiths.

Winter Routine 365

But when day after day and week after week pass without a benign ray from the great alchemist and mist dissipator, the sun, then the animal feels the effect and the machinery begins to jar.

Nine out of every ten people the first time they meet me ask, "How did you stand the cold?" As a matter of fact, the cold of the Arctic regions to a well man, properly fed and properly clothed, is no more serious than is the cold of our own winters to us here. But the darkness, the months-long winter night! That is different. Just so long as man remains an animal, just so long can he never entirely avoid the effects of the long-continued gloom. We all know that a plant will grow in darkness, but it does not grow properly, and is weak and colourless.

So, too, man will live through the Arctic night, but he does not live properly. No temperament can avoid its effects entirely. The man of sanguine temperament, full of plans for the future, gifted with self-contained resources, feels it least, while, on the other hand, there are nervous temperaments upon which the stress of the Arctic night would bring complete and literal insanity.

Try and imagine, if you can, what it would be like if, here at home, the sun set every year on the 26th

FLASH-LIGHT STUDY.

Ill. 6 Pages 364–365 from the second volume of Robert Peary's book *Northward over the "Great Ice"* (1898).

Again, no names are mentioned. But there are in fact several photographs of (primarily) naked women with the same caption found in this chapter. Here photographs are entirely of Kalaallit people and reminiscent of ethnographic photographic studies of the period, recording and measuring the people's routines, postures and physique. Peary's writing confirms this reading: "I continued work on the ethnological photographic record of the tribe as in the previous winters, but now that new subjects were comparatively scarce, it gave me an opportunity for an auxiliary series of pictures showing action, special positions, characteristics, etc." Closing the "ethno-aesthetic" circle, he expresses: "Some of these photos scattered through this chapter, will give an idea of the work. Many others, while not adapted for a narrative of the nature of this, are of much interest to the artist and ethnologist, and contain many surprises."[20]

Appropriation, Ownership and Visual Repatriation

Arke appropriated the photographs from Peary's book more than seventy years following his death. Thus, during the period Arke formed her own work (1995–99), the material was not only publicly available but also copyright claims had expired. However, regarding appropriated photographs that found their way into artworks such as *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* (both 1997) this is not the case (ill. 7).

Ill. 7 Installation view of *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* at the exhibition "Landscape '97," Jyväskylä Fair, Jyväskylä, Finland (21 November – 14 December 1997). Photo: Pia Arke. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

Here, Arke appropriated photographs from the book *Greenland, Its Nature, Inhabitants, and History* by Danish doctor T. N. Krabbe (1861–1936). Here, copyright would have expired in 2006. Regarding other photographs Arke frequently appropriated, namely those by Danish telegraphist Sven Lund Jensen, the material was in fact intended for others to be used. In

Stories from Scoresbysund, Arke recounts how she discovered that Jensen had placed his negatives at a photo shop in Copenhagen for acquaintances to make their own "Greenland album". This explained for her why she stumbled upon photographs of her mother taken by Jensen in 1947 in private archives.[21] These would re-appear in *Krabbe/Jensen I* and *Krabbe/Jensen II* together with Krabbe's ethnographic photographs.

Arke's method of appropriating photographic material was of course already common practice at the time she assembled her photomontages. Artists from the so-called *Picture Generation* had prominently expatiated on the appropriation of photographs, predominantly from mass media. Also, historical photographs were appropriated. The 1990s saw an increased engagement with the postcolonial appropriation of 'legacy images', as Jessica Neath has noted.[22] While questions of copyright and ownership arise in all cases, the appropriation of 'legacy images' specifically poses questions as to whom this 'raw material' belongs.[23] Shall its ownership be attributed to the person who has taken the photographs, to the subjects depicted or to the author who has assembled them (here: Arke)? This question is important because it steps into discussions of repatriation and, more concretely, visual repatriation.

Beside tremendous scholarly engagement regarding the physical repatriation of cultural objects in the past decades, scholars discussing the concept of visual repatriation have focused on how images play a crucial role in uncovering the histories and memories of the formerly violated and repressed.[24] Elemental in this process is the close collaboration and partnership with the 'source communities' from which those images originate.[25] However, as Kirsten Dobbin has expressed, visual repatriation entails not necessarily the return of physical objects/photographs, but "rather elements of history, memory, and identity that are associated with the images."[26] Furthermore, "[a]s visual repatriation predominantly involves the return of modern copies of images rather than the original vintage print, visual repatriation can be seen as subset of 'knowledge repatriation', where information is returned, as opposed to artefact repatriation, where the original piece is returned to the source community."[27] Subsequently, the process of visual repatriation through re-engagement with photographic images has the potential for empowerment, renewal and contestation.[28]

Although visual repatriation is conventionally practiced in collaboration with source communities, I argue that this concept can be applied to Arke's work (while being aware of current contestations of the term in favour of 'rematriation'). Born to a Kalaallit mother and Danish father, Arke was, metaphorically speaking, a descendant of Peary and Alakahsingwah – while it is evident that Arke identified more with the Kalaallit woman.[29] As a diasporic member of a female Kalaallit community (even if Arke met challenges belonging to it), the appropriated photographic material would also 'belong' to Arke, giving her every right to claim ownership and tell its "other histories".[30]

Meeting the Gaze

Arke's visual repatriation, however, differs from conventional scholarly practices of re-owning colonial photographic material. Instead, by appropriating the photographs and "moving the same pieces around", she makes meanings and relationships shift. In setting the figures of the pompous polar explorers against the nude Kalaallit women, she reminds us of the imbalance in power relationships that occurred in such encounters: the indigenous woman as an exoticised and eroticised object that cannot escape her powerless status as either model, mistress or servant. But not only that: by blowing up the photographs of explorers and women to almost life-size dimensions, they meet both their own and our gaze at eye level (ill. 8).

Ill. 8 Pia Arke standing next to *Arctic Hysteria IV* when it was exhibited at the group show "MAP: In Differences," Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki (3 October – 2 November 1999). Photo: unknown. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

Here the photographs become, through their materiality, as Roberta McGrath has noted, a locus of "intersecting gazes" where it is possible to contest or confirm the gaze of others and our own.[31] Arke not only makes us aware of our own gaze but also what happens when historical material and discourses are reframed and re-contextualised: as objects of evidence and post-memory devices to disclose repressed histories and overcome the traumatic events hinted at earlier in this article.

Arke repeatedly pointed out that traumatic events were ingrained in the colonial history of Kalaallit Nunaat. However, they were not talked about because they were associated with shame and loss. Such events not only entailed the brutalization of Kalaallit women by polar explorers as highlighted through the artwork discussed. Other examples include the resettlement of Kalaallit communities for the purpose of colonial territorial expansion (such as from Angmassalikk to Scoresbysund, officially to ease famine and disease but, in reality, about the Norway-Denmark territorial dispute), forced removal of children to Danish boarding schools for the purpose of 'assimilation', denial of hunting rights leading to hunger and starvation or ethnographic activity including measuring naked bodies. While these events were repressed in the Greenlander's memory, Arke does the opposite: she lifts them out of oblivion. She appropriates and reappropriates historical photographs to repeatedly materialise the 'other' repressed histories. This becomes evident through the different formats and presentation modes Arke applied when showing the work in various contexts.

Loss, Abandonment and Performative 'Ephemeral Materializations'

Information retrieved from Arke's survey publication shows that *Arctic Hysteria IV* was last exhibited at "ATTACK! Photography on the Edge", Amsterdam (5–26 June 1999).[32] The work's first appearance seems to have been in "Tätatät – Ny nordisk kunst" at Bildmuseet, Umeå (8 June–7 September 1997). Available installation views from this two-year exhibition period, as well as material showing the photomontage in Arke's studio, confirm that the work's format shifted variously. A slide found in Arke's archive shows a version where the boards are cropped, leaving out the original captions, and in which one nude was exchanged with another (ill. 9).[33]

Ill. 9 Slide found in Pia Arke's archive. Today titled *Untitled (Arctic Hysteria sketch)*, c. 1996–97. Collection Nuuk Art Museum. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

A conversation with Arke's brother Erik Gant reveals that she gave him two of the seven photostat elements (*An Arctic Bronze* and *Clark*) while doing his PhD at Aarhus University in the 1990s. He had pinned them to the wall in his office. When he left he donated them to the university, upon which they were mounted on cardboard and displayed in the breakfast lounge, Gant seems to remember.[34] For the exhibition at Bildmuseet, curator Jan-Erik Lundström recalls that *Arctic Hysteria IV* was mounted on cheap board, possibly KAPA.[35] In a museum context, KAPA is rarely used as support material for photographs of collectible/museological value but rather as affordable, lightweight material easily to be installed and discarded of. This makes it suitable for temporary exhibition presentations and appears to have been the case for the materialization of Arke's work in the exhibition.

A photograph from spring 1999 shows Arke in her studio with seven separate reproductions of Peary's photographs mounted on cardboard (ill. 10).

Ill. 10 Pia Arke showing the photomontage *Arctic Hysteria IV* to curator Johan Swinnen during his studio visit to her apartment in Copenhagen, spring 1999. Photo: Johan Swinnen. Courtesy Søren Arke Petersen.

With Arke holding one of the plates, it is evident that they were almost life-size, in contrast to a 76 x 200 cm reproduction made for Arke's survey exhibition in 2010 (today The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art collection, Humlebæk). According to the curators, the reproduction was made from a colour photo of *Arctic Hysteria IV* at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen (ill. 1).[36]

This practice of assembly and reassembly, of creating a work in "a constant state of flux", to refer back to Edwards, I argue, can be seen as a cathartic method of trauma processing and a practice of visual repatriation. Thus, the physical manifestation of the artwork becomes of minor importance because it constantly evolves and transforms itself. It is rather one step amongst several, where an old version gets abandoned in favour of another one, an 'ephemeral manifestation' of a continuous process of reclaiming ownership and coming to terms with one's own legacy.

Consequently, to this day, none of the "original" works/boards have been retrieved. This will presumably not happen in the future because *Arctic Hysteria IV* was not 'lost' but rather abandoned, where elements from it were discarded or recycled. This could also explain why there are no physical traces found regarding works that could have preceded *Arctic Hysteria IV*, such as an *Arctic Hysteria II* or *III*. Arke's video *Arctic Hysteria* (1996) appears to be the only still "physically" existing original work that engages with the phenomenon – a performance recorded on 25 March 1996 showing Arke crawling naked on a photograph of a Kalaallit landscape which she eventually destroys.

The programme of the conference *Kunst og sted* (Art and place), organised by the late Eli Høydalsnes at UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø (25–26 April 1997), gives evidence of Arke's participation together with her brother Erik Gant. Arke's presentation was entitled *Arctic Hysteria III* and followed Gant's *Eskimoer og kunst* (Eskimos and art).[37] Recent

conversations and retrieved notes from conference participants reveal that *Arctic Hysteria III* evolved around two images/narratives.[38] Firstly, an early twentieth century photograph of long-bearded Western men standing in a ring and laughing at a naked Kalaallit woman lying and screaming in the snow.[39] Such a photograph is in fact reminiscent of Dick's critical examination of photographs depicting episodes of *pibloqtoq* archived at The Peary MacMillan Arctic Museum and Arctic Studies Center.[40] Secondly, an image of a cliff that had white marks on it. The story Arke told was about three brothers who had urinated on it and that the ammonia had left their traces in the landscape.[41] Arke expressed, presumably with an underlying sense of humour, that Greenland's landscape was thus altered by human piss. These recollections reveal *Arctic Hysteria III*'s performative character, even if no other archival material nor written literature could be retrieved by the author. But it shows that Arke engaged with and processed her engagement with 'Arctic hysteria' in various formats and over an extended period of time, as Arke's long-term friend and scholar Kirsten Thisted has also highlighted.[42]

Conclusion

Arctic Hysteria IV made its last public appearance in 1999, thus eight years prior to Arke's death. Few traces of *Arctic Hysteria* photomontage versions remain, similar to other artworks from the same period classified as 'lost' (*Black & White Ornament* (1996), *Krabbe/Jensen I* (1997), *Krabbe/Jensen II* (1997) or *Untitled (Krabbe/Arke/Jensen montage sketches)* (1997)). Those artworks that do 'survive' from this period are predominantly housed in public and private collections. It appears that their survival was guaranteed because they were acquired or donated close to their period of making.[43]

Whereby those artworks that did not, could continue their life as 'raw material', as material that would get continuously recycled – if only conceptually – and sometimes reappear in/as other works. Labelling *Arctic Hysteria IV* and other works as 'lost' would thus appear misleading and rather contribute to mythologizing Arke's work.

But what this work does today, precisely because it only lives on through documentation and because, as I have argued, it never became a permanent artwork, is that it can become a metaphor for loss, belonging and recuperation. *Arctic Hysteria IV* is emblematic for Arke's practice of reappropriation leading to visual repatriation and, in a sense, personal reconciliation. Thus, her work has not lost in actuality. On the contrary, I believe that the increased interest for Arke's work happens when voices for decolonization are becoming even more articulated, and Western powers must not only face their non-glorious role in colonial history but also pro-actively work for shifting still prevalent power imbalances, issue public apologies and repatriate what does not belong to them. Arke shows us how artistic practises are valuable contributions to pushing these processes.

Noter

1 This story is told through an article in *Weekendavisen*, 29 April–6 May 1999, reprinted in *Tupilakosaurus. An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research*, ed. Kuratorisk Aktion (Copenhagen: Kuratorisk Aktion, 2012), 75.

2 Lyle Dick, "'Pibloktoq' (Arctic Hysteria): A Construction of European-Inuit Relations?," *Arctic Anthropology* 32, no. 2 (1995): 1–2.

3 Pia Arke, *Ethno-Aesthetics/Etnoæstetik*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Ark, Pia Arke Selskabet & Kuratorisk Aktion, 2010 (1995)), 27.

4 A book entitled *The Arctic Hysterias of the North Alaskan Eskimo* by Edward F. Foulks (1972) was found in Arke's library posthumously. It is unknown when she acquired the book. But all her (known) works referring to 'Arctic hysteria' follow her visit to New York.
5 Dick, "'Pibloktoq' (Arctic Hysteria)," 11.
6 Arke, *Ethno-Aesthetics/Etnoæstetik*, 23–24.
7 Stefan Jonsson, "On Pia Arke," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 44, (2017): 16, https://doi.org/10.1086/695509.
8 Louisiana Museum, *Pia Arke*, exhibition catalogue (Humlebæk: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 112; *Tupilakosaurus*, 86.
9 Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 1.
10 Edwards and Hart, "Introduction."
11 Elizabeth Edwards, "Objects of Affect: Photography Beyond the Image," *Annual review of anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 225, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092611-145708.
12 "Atlantikum // Atlanterhavet. Pia Arke Jessie Kleemann Jeannette Ehlers," (Nuuk: Nuuk Kunstmuseum, 2021), 1; Anders Keuger, "Värstascenario. Fyra konstnärer från Grönland / Worst-Case Scenario. Four Artists from Greenland," ed. Lunds konsthall, exhibition catalogue (Lund: Lunds konsthall, 2021), 126; James Andrew Billingsley, "An Arboretum at the End of an Epoch," *Avery Review*, no. 46 (April 2020); "Threshold(s)," CAMP Center for Art and Migration Politics, 2020, accessed 08.06.2020, http://campcph.org/past/thresholds; Carl Martin Faurby, "Foreword," in *Pia Arke. Wonderland*, ed. Kunsthall Trondheim (Trondheim: Kunsthall Trondheim, 2019), 4; Jonsson, "On Pia Arke," 13; David Winfield Norman, "Do you think it's over?: Performance and the 'third place' of Greenland's art history" (Master of Arts, University of British Columbia, 2016), 23; Mette Sandbye, "Blasting the Language of Colonialism: Three Contemporary Photo-Books on Greenland," *KULT. Postkolonial Temaserie* 14 (2016): 77; Kirsten Thisted, "The Hate in the Body. Language, Gender, and National Affiliation in New Greenlandic Literature," *The History of Nordic Women's Literature* (12.10.2016), https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2016/10/12/the-hate-in-the-body-language-gender-and-national-affiliation-in-new-greenlandic-literature/; Kirsten Thisted, "De-framing the Indigenous Body. Ethnography, Landscape and Cultural Belonging in the Art of Pia Arke," *Nordlit* 16, no. 1 (05/01 2012): 291, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7557/13.2318; Vanessa Gregory, "The Unforgettable Pia Arke," *Hakai Magazine* (14.02.2017): 11.
13 Charissa von Harringa, "'Arke-Typical': Dialogues in Art, Anthropology and the Writing of Self in the Work of Pia Arke" (Master Thesis, Concordia University, 2016); Stefan Jonsson, "Disclosing the World Order: Decolonial Gestures in the Artistic Work of Pia Arke," *Third Text* 27, no. 2 (2013), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.772349; Thisted, "De-framing the Indigenous Body."
14 Jonsson, "On Pia Arke"; Mette Sandbye, "Making Pictures Talk: The Re-Opening of a Dead City through Vernacular Photography as a Catalyst for the Performance of Memories," in *Tupilakosaurus*.
15 There exists no published material to date mentioning work following *Arctic Hysteria IV*.
16 Robert E. Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, vol. 2 (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1898).
17 Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, 2:404.
18 This came to light in the 1980s when researcher A. Counter tried to rectify the role of African-American explorer Henson alongside Peary. The website of Peary's great-grandson gives elucidating information. "Homepage of Hivshu (Robert E. Peary II)," Hivshu (Robert E. Peary II), accessed 02.03.2022, https://www.hivshu.net/robert-peary.
19 Peary's quote was taken from *Robert E. Peary Papers. Papers Relating to Arctic Expeditions, 1886-1909. Greenland 1886, Notebook 1886, Equipment Lists, Notebook, Planning Notes, 1885-86, Notes dates 13 October 1885* in Dick, "'Pibloktoq'," 15.
20 Peary, *Northward over the "Great Ice"*, 2:361.
21 Pia Arke, *Stories from Scoresbysund: Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping*, ed. Frederikke Hansen & Tone Olaf Nielsen (Copenhagen: Pia Arke Selskabet & Kuratorisk aktion, 2010 (2003)), 86–90.
22 Brook Andrew and Jessica Neath, "Encounters with Legacy Images: Decolonising and Re-imagining Photographic Evidence from the Colonial Archive," *History of Photography* 42, no. 3 (2018): 220, https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2018.1440933.
23 I use the term 'raw material' as proposed by Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction: Observations from the Coal-Face," in *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 5.

24 Kristen Dobbin, "'Exposing Yourself a Second Time': Visual Repatriation in Scandinavian Sápmi," *Visual communication quarterly* 20, no. 3 (2013), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2013.820585; A. Smith David, "From Nunavut to Micronesia: Feedback and Description, Visual Repatriation and Online Photographs of Indigenous Peoples," *Partnership* 3, no. 1 (2008); Jocelyne Dudding, "Visual repatriation and photo-elicitation: recommendations on principles and practices for the museum worker," *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 17 (2005); Edwards, "Talking visual histories: Introduction"; Ann Fienup-Riordan, "Yup'ik Elders in Museums: Fieldwork Turned on Its Head," *Arctic anthropology* 35, no. 2 (1998); Ann Fienup-Riordan, *The living tradition of Yup'ik masks: Agayuliyararput (our way of making prayer)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press / Anchorage Museum of History and Art, 1996).
25 Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers, "Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities. A Routledge Reader*, ed. Alison K. Brown Brown and Laura Peers (London, New York: Routledge, 2003).
26 Dobbin, "'Exposing Yourself a Second Time'," 128.
27 Dudding, "Visual repatriation and photo-elicitation," 228.
28 Edwards, "Talking visual histories: Introduction," 86.
29 Evident through Arke's name change from Gant (father's name) to Arque (mother's name), then turned into 'Arke'. In *Ethno-Aesthetics* she writes from the perspective of "us Greenlanders", clearly identifying with her Kalaallit heritage.
30 Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, *Photography's Other Histories*, Objects/histories, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2003).
31 Roberta McGrath, "Reviewing the Gaze," in *A Companion to Photography*, ed. Stephen Bull (Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 189.
32 *Tupilakosaurus*, 361–63.
33 Today Nuuk Art Museum collection.
34 Email conversation between Erik Gant and the author, July–August 2021.
35 Email conversation between Jan-Erik Lundström and the author, September–October 2021.
36 *Tupilakosaurus*, 86.
37 Eli Høydalsnes, *Program "Kunst og Sted"*, (Tromsø: UiT The Arctic University of Norway, 1997).
38 Eli Høydalsnes, *Kunst og sted. Rapport fra konferanse 25.–26. april 1997*, (UiT The Arctic University of Norway, 1998).
39 Email conversation between Jan Martin Berg/Elin Haugdal and the author, October 2021; email conversation between Jan von Bonsdorff and the author, May 2021.
40 Dick, "'Pibloktoq'," 20–21.
41 Email conversation between Jan Martin Berg/Elin Haugdal and the author; email conversation between Jan von Bonsdorff and the author.
42 Thisted, "De-framing the Indigenous Body," 289.
43 The database *Kunstindeks Danmark & Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon* registers artworks acquired by public collections including date of acquisition (when available). Arke's registered works show that the majority were acquired in the same year of making. Few were acquired later, the latest four years after its making. The same applies to works in the Moderna Museet collection, Stockholm. *Kronborg-Suite* (1996) Arke donated in 1996. *Nature Morte* alias *Perlustrations* (1994) Arke donated in 1995.