

Blasting the Language of Colonialism: Three Contemporary Photo-Books on Greenland

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ABSTRACT:

Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, photography was among the main tools for communicating knowledge about Greenland to the rest of the world, not least to the Danish public. Photography was originally used by Arctic explorers as well as by the colonial system. With few exceptions, such as the documentary photographs and films of Jette Bang, the visual image transmitted through photography was highly stereotypical: ice and wild nature, peopled by tough sealers and hunters. Documentary photography and art in general, from Greenland as well as Denmark, usually confirmed this image. Recently, however, new narratives have begun emerging among contemporary artists, many of whom use photography in radically new ways to construct an alternative ‘ethno-aesthetics’, to use Pia Arke’s term. This article discusses three photography books, published almost simultaneously: Pia Arke’s *Scoresbysundhistorier* (2003)/*Stories from Scoresbysund* (2010), Jacob Aue Sobol’s *Sabine* (2004), and Julie Edel Hardenberg’s *Den stille mangfoldighed/The Quiet Diversity* (2005). It brings them together to show how they simultaneously follow recent developments in contemporary global art as well as step into the tradition of that most referential of media, photography, and manage to ‘blast’ this tradition from within, thereby representing an important renewal of the discourse of photography.

A preface starting in 2014

‘Enough of that post-colonial piece of shit,’² says one of the five protagonists and narrating voices of *Homo Sapienne*, the much-acclaimed novel by Greenlandic author Niviaq Korneliussen (Korneliussen 2014: 68). The novel was published in 2014, when the author was only 24 years old, and it was nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize in 2015. This quotation is articulated

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² The book was originally written in Greenlandic and then translated into Danish by its author. Much of the text appears in English as well. For instance, this quote appears isolated in English in the midst of the Danish text.

by Inuk in a letter to his best friend Arnaq, who – in Inuk’s eyes – blames everyone else for her own misery and alcoholism – and ultimately for her friend’s desertion: her father who abused her as a child, her mother who did not intervene, the teacher, her boss, the system in general.

In various interviews following the book’s release, the author expressed regret over the lack of literature written by Greenlanders in general and concerning youth culture and homosexuality in particular. As a result, she needed to write the novel herself. The author studied social sciences at the university in Nuuk, Greenland’s capital, and although the novel is not *about* postcolonialism, the author is clearly aware of this position. By arguing against ‘that post-colonial piece of shit’, the author indirectly introduces postcolonialism as a contextual framework for the novel. As she says in an interview, referring to the nationalism and hatred toward Denmark that she sometimes experiences in Greenland:

We have to improve collaboration to get anywhere. Isn’t it time to move on and away from the thought of us as a former colony? The older generations should, of course, be allowed to regard themselves as victims, but it does inhibit all of us when someone thinks this way [...] For me, it is important to give the Danes the possibility to gain more differentiated insight into the actual conditions in Greenland. Most Danes know nothing about life in Greenland. (Scherrebeck 2014, *my translation*).

In the novel, we follow five young people over the course of a few days in their daily lives in Nuuk, struggling with love affairs, friendship, and other social relationships – trying to identify themselves and their sexuality. The novel is about being young *in general*, including in Greenland. It is about universal themes such as love, sexuality, and the search for identity. Another acclaimed aspect of the novel is that *Homo Sapienne* is written in a collage-like form, mixing not only the voices of five very different narrators and including direct speech as well as diary text forms but also combining languages (Greenlandic, Danish, English) and appropriating mobile phone text dialogues, song lyrics, and a handful of photographs.

Three earlier examples

This novel is a recent example of a current in contemporary visual art, music, theatre, and literature in Greenland, starting already in the 1990s, one in which artists in many and varied forms manoeuvre between the local and the global, more or less informed by ‘post-colonial shit’. Political scientist Ulrik Pram Gad has suggested the term post-postcolonialism as a way to challenge any

essentialism as well as the constant referencing of Denmark as the colonial ‘Other’ in an identity policy occurring in Greenland today and around the years leading up to the 2009 self-rule government (Gad 2009). The visual arts, which are the focus of this article, have been dominated by depictions of the landscape populated by traditional Inuit such as sealers and hunters. This seems to have been the most common discourse among both Danes and Greenlanders (Thisted 2005, Trondheim 2007, 2011). Recently, however, other innovative narratives, both in terms of form and content, have begun emerging among contemporary younger artists. According to Jørgen Trondheim, the 1990s were already a period in Greenlandic art in which ‘the conceptual and reflexive radically entered the art works’ (Trondheim 2007: 249, *my translation*). Many of these artists use photography in radically new ways to construct an alternative ‘ethno-aesthetics’, to use the term coined by the artist Pia Arke.

This article introduces and compares three such artworks, more precisely three books published within a period of just two years: Pia Arke’s *Scoresbysundhistorier/Stories from Scoresbysund* (2003),³ Jacob Aue Sobol’s *Sabine* (2004), and Julie Edel Hardenberg’s *Den stille mangfoldighed/The Quiet Diversity* (2005). Although various amounts of text are included, particularly in Arke’s book, photography is the main expressive tool uniting these three books. Other scholars have pointed to these three books as seminal artworks in order to formulate and discuss what Gad calls ‘post-postcolonialism’. Birgit Kleist Petersen (Petersen 2008/9) has compared Sobol’s book with that of Hardenberg, and Lill-Ann Körber draws a parallel to Arke in her analysis of Hardenberg (Körber 2009). By including them all here, I aim to highlight the importance of the medium of photography in a process of what I call ‘blasting the language of colonialism’, precisely because this is the medium most used to represent Greenland and thus the medium that formulated the hitherto highly conventional colonial image of Greenland.

Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, photography was among the main tools for communicating knowledge about Greenland to the rest of the world, not least to the Danish public (Kleivan 2004). Few outsiders had actually visited Greenland. With few exceptions, such as the documentary photographs and films of Jette Bang, the visual image transmitted through photography was highly stereotypical: ice and wild nature peopled by tough sealers and hunters.

³ The book was originally published in Danish in 2003 and posthumously republished in English in 2010 but with the text in both Danish and Greenlandic in the back of the book.

Although there have been indigenous photographers in Greenland since the early twentieth century, this image has been the most dominant, including from ‘within’ (Kleivan 2004, Thisted 2005).

Arke’s book mixes family photography, museum archive photographs, the artist’s own photographs, interviews, and other textual records in order to tell the hitherto untold story of Scoresbysund on Greenland’s east coast. Sobol documents his life as a sealer and his love story with the Greenlandic girl Sabine in a rough, personal snapshot style, which challenges the classical documentary tradition. Hardenberg uses a variety of photographic forms to discuss what it means to be a Greenlander in a globalised world. I aim to show how they together – through a mix of text and photography – present and critically discuss ‘another Greenland’ and offer a new aesthetics, combining reflections of place, identity, nationality, and Greenlandic ‘particularity’ with a deconstruction of the same issues. They do so by the means of photography, using the whole representational range of the medium, from historical archival images (Arke), to conceptual deadpan registrations (Hardenberg), to a documentary snapshot style involving the personal investment of the photographer (Sobol). These photographic strategies have dominated the international art scene for a couple of decades now, from Christian Boltanski’s use of the historical archive, and Bernd and Hilla Becher’s conceptual documentarism, to Richard Billingham’s family snapshots. Whereas my three Greenlandic examples might be familiar to a more local or scholarly specific audience, my intention is also to introduce these contemporary Greenlandic currents and artists to a larger international art audience.

From home rule to self rule

The 1721 expedition of Danish-Norwegian missionary Hans Egede is seen as the first step towards Greenland officially becoming a Danish colony in 1814 and a county of Denmark in 1953. The Danish parliament granted Greenland a home rule government in 1979, and 30 years later, in 2009, a new Greenlandic referendum strengthened the self-rule system. This more recent augmentation of Greenland’s autonomy and its partial separation from Denmark has also opened up new currents of nationalism and discussions of identity politics. The work of all three artists started, of course, many years before the publication of their books. As noted above, they can be seen in the general context of a current of more conceptually and politically informed art emerging in the 1990s (Trondheim 2011). Looking at the dates of these book projects, it is nevertheless interesting to note that, in 2004, Greenland’s home rule government launched a report ‘on cultural policy in which it

recommended that a unique Greenlandic identity be mapped out, beginning with Greenland's cultural heritage, namely, the hunting culture with everything it includes in the form of kayak sailing, drum dancing, traditional clothing, original singing and so on' (Salto 2005: 22). This quotation is from the introduction to Hardenberg's book, in which the author Iben Salto offers a critical interpretation of the report. As Salto argues, the report maps out the recent, mostly institutional, currents and developments within the arts and formulates a strategy for further development. The report highlights the importance of supporting Greenlandic culture and heritage, and one of its proposals is that traditional craft practices such as dogsled building, wool treatment, leather embroidery, and the drum dance should be taught at schools. The aim of the new cultural policy is introduced and concluded upon in the following manner:

A new cultural-political goal and content will largely be based on the population possessing a clear consciousness of its history, living in and being enlightened about its present, and having visions and hope for its future. We must turn toward developing the spiritual values and emphasise spiritual strength and strength as a people in connection with the movement toward autonomy. The government will prepare an action plan for the coming years, with its point of departure in Inuit's characteristics in an international context and our own identity as Greenlanders. (Grønlands Landsting 2004: 5, *my translation*)

On the basis of the cultural tradition that we call our own, we can assess the external influences and sort out that which we cannot use and transform those potentials that we find useful in our country.

Globalisation simultaneously provides us with an opportunity to focus on our own cultural heritage and identify the pillars that have borne us to that Greenland of which we were born. In other words, we must document the pillars of our cultural development. (Grønlands Landsting 2004: 29, *my translation*)

There is a considerable gap between Korneliussen's 'new' and experimental prose and her highly informed but simultaneously deliberate post-postcolonialism (as argued by both the fictional character Inuk and the author in various interviews) on the one hand and the focus on cultural heritage and specifically Greenlandic tradition (almost as a defence against globalisation, as underlined in the policy report) on the other hand. The three artworks in question, produced more than ten years prior to Korneliussen's novel, could almost be regarded as anti-responses to the simultaneous policy request in the way in which they simultaneously map and deconstruct the uniquely Greenlandic values, history, identity, and tradition – whatever these may be. Two of the artists, Arke and Hardenberg, use a collage-like form, not unlike Korneliussen, but in their

integration of various photographic archival sources as well as their own photographs and/or texts, they go even further in their urge to construct as multifaceted a narrative as possible.

I do not intend to open up a major discussion as to what it means to relate to the question of postcolonialism in the context of Greenland. I will not examine whether this term implies a certain chronology, a quest for a new identity politics ‘after’, a general criticism of colonialism, or a deconstruction of all positions in order to arrive at some kind of (utopian) phase ‘after’ or ‘without’ colonialism – which could serve as an argument against both Korneliussen and Gad’s terminologies. The three artists in question are all critical towards the concept of postcolonialism, and none of them see colonialism as something that is ‘over’. My aim – and my reason for using the term ‘blasting’ - is to show how these artists simultaneously relate to colonialism, appropriate and deconstruct its language (photography), and point towards new and critical positions.

Archival ethno-aesthetics

The historical archive – and its interpretation – has traditionally been used to construct official history. But as Jacques Derrida reminds us in his *Archive Fever*, ‘there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation’ (Jacques Derrida 1995, quoted by Merewether 2006: 13). To question what is pronounced within the official archives of modern society, to research the difference between what is said and what is not said, to question the already said, to map and to uncover the archive, Michel Foucault developed the concept of ‘archaeology’ as a practice in his 1969 book *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, a source of inspiration for many contemporary artists and thinkers such as Derrida. Archival forms, often including both photography and text (as well as readymade objects), have recently been used by artists working critically or deconstructively with historically or politically ‘difficult’ subject matters. Major artists such as Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie, and Gerhard Richter have re-read the Holocaust and Nazism through vernacular archival photographs, thereby including a perspective of the everyday and the ordinary as a corrective to the official history. Other artists such as Fred Wilson or Glen Ligon have stirred up white American history from the perspective of black culture, and over the past decades many artists from former European colonies in Africa and Asia have rewritten history from a postcolonial perspective using archival methods. Although Denmark has a history as a colonising nation, these strategies have not – to put it mildly –

dominated Danish art. It is only recently that artists such as Nanna Debois Buhl and Jeanette Ehlers have investigated and questioned Denmark's relationship with its former colony, the Danish West Indies, now the United States Virgin Islands.

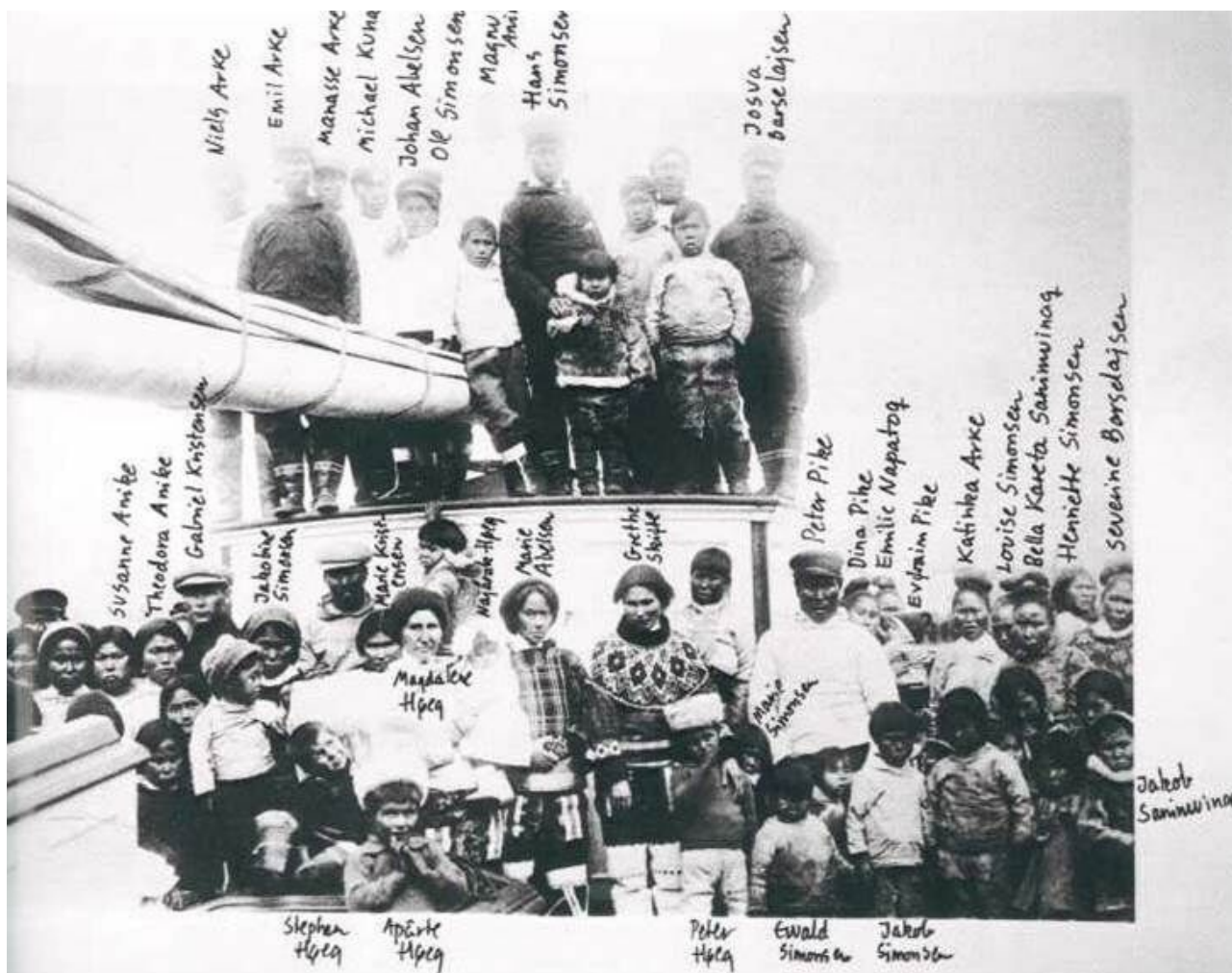
Danish-Greenlandic Pia Arke (1958-2007) was among the first local artist in the 1990s to use such archival artistic methods to place the postcolonial perspective in a Danish context in a coherent, intelligent, and artistically innovative manner. She shed important light on previously unarticulated, displaced aspects of the Danish colonial past, and she did so by – among other strategies – making the forgotten archival photographs speak. In her work, especially the art book *Stories from Scoresbysund*, she appropriated existing photographs and related them to oral culture and personal memory.

In various formats, but especially in a small booklet, which was first published in 1995 (her graduate thesis from the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen), Pia Arke uses the term 'ethno-aesthetics' to describe her own artistic practice as a position from which identity can be created.⁴ She prefers this to the term postcolonial 'because it is a messy concept, a concept that inspires further work. As already suggested, it concerns two groups of disciplines: on the one hand, ethnology, ethnography, anthropology; on the other hand, artistic practice, art theory, aesthetics' (Arke 2010a/1995: 14). In the text, she criticises the term 'postcolonialism' because 'it represents colonialism as a thing of the past' (26), and she describes how she, as neither the ethnographic object nor the subject, must find 'a third place' (28) – a place she found through being an artist and addressing her own background as an artist. The prefix 'ethno-' in Arke's program of 'ethno-aesthetics' does not refer to a specific Greenlandicness. Arke instead defines it in anti-terms such as 'what we are not' (12), meaning belonging to 'Western' culture. In fact, she rejects an us-versus-them dichotomy and instead defines a strategy to 'play with the pieces of different worlds' (28), 'a mixed-up way' (13) directed 'against' the old kind of traditional ethnic art: 'In this way the ethnics intensify their ethno-aesthetics, expose it to itself, take control of it in a confusing operation of reproductions, thematisations and loving suppression' (21).

Stories from Scoresbysund

⁴ In the text, she also lists a new generation of artists – 'the art of the present' – who are not particularly preoccupied with being Greenlandic: 'These are artists like Aka Høgh, Arnannuaq Høgh, Esajas Isaksen, Anne-Birthe Hove, Jessie Kleemann, Kiisat Lund, Buuti Petersen, Miki Jacobsen, Kunuk Platou, Ina Rosing and myself' (19).

Pia Arke's native town Scoresbysund (Ittoqqortoormit in Greenlandic) has a population of around 600.⁵ The town is so geographically remote and isolated that food and supplies are shipped there just twice a year. The town was founded in 1925 when 100 Inuit from ten families in Angmagssalik – including Pia Arke's grandparents – were transported 1,000 kilometres north to form a Danish outpost in Northeast Greenland before the Norwegians could claim the area (ill. 1).



They did not know where they were going or why they were going there. The official story is that the Danish government moved the people to prevent overpopulation in Angmagssalik. The truth is that the settlement was planned due to a territorial dispute between the Danish and Norwegian states, both of which claimed unpopulated Northeast Greenland. It was thus important for the Danish government to colonise and claim Scoresbysund. In August 1924, the site was settled by 21

⁵ I have previously written about this book project (Sandbye 2010). The subsequent more factual description of the book is based on this article.

people from Denmark, representing the so-called 'Scoresbysund Committee'. On September 4, 1925, a ship with the 100 Inuit settlers arrived. The territorial conflict over East Greenland ended in 1933 when the International Court of Justice in the Hague settled the issue in Denmark's favour.

Today, this isolated town suffers from major problems, including alcoholism, unemployment, a high suicide rate, and even murder. The story of Scoresbysund's founding is little known by either Danes or locals. The town's residents do not speak about it, just as they do not speak about the social problems that occur there. It is a town with no collective memory – or rather, it was, before Arke's book. Arke's mother was born and raised in Scoresbysund, and Arke herself was born and lived there until the age of three (ill.2).



Foto: Apotekerfrue Thyra Juul

Gerda med sin farmor og min oldemor Justine, august 1925

Pia Arke begins her book as follows: ‘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 geopolitical are to some extent intermingled here, somewhere in the middle of it all, in the middle of nowhere’ (Arke 2010b/2003: 11). The book (originally 164 pages; 284 in the tri-lingual 2010 edition) consists primarily of photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, mostly taken by members of the Danish colonial Committee (ill. 3 + 4).



In addition, the book includes Arke’s own photographs of people she met when travelling there as well as photos of the town taken by others, from the town’s birth up until today. These include a series of portraits from 1947 by the craftsman Børge Meyer and one from 1959 by the Danish doctor Jens Nielsen. The book also includes Arke’s own text, a collection of the early maps of the site, and a text written by the Swedish author Stefan Jonsson, who analyses the construction of these maps within their wider historical and geopolitical context. Jonsson’s more academic and general analysis represents a framework for the artist’s more personal narrative. Her text includes archival material and interviews conducted with locals from Scoresbysund, Danes who visited the town, and descendants of Committee members. Most of the photographic material from the 1920s and 1930s shown in the book was found in Denmark, either in public archives or obtained from descendants of the members of the first colonial Committee, who were contacted by the artist and allowed her to replicate the old private photo albums. Arke then travelled to Scoresbysund, taking with her one thousand photographs, with the help of which she identified people and built up a local archive. This working process is described in the text. Arke first revisited her childhood home in 1997, when she experienced a remarkable lack of historical consciousness and little willingness to discuss the past among the town’s residents and her family members.

Arke interviewed town residents, both young and old, and assembled the private stories of the nameless people in many of the archival photographs. She also photographed the now elderly children of the town's first residents, many of whom she found in the town's small retirement home (ill. 5).



Being artistic and not anthropological, her work represents less a recovery of authenticity than a complex imaginary inventory. Referring to her own concept of ethno-aesthetics as a 'mixed-up way' of representation, the book bridges all dualities: It is at once an archive of photographs and a deconstruction of the idea of the photographic archive as the straight way to historical truth. It is art, and it is anthropology. It is a recovery of Arke's personal history, beginning with her grandparents, and it is a much larger political analysis. It is a specific narrative, and it is a postcolonial reflection. The book is about giving voice to hitherto untold stories, and it is full of meta-reflections upon its own processes. One example is when Maria at the retirement home suddenly finds herself unable to speak or remember her own past. In order to justify Danish colonial history, Scoresbysund has been reduced to a name on a map as well as an actual town with major social problems and no mental past, no memory. Arke fills in the gap by giving the town a memory.

But what is a place anyway? In opposition to traditional geography, Arke describes 'place' as an ongoing memory process, which must be told and re-told in order to be a place at all. One can

describe Arke's work as a 'place-making activity' (Cresswell 2004: 5). In his book *Place: A Short Introduction*, dating from the same period as Arke's work, the British geographer Tim Cresswell describes the field of human geography as 'the study of places' (Cresswell 2004: 1), but place seems to be an activity rather than a static, rationally defined 'space'. Such activities must also include memory, handed-down narratives, and everyday experiences. In today's academic circles, these insights might not seem as eye-opening as they were ten years ago and even earlier. Place as narrative process and lived experience characterise Arke's 'mixed-up project.' An important aim of the book is to identify the names and stories of the actual people in the nameless photographs in Danish archives such as the National Museum. It also seeks to recollect often traumatic memories of the past and return these memories to the town. Arke reflects upon her particular use of photography because it plays 'an important part of the language of colonialism' (11). Anthropologists and art historians such as Elizabeth Edwards (1992, 2001), Sigrid Lien (Edwards and Lien 2014), and Christopher Pinney (2011) have demonstrated how photography has historically been used as a tool of power to represent 'the colonial other' in the museum, in public archives, and in history books. At the same time, they have demonstrated photography's potential to articulate histories other than those of their immediate appearances if we practice a Foucauldian 'archaeology of knowledge'. Kirsten Thisted (2005) and Birna Kleivan (2004) have respectively pointed to the importance of photography in Danish-Greenlandic colonial power relations. Pia Arke states: 'I make the history of colonialism part of *my* history in the only way I know, namely by taking it personally' (13). With this book, Arke depicts the town as a place of personal memory, longing, and belonging while at the same time carrying out a constructivist critique of political and ideological place production related to colonial history.

The Quiet Diversity

Like Pia Arke, Julie Edel Hardenberg (1971) has a Danish father and a Greenlandic mother. She was born and raised by her mother in Greenland, studied art in Finland, and took her degrees in Trondheim and (like Arke) at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen. Hardenberg, however, has returned to Nuuk, where she lives today. Like Arke, Hardenberg uses photography, video, installations, and objects as well as text, and she has published several art books. In various texts and interviews gathered on her own website, Hardenberg expresses a postcolonial point of departure for her own work, and at least in 2009 she lamented that this position in her opinion was rare and

overlooked in contemporary Greenland, apart from by Pia Arke, whose work was unknown to most Greenlanders before the touring retrospective exhibition *Tupilakosaurus* in 2010.⁶

Hardenberg's book *The Quiet Diversity* (2005, nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize in 2006) is an explicit response to the aforementioned national policy discussion on the importance of keeping a specific Greenlandicness alive. Despite her critique of the lack of critical awareness in Greenland, Hardenberg's book nearly became a bestseller in Greenland, and the first edition was sold out within a few months (Körber 2011). Birgit Kleist Petersen calls it 'a necessary book that was published at the right moment when the nationalist rhetoric is increasingly sharpened on the political scene' (Petersen 2009: 93).

As the title indicates, Hardenberg regards being a Greenlander as an issue of diversity, just as it would be for someone from anywhere else on the globe. Her own book's foreword is illustrated by three coloured scraps, which I clearly remember from my own childhood in Denmark in the 1970s, depicting the stereotype of the Josephine Baker-style tropical 'Hawaiian girl', the Spanish gypsy/flamenco dancer, and the Japanese girl in a kimono (ill. 6-8).



⁶ www.hardenberg.dk. See, for instance, the two e-mail interviews from 2009 conducted by Danish author Dy Plambeck. *Tupilakosaurus* was curated posthumously by Kuratorisk Aktion.

As illustrations to the introduction by the author Iben Salto (now Mondrup), Hardenberg provides a series of twelve self-portraits in which she poses as global racial stereotypes, including as an Arab in a niqab, a Native American, an Indian, a Russian, and a Peruvian. These are followed by twelve portraits of people wearing the same Greenlandic parka coat. At first glance, one thus takes these to be Greenlanders, but one soon realises that the faces look anything but Greenlandic.

From the start, Hardenberg hereby indicates that her book is not just about discussing Greenlandic identity; it is about problematising all kinds of racial, gender, and identity stereotypes. Apart from the foreword and the introduction, the book's 200 pages consist solely of photographs. The final photograph shows a young Greenlandic woman carrying a newborn baby (ill. 9).



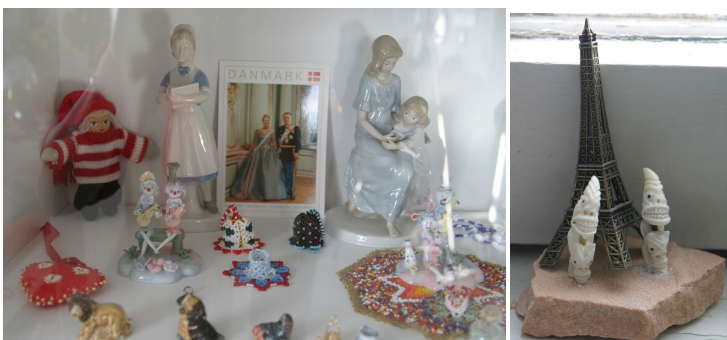
She is photographed from behind, so that we see the back print of her t-shirt, with the words 'Plads til alle' ('Room for everyone'),⁷ indicating the prospect that the positive aspects of diversity will be recognised in the future.

⁷ Interestingly, Korneliussen's novel also ends with the birth of a new child at the Nuuk hospital, which brings hope for a better and more tolerant future for the protagonist of the final story.

In a kind of collage-form, not unlike those of Korneliussen and Arke, Hardenberg discusses what it means to be Greenlander in a globalised world, using a variety of photographic forms: These include many staged portraits of mixed couples or of members of the same family with very different hair and eye colours and other ‘ethnic’ features. There is a series of portraits in which the subject is ‘Playing Ethnic’ (as the title indicates) and a series of four portraits accompanied by the text ‘One of us is Canadian, guess who!’ (ill. 10, 11, 12, 13).



There are also more vernacular or snapshot-like portraits of faces of ‘Arctic mix’ (as the heading indicates). The portraits are followed by a series of photographs of home interiors and details of home decoration, photographed as dry, anthropological recordings, which is why I initially compared her strategy to that of the German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. Here we meet folkloristic, traditional, and touristic objects, such as wooden miniatures of sealers and kayaks, tupilaks, bead embroidery (the kinds of handicrafts mentioned by the governmental cultural report), side by side with the sorts of Catholic images that have become part of global fashion (even in Denmark’s Protestant culture), souvenirs from all over the world (such as a model of the Eiffel tower), magazine clippings with images of the Danish royal family, and an enormous variety of stuff in the generally rather ‘stuffed’ interiors (ill. 14 + 15).



To refer back to the quotations from Arke's *Ethno-Aesthetics*, this is art mixed with anthropology, and it is a strategy in which the 'ethno-' is exposed, reproduced, played with, thematised, and problematised.



Other series show pets in Greenland, street signs, house fronts (including the 'Hong Kong Café', (ill. 16)), and a menu from what could be this café or some other restaurant, with dishes including whale steak, Italian osso buco, lasagna, Swedish sausage pot, salmon with hollandaise, Bayonne ham, beef stroganoff, and something called 'Jamaica roast'. This is globalisation depicted in a simple and humorous manner.

Motifs generally or stereotypically connected with Greenland are not avoided. The wild, icy nature is included in a variety of landscape photos as well as close-ups of traditional bead embroidery. But in this context, it is an integral part of everyday life, of equal importance and scale as Jamaica roast and dressing up as a Danish soccer hooligan. By playing with the stereotype of the Inuit and with Inuit accessories, such as the fur coat, face painting, the flag, specific ritual jewellery, and so on, Hardenberg punctures and deflates the idea of an authentic Greenland and the Greenlander as

someone with a fixed and shared culture, identity, and history. Her Greenlander is instead someone with a hybrid and constantly fluctuating identity. The people portrayed in the book do indeed represent a quiet diversity, but at the same time the book blasts and questions all sorts of colonial and folkloristic representations and in so doing also represents a suggestion of what a new 'ethno-aesthetics' might be.

Both Hardenberg and Arke's books represent an investigative, novel, and varied use of the medium of photography and its indexical as well as narrative potentials. Their works braid together different narrative angles and genre expressions. Indirectly, they both critically engage with the referentiality of the medium as well as its use in colonial history, in which anonymous Inuit have been presented and objectified as 'types' instead of as individuals.⁸ In order to make sense of the archival photographs of the first Inuit inhabitants of Scoresbysund, one needs not just the names of their subjects but also their accompanying oral narratives. Sometimes, the memories and what we see in the image are contradictory, depending on who the artist asks. In the example of 'One of us is Canadian, guess who!' and in most of the portraits in her book, Hardenberg criticises not only racial stereotypes but also the conventional understanding of the photographic portrait as a particularly true or honest genre. But this medium criticism is not the main task of the projects. The fact that both artists in various ways puncture the referentiality of the medium does not mean that they fail to use photography productively. Within photography, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, there was an intense problematisation of the kind of objectivity and reality reference that has traditionally been associated with documentary and anthropological photography in particular – these being two dominant forms in terms of depictions of Greenland. Both artists seem to say that the photograph is a language just like any other: It can be manipulated, it lies, it can be used to serve ideological ends, it is no more 'true' than the written word, and its meaning is inextricably tied up with the context in which it appears. The artists thereby stand on the shoulders of critical theories of photography. A story of Scoresbysund, or of the diversity of contemporary Greenland composed of several different expressions and narrative tracks, may thus actually be perceived as 'more true' in all of its uneven complexity than would be claims of 'this is how it was'.

⁸ This is the main theme of Pia Arke's work *Arctic Hysteria IV*, 1997, a large montage of juxtaposed photographs appropriated from American explorer Robert E. Peary's 1898 book *Northward over the 'Great Ice'*. In Peary's book, the explorers are all dressed and named whereas the Inuit women are presented naked and unnamed, given nicknames such as 'An Arctic Bronze'.

Sabine

The book *Sabine* (2004) is quite different from the two others and is more traditional in form. Whereas both Arke and Hardenberg have more or less political intentions and are informed by theoretical discussions of nationality and postcolonialism, Sobol seeks to make a personal interpretation of his life in Greenland using and reinventing the language of documentary photography. Furthermore, because the book is not created by a Greenlander, I do not claim that this artwork is part of the Greenlandic art scene's discussions of identity politics. I briefly include the book as an example of a renewal of the more classical forms of photography, in contrast to Arke and Hardenberg's conceptually based art projects.⁹

Jacob Aue Sobol (1976), a Dane, moved to the tiny fishing village of Tiniteqilaaq in East Greenland for two years when he was 23 years old. He had originally planned to stay for just a couple of weeks, but he returned some months later and then stayed on for two years, primarily working as a hunter and fisherman and integrating himself into this village of around 150 inhabitants. While he was there, he also took photographs. In the book, Sobol documents his life as a sealer and his love story with the Greenlandic girl Sabine, using a rough, grainy personal snapshot style, which challenges the documentary tradition and its conventional image of Inuit culture. The book (120 pages, including 70 pages of photography) consists of large, untitled black-and-white photographs, followed by a large amount of text written by the photographer in a personal, fragmentary diary style. I quote one of the early entries in its entirety: 'I am in love. Sabine is 19 years old, I am 23. I have decided to stay in Tiniteqilaaq. I want to be trained as a sealer. Shoot seals and catch fish. Learn the East Greenlandic language. I have stopped photographing' (Sobol 2004: 79, *my translation*).

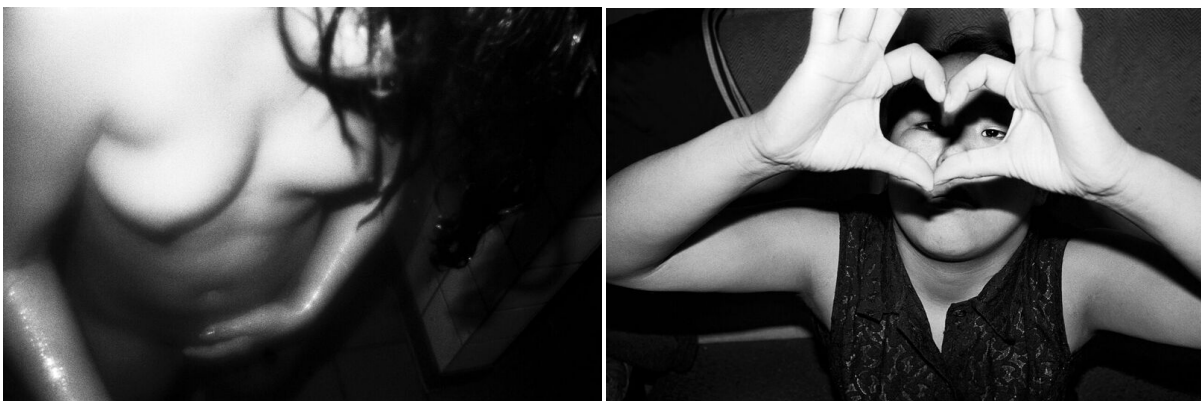
The photographs are taken both outside and indoors. Outside, Sobol focuses on details such as a dead seal, a small dog freezing (or dead?) in the snow, larger sections of the village and its

⁹ Sobol photographs in the tradition of personally engaged Swedish photographers Christer Strömholm and Anders Petersen or Japanese photographers such as Daido Moriyama. One could also compare his rough and unaesthetic snapshot style to the style of artists such as Richard Billingham. Another interesting photo book that predates Sobol's is Per Folkver and Frank Hvilsom's *From the Inner Strength/Af den indre styrke* from 1994, in which the author Hvilsom and the photographer Folkver depict everyday youth life in a larger town on the West Coast of Greenland in a hitherto-unseen, simultaneously rough and nuanced manner. Recently, a new generation of Greenlandic photographers have appeared, who also seek to depict Greenland in a more nuanced, universal, or everyday way, not unlike Korneliussen's prose. Together with Danish pioneer photographer Jette Bang's images from 1936 onwards, some of these names – Angu Motzfeldt, Jukke Rosing, and Inuuteq Storch – were presented at the exhibition 'Jette Bang in Dialogue' at the Center for Photography in Copenhagen in 2015.

surroundings, small wood houses in impassable snowstorms (ill. 17), and a funeral in the snow, all in a ‘muddy’ or ‘messy’ snapshot photography style.



This is not the conventional image of Greenlandic nature but instead one of tough and inhuman nature as a condition of everyday life. The indoor photographs show many intimate details of Sabine and her body, both naked and dressed: her torn nylon stockings; bodily details such as menstrual blood dripping down her bare legs; her mouth kissing the camera; her sometimes sad, sometimes loving, sometimes aggressive or scornful direct gaze at the photographer (ill. 18+19).



The portraits of Sabine might seem slightly exoticising (Petersen 2008/9: 95).¹⁰ To my eyes, this is a central aspect or ‘trap’ of this snapshot documentary style in the tradition from Larry Clark to Nan Goldin to Richard Billingham. But it is also an aspect of which Sobol is aware and with which he plays and it is part of the disturbing quality of the book.



We meet other locals, sometimes posing directly for the camera; a dead seal in the kitchen (ill. 20); interior decoration (ill. 21), which could in principle be anywhere on earth, not unlike that which we see in Hardenberg’s book. The texts recount Sobol’s experiences – dangerous as well as humorous – as a hunter. They describe parties and evenings in the local youth club, playing Super Mario Brothers and table tennis, the birth of Sabine’s niece Iluna. Yet they also describe excessive drinking and a young man committing suicide. Under the headline ‘Dead dog and chicken’, the text uses just five sentences to mix sadness, drama, death, life, fun, and everyday experiences such as having supper: ‘Tonight I stumbled over a dead dog on my way home. It did not make it through the piteraq [the snow storm]. Sabine has just returned from bingo. She won three times, and her pockets are full of coins. Now we are having chicken’ (89). In another sequence, Sobol simply – though as tellingly as with the menu in Hardenberg’s book – lists the food they are eating. Here is an excerpt from the longer list, which also includes spaghetti napolitana and many traditional Danish dishes: ‘Whale skin, chicken, grouse, chocolate eggs, sea gulls, sauce béarnaise, goose, and meatballs in curry’ (94). As in Hardenberg’s book, this could be seen as a postcolonially informed list of food in a globalised world. As much as it is an ‘ethno-’ listing of Greenlandic traditions, it is also an attack on the ethnographic edifice.

¹⁰ In her analyses of Sobol’s work, Birgit Kleist Petersen includes an e-mail exchange with him, in which he emphasises that Sabine took part in the production and that she has approved the final work (Petersen 2008/9).

The book primarily concerns Sobol's – universal – love story with Sabine, as the title and the front cover photograph of her making a heart with her hands indicate. Secondly, it concerns everyday life and survival in such a remote and isolated small town, under rough weather conditions. Sobol manages to become part of the town's daily life, and most of the texts are small stories of everyday life, yet neither he nor the reader forget that he is an outsider. He photographs the direct, sometimes slightly skeptical, at other times happy and inviting gazes that are directed at him, and in the texts he describes his difficulties in learning the language, how to hunt, how to get lost in the snow, and how two men from the neighbouring village greet him with 'Hello Dane' and ask what he is doing there. Sobol is a man, he is a Dane, and he is an outsider, and on top of it all, compared with the works of Arke and Hardenberg, he steps into a much more traditional language of photography. He is clearly aware of his position and articulates it in the book himself. Arke's and Hardenberg's works are informed by and circulated within a certain contemporary, conceptual, avant-garde aesthetics, whereas the strength of Sobol's book is that he manages to push the limits of traditional black-and-white documentary in a very radical and often rather disquieting and provocative direction.

Conclusion: Blasting the medium of colonialism

Through texts and photographs, Sobol constructs the village as a multifaceted space, and in this sense there are many similarities between the three books published within a timespan of just a few years. Arke reinterprets and stirs up the colonial archive; Hardenberg uses a variety of mostly conceptual, serial photographic forms; and Sobol steps into traditional documentary. They all use photography as a 'place-making activity' and a performative interlocutor between people, memory, lived experience, and historical knowledge. Together, these three book projects present and critically discuss 'another Greenland'. At the same time, they construct and deconstruct – thereby speaking from 'a third place,' in Arke's words.

Today, Greenland hosts a strong art scene, and many other artists work with issues related to identity, globalism, and nationalism. But apart from the fact that the three books were all produced in the period leading up to the self-rule and that they were published within a short time span, my main reason for bringing them together has been their use of photography. Photography is a 'messy' medium, which can be used for all sorts of purposes. Indeed, the same image can appear in a private family album, in a public archive, or on a museum wall. Together the three artists exploit this

‘messiness’. Historically, photography has been the medium most used to depict Greenland in ‘the language of colonialism’ (Arke 2010b/2003: 11). Whether informed or uninformed by theoretical discussions on postcolonialism and critical theory questioning the referentiality of photography, most people today possess a critical awareness towards photography. Yet we nevertheless still believe in what we see. It is thus important to ‘blast’ the medium of colonialism – photography – by simultaneously using it and deconstructing it, playing with and circumventing its codes in order to challenge the conventions of photographic representation and renew the discourse of photography. The important photo-based books considered in this paper achieve this in three different ways.

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List of illustrations:

1: Pia Arke: Stories from Scoresbysund. Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping, p. 161. The East Greenlandic colonists, Isafjodur, August 1925. Photo: Thyra Juul, the pharmacist's wife.

2: Pia Arke: Stories from Scoresbysund. Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping, p. 155. Gerda with her parental grandmother and my great-grandmother Justine, August 1925. Photo: Thyra Juul, the pharmacist's wife.

3: Pia Arke: Stories from Scoresbysund. Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping, p. 43. The settlement Kap Hope, August 1926. Photo: Unknown.

4: Pia Arke: Stories from Scoresbysund. Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping, p. 104. Hilma, Rif and Charles, summer 1932. Photo: Theodora Anike.

5: Pia Arke: Stories from Scoresbysund. Photographs, Colonisation and Mapping, p. 154. Gerda Mathæussen, July 1997. Photo: Pia Arke.

6-13: Julie Edel Hardenberg: The Quiet Diversity.

14-18. Jacob Aue Sobol: Sabine.