



# Collaboration Dialogue and Trust

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**Art and Social Resilience in Kalaallit Nunaat / Greenland**

**Collaboration, Dialogue and Trust**

**Peter Berliner / Tina Enghoff**



*Thanks to everyone in the towns and villages of Greenland we have visited from 2015-2019. It is their experiences we try to communicate to others, their creativity, input and intelligence that are at the heart of this book.*

*We write about what we have experienced and learned. About the collaborations, storytelling and creation of shared knowledge that has taken us on an enlightening journey into landscapes of warmth, joy, and shared goals.*

*We have seen what freedom, art and research can mean for individuals, whole communities and the society they are part of, a society that is ready to stand up for its rights and dreams for the future.*

*This is an open book.*

*It has a beginning, but no end ...*

**Collaboration**

**Dialogue**

**and**

**Trust**

**Peter Berliner**

**Tina Enghoff**



Ilisimatusarfik / University of Greenland / Centre for Children, Youth & Family Research

**Art and Social Resilience in  
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CONTENTS

8    *Introduction*    **Philosophy in Practice**

14    *Chapter 1*    **Different Forms of Expression**

30    *Chapter 2*    **Our Perspective on Creating Change**

48    *Chapter 3*    **Travelling Dialogue**

72    *Chapter 4*    **New Landscapes of Photography**

96    *Chapter 5*    **Ethical and Practical Principles**

110    *Chapter 6*    **Creating Community through Public Art Events**

128    *Chapter 5*    **From Where We Stand**

138    *Bibliography*

The vast majority of photographs in this book have been taken  
by young people in Siunissaq’s workshops.

# Introduction

## Philosophy in Practice



Uagut oqaluttuagut / Our Stories, Tasilaq 2017

**Over a century ago people travelled here** from far-away places to measure the skulls of people already living here. These outsiders were in the surprising habit of holding strange events, which included measuring the heads of the people who turned up. This extraordinary behaviour was met with generosity and cooperation, since nobody wanted to make life more difficult for the visitors. People let them measure their heads, most of them out of sheer kindness, others in exchange for a token gift. Slowly but surely, however, the people discovered that this habit was not based on the particular heads of those that were measured, or whether they were particularly beautiful, thoughtful, radiant or sad. The sole interest of the outsiders was measuring heads. Apart from being different in size, all heads were the same to them. There was no Aqqaluk or Paninnguaq, no Nukapianguaq or Aviaaja. Only heads and skulls.

The people also discovered that this obsessive need to measure heads was a habit the newcomers had developed elsewhere, far from here. And it had stuck, almost becoming part of their soul. But that is what made it an echo. An echo of something somewhere else. It was not based on the heads here. It was a reverberation of something the travellers had already talked about in other places, in other buildings, in other countries.

The outsiders left again, taking the head measurements home with them to the buildings and countries where they had talked about measuring heads before coming here. In some cases they also took the skulls of the dead with them and put them on display far away. There the dead could face eternity in museums, surrounded by dust dancing in the rays of the autumn sun coming through the windows.

Today we measure what is inside the skulls, inside heads large and small, long and round, happy and sad. We measure thoughts, we measure emotions. Outsiders arrive by helicopter and plane and immediately start measuring and evaluating, taking the results back with them to other places, other buildings, other countries. They have a job to do. Their job is measuring: the land surveyor out in the mountains measuring in the pouring rain, the teacher weighing and measuring and quantifying human efforts, hunched over a desk in the dwindling light reducing the hopes and longings of children and young people to numbers on a scale. All this measuring consists of calculating the development of life using units of measurement that already exist: centime-

tres, litres, light years, exam results, and degrees of vulnerability. Human worth measured in numbers and grades.

Human beings apparently enjoy measuring, or else do it because we are told to. We believe we can give a performance in class a number, and that there is a scale for measuring emotions. We would rather measure than celebrate the life that pours over the edges of any measuring glass, immeasurably boundless and free.

We like to measure, but does it make sense to measure a boy's pride at shooting his first reindeer in the mountains and carrying it down to the boat? Does it make sense to compare his pride and joy with another boy's pride and joy in a similar situation? Does it make sense to measure who is proudest? Does it make sense to measure joy in small units and compare the joy of one person out on the glassy fjord on a hot summer day with another's at seeing their loved one walk towards them? Angaju's happiness was a 9, and Aqqalu's an 8? Angaju's happiness was 17.2 cm, and Aqqaluk's 15.3? Can we give experiences marks and still see people's uniqueness, see their singularity?<sup>1</sup>

This makes no sense to us. We would rather experience joy, reflection and community and make them visible than spend our time making measurements. Our approach is that of the arts and social sciences, striving for empathy through presence, a shared point of view, and insight through dialogue. But none of this is anything we can give marks or put a figure on. When we measure we evaluate, and what we see is evaluated in relationship to something else – an echo from another place.

The writer and Arctic explorer Knud Rasmussen once said that people are not coins that can be melted down and recast in the same currency. Yet throughout our lives we encounter endless schools of knowledge that try to recast us. The aim is results, improvements that can be measured on a scale that measures and weighs in the same currency. But results that consist of self-referential repetitions leave little room for new departures, presence, and surprising and wonderful life projects. The new, the remarkable, the very flow of life, cannot be contained by set ideas. If the animals take another path, the hunter who only knows one route and sits waiting as night falls will starve to death in the winter.

In Siunissaq we do not sit and wait. We head out into the landscape, not

knowing where the tracks will take us. What we do know is how to travel. We know what the process is, and that only when we know that we do not know best are we capable of listening. In the silence – where we listen – other voices can be heard. It is by being open to everything we do not know that we can find the courage to travel into unknown territory together. We know how to travel together – but we never force each other to travel the same path.

Siunissaq is a journey into the unknown landscape of the future.

*“Many years ago, when working in adolescent psychiatry, I met a therapist who said: ‘I don’t really like the phrase ‘working with’. We always say we ‘work with’ adolescents, but I don’t like the idea of working with others as if they were plasticine or sculptures we can carve and mould.’ This is something I contemplated for years. It became more and more obvious that the more we ‘work with’ people the less we ‘work together’ with them. The more we want to mould others, the less responsive we are to who they are and the unique contribution they make to the lives we share. What they contribute is a singularity there is no set formula for, because there is no pre-existing category or blueprint. A singularity that is not merely a repetition or replication of something we already think we know. All too often that disappears, because all we can hear is the echo of something that has already been seen and done. But this is no echo. It is here and now.”*

*Peter Berliner*

In Siunissaq we do not work with people, we work together with them. We are not interested in moulding people. Our focus is the meaningful aspects of the lives we share: hope, joy, capability, having values, and looking after each other in a strong network that provides protection from violence and abuse. We do not want to change anyone, but together we hope to generate more hope, joy, resourcefulness, values, care, and protection.

We like everything in people's lives that generates joy, trust and collaboration. *That* we would like to see repeated, see expand and grow. Repetition, echoes and the replication of violence, disrespect and humiliation we meet with liberation – by finding new voices and new departures.



Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut – Uagut inuunerput  
 Our Rights – Our Life  
 Nanortalik, 2015

Our job is to try to create life together. Work can be creative, but so can play. What matters is being in a creative process that challenges our preconceptions, ideas and impressions, and from there to create something new – out of the present moment, out of reciprocity, out of matter, out of the crystal clear air above the fjord on a summer day. It is to create worlds of ideas, possibilities and wonder. It is through this kind of creative play with hope, with joy, with values, belonging and mutual responsibility that Siunissaq travels.

It is a journey, but a journey into an open landscape where we build using the tools and provisions each of us brings, and where new paths into the future open – a future of new tools and the gifts granted by the mountains and sea en route.

Our job is not criticising what already exists, but a supplement – making life broader and richer at a human level by opening the possibility of multiple destinations. We just have to trust that we find new supplies on the way, that we can repair the tools we have, and that the journey is meaningful – or at least exciting and fun – and introduces us to new people and places. By travelling we can make the world bigger and meet new people without having to abandon those we love and the values that give our life meaning.

*Peter Berliner and Tina Enghoff,  
 September 2019*

1. Byung-Chul Han (2018). *The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.



# Chapter 1

## Different Forms of Expression



Nerisagut / Our Food, Nanortalik, 2016

**Any description is an intervention** – a dialogue, a process – and thereby by its very nature generates a range of possibilities for development and learning. Description is an action. It creates a relationship. Describing something from the outside – measuring and evaluating others – judges everyone by the same standards. Documenting solely on the basis of data with self-defined parameters creates a distanced relationship without presence, participation, or social responsibility for the life we share.

*“I was once – briefly – part of a project for teenage boys who suffered bouts of extreme rage and aggression. It was so extreme that they could not stop themselves or see any alternatives. Until little by little they started to see that there might be other options. During the project we were visited by professionals from other institutions, because we needed to cooperate on the boys’ lives and paths of development. The meetings with these professionals took place at the communal dining table in the middle of the living room. The boys could hear everything that was said. They could also join in and say something if they wanted to. In the beginning this openness seemed wrong, because some of the meeting participants thought there was information that should not be shared. But that was not true. Everything could be said, but we had to think carefully about how to say it. Do we say things in a way that generates anxiety and conflict, or in a way that generates trust, a feeling of security, and collaboration? The way things are said impacts on the meaning of what is said. That is where its truth lies, precisely in the experience and possibility of change generated in the specific, lived, material – and shifting – context we are part of.”*

*Peter Berliner*

The philosophy behind this approach drew on stories of communal living in the past, when people lived in close proximity. Stories of what happened when a hunter returned from the hunt. Sometimes when people were forced indoors by the cold and snow drifts, the hunter could approach unobserved. Then he would come into the room, strip off his clothes, and lie down on the big bed, immediately sparking the curiosity of the many people in the room. “Did you catch anything?” he would be asked. He would stretch and yawn on the bed, saying good-naturedly: “Go out and see for yourself”. And out they



rushed, because this was a guarantee that the hunt had been successful. This was a dialogue devoid of secrets, where everyone could see what they wanted to know. Anyone who wanted to could stick their head out of the door and see for themselves. The visibility was shared, and generated shared knowledge.

When things are open and visible everyone can relate to them. The decision to make speaking openly part of the project was based on knowing that any form of speaking about others in their absence can produce secrets, superior attitudes, gossiping behind people's backs, disrespect, and the loss of a child's rights and participation in decisions about their own life.

In the project with teenage boys who had been deprived of their freedom all of us were invited to enjoy the freedom to say what we felt, thought and wanted in life in an open way that did not harm others or limit their freedom. This is the fundamental basis for respect – having the freedom to express oneself and thereby taking responsibility for everyone else having the same freedom.

This led to all the professionals involved finding new words to say what was usually said in the third person, finding words that could exist in dialogue. A dialogue is a shared space for reflection where we speak from different positions to find shared solutions to create joy and escape the fatigue that comes from repeating the same sentences, the same symptoms, the same deadlock, the same dance on the spot. This is the very essence of the symptom, that in the eagerness to find solutions the same cycles are repeated: the same anger, the same worries. An inability to escape repetition and reiteration. By suddenly creating words as part of an active dialogue, the presence of the boys – their attentiveness and attention – gave us the opportunity to escape know-it-all theories and distanced descriptions. A common language was created building on respect for everyone having the opportunity to see and listen to – and smell, taste and touch – what was happening.

Being in dialogue creates new possibilities for how we relate professionally to spoken language, because the pragmatic value of words is weighed according to considerations of what can be said in order to create relationships of mutual trust and respect. This is a liberation, an unleashing of possibilities generated by social intelligence. Imagine the freedom of never saying anything about others that you would not say to their face.

Central to dialogue is that different descriptions contribute to the development of a shared understanding. Dialogue is not about providing a summary

or conclusion. Summarising and concluding create feelings of otherness and alienation. They shut down communication. In an open dialogue, summarising is not necessary because everyone is present in the situation. Everyone can see, and everyone can hear what is said. The result of dialogue is a feeling, a sense of presence, the experience that everyone is moving in the same direction even if this is not said explicitly. In discussions, on the other hand, summarising is key. In dialogue the result is an experience of mutual connection and belonging with room for the singularity that creates balance. There is no handshake to seal any deal, but instead a potential direction for those who want to join the journey.

This does not mean that people who are subject to the kind of violence, oppression, abuse and disrespect that deprives them of their human rights do not need a safe space where they can tell of their experiences without those who have exercised the violence and mental torture being present. It is important for such spaces to exist. This is not speaking ill of people, this is insisting on the right to safety and protection, development and freedom. This is telling what has happened or is happening in relationship to the laws, rules and values we establish and uphold together.

Describing people in terms we do not want them to hear creates social divisions and fragmentation. During research on family classes<sup>2</sup> held in Nuuk, Rita Thomsen, the head and initiator of the classes, told us they never criticise others. Asked how the family classes related to potential conflicts between parents, teachers, head teachers and psychologists, the answer was: "That we don't address. It's not what we're here to do. We never criticise in any way, and we do not express opinions about others. We stick to what we can do here together." People in the family classes do not speak negatively about others, be they teachers, head teachers, parents, psychologists or students. The professionals in the family classes want to help create dialogue, but they are not interested in talking about people who are not there. Instead, energy is focused on finding solutions to the challenges people face in student life, family life, or school life.

The description itself – its content and form – can contribute to finding solutions by focusing on the shared goal of breaking down any barriers to the free and secure development of children and young people. In dialogue, statements and semantic style – the narrative form – are interwoven with

what is said, i.e. it is an active process in which we show each other respect and grant each other possibilities by giving everyone the opportunity to contribute.

This means that dialogue makes it possible to confront challenges in life, because it creates a place of trust – a space of possibility, a framework and frame of mind. A space where people define challenges in their own words. Statements about others are alienating, whereas statements about the self in both ‘we’ and ‘I’ form foster presence and possibilities for agency. We do not talk about ‘them’ or ‘she/he/it’. We talk to ‘you’ – but by appealing to and focusing on the use of ‘we’. In dialogue we describe what we are experiencing, because this is where the potential for understanding and possibilities for action begin. It unites, and creates recognition and identification. As we wrote above, it is through community and solidarity that we can create the space and possibilities for the singular, for the unique.



*Uagut oqaluttuagut / Our Stories, Nanortalik 2017*

It is not about replacing the one with the other. Football is not about forgetting, it is about having fun with others. And as such it can provide the strength to remember feelings and experiences in new ways. They can be met in the present because they are part of a balance instead of being suppressed then creeping back as ghosts and phantoms that smother the love people have for those killed by violence and torture, which is what they really want to talk about.

It is through good experiences with others in the present that we can gain the strength to remember and hold on to the love and human dignity violence and torture can never kill. The point is to create a balance so we can use experiences of community, solidarity, joy and trust to help us relate actively to the suffering we also experience, and see our suffering as an expression of love and our sense of justice.

When we face challenges in life it often emerges that they cannot be registered on any scale. This is something we learned many years ago in our meetings with people who had experienced war, torture, sexual abuse and violence. They told us – and showed us in practice – that people can be heavily traumatised, relive their experiences, have flashbacks and nightmares, yet still often enjoy themselves with others. The one does not necessarily preclude the other. They are not on the same scale. As a boy of 14 told us: “I cry and think about everything that’s happened, but I still like playing football with the others.” Which could make us think “Aha! Football makes him forget.” But that is not what he is saying. He is simply saying that joy in life can co-exist with distress, loss, anxiety and anger at breeches of trust and violations of human dignity and rights.

The word balance is key here. In our understanding, the only way to actively transform suffering is to establish communities that are trusting and strong enough to transform suffering into an understanding of the beauty of human existence, which means we suffer when we suffer injustice and any violent restriction of human growth and development. It is through experiences of support and community that we can face experiences of pain and abuse.

The potential lies in balance. Having a community opens the possibility of creating wholeness and balance. Conversely, the breakdown of community support creates a sense of isolation and separation that can lead to suppression, denial and avoidance, three concepts describing what we do not dare to (think about), what we refuse to acknowledge, and what we cannot look openly and realistically in the eye.

Executive functions are currently central to neuroscience and developmental psychology. Executive functions include self-monitoring in relationship to others, the ability to plan and concentrate, emotional control, impulse control, a general awareness of one's own feelings and those of others, being able to connect language and emotions, as well as relating reflectively and consciously to ourselves and others. These functions are learned in interaction with others, either early or later in life.

They develop through participation in concrete social communities where we learn to cooperate, show consideration, listen to each other, and recognise emotions, all of which make it possible for us to resolve conflicts and include each other, at the same time as respecting each other's singularity.

We recognise ourselves in each other, but are at the same time unique. It is through beauty, change and creativity that our singularity unfolds. Violence, disrespect and dumbing down are tediously familiar and repeated – trivial monotony and deathlike stagnation. Hannah Arendt, some have claimed arrogantly, called evil 'banal'.<sup>3</sup> She has been criticised for viewing violence as trivial, as a habit and way of obeying orders. But the criticism is misguided, since for Arendt the banality lies precisely in the imaginary, in the belief in the justification of violence, in the division into 'them' and 'us', in the credo of violence as the solution to all problems. It is this belief that is trivial or banal. The banal is doing nothing, not protesting, repeating the same behaviour without daring to object. It is banal to believe that true human nature is violent, instead of focusing on caring, empathy and peacefulness as part of human nature. To overcome the banality one has to realise that the violence or the caring is not the product of 'nature', but of childhood, culture, and ideology. To be human is to be conscious and make choices. Only then can the banal – the flat and flattening, grey and dull, one-eyed and narrow-minded – be part of a wider balance that also creates space for moments with multiple facets, colours and voices: a place of openness and playful imagination.

Balance means that we do not have to lash out and kill, creating grey totality in accordance with our own conceited self-image, but can instead let life grow, and celebrate and embrace singularity. A balance that makes it possible to retain our focus on the community and solidarity to be found in being able to stand by and stand up for others and support each other in difference. Difference is probably the most important factor – or perhaps more

**The otherness is not only the recognition of the ontological right of the existence of other, but also the duty/responsibility to provide the other with the means so that the other can perform their existence. The recognition of otherness does not only implicate that I recognise that there are others, who can exist, but that I recognise that I have to provide the means to help the others to exist.**

*Silvia Bleichmar<sup>4</sup>*

accurately shared site of learning and process – in the survival of humankind. It has possibly also represented the greatest threat to human survival when we have tried to eradicate it through violence. Viewed philosophically, violence is the drive to abolish difference through the dominance of a single viewpoint.

In real life, young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland – and probably everywhere on the planet – are very different to the picture painted by statistics and surveys. First and foremost because they cannot be measured on any predefined scale. They cannot, in fact, be weighed and measured at all. They can be seen and heard, they move – on the way from one place to somewhere that has to be created and built. It is this movement that can be felt. It is a social movement we are part of.

What we have noticed about this movement is that it is honest. There is no pretence. We know where we have each other. There is happiness when there is happiness, and sadness when there is sadness. There is unrest when there is unrest, and distrust when there is distrust.

When we meet a large group of young people in a workshop they are generous in showing us how they feel. There is a lot of commotion. They rush around the room, throw plastic bottles and cushions, push and shove each other. The boys sometimes look like a creature with multiple heads and limbs – piles of wriggling, wrestling bodies. We might think this makes it difficult to concentrate, but moving those piles of bodies across the floor at that speed demands a lot of focus and concentration. The room is used to the full, every inch of it full of life. At the back there is a platform four metres above floor level. There are theatre seats that can be pulled out in inclining rows. The





teenagers crawl up and down at breakneck speed. With great elegance. Nobody falls and hits themselves. But they do sometimes hit each other, usually in fun and the joy of tumbling about together, although sometimes it hurts. And the hurt is expressed. No pretence there either.

People also express themselves through language. During the Siunissaq workshops we have focused on being able to say no to what causes suffering, and yes to what generates joy, insight, trust, and mutual respect. At one of the last in a series of workshops a group of boys were engaged in activities that demanded a lot of strength and skill in balancing, and we suggested making a short video, a video of “everything you do with such strength – a video about what it’s like to be a young man!” Which is about values, self-esteem, self-confidence, and affirming others. Nobody looked at us. They just continued their high-energy exertions. Then they started to move away, still cycling on one wheel while dribbling a ball. As if to underline their point, one of the boys sent us a friendly smile and said “No”. Little by little, they moved further away. We were just pleased to hear a clear no to something they did not want to do.

Another time, in another town, we wanted to interview young people. We had made an appointment with some of those who had signed up for interviews, and borrowed the family centre’s new group-therapy room. A big light room with lots of chairs. We sat waiting in this room for the first teenager, a young woman. Outside there was a fresh breeze. Jagged white clouds rushed across the sky, reflected in the large puddles on the road below. The young woman entered the room, smiled at us, and accepted a cup of hot tea and a biscuit. Then our associate Augustine asked the first question. The girl smiled, then her face clouded. She sat for a long time without saying anything, just staring into space. “Is there something else you’d like to tell us?” Augustine asked. The girl just looked at us and gently shook her head. Then she said “Yes please” to another cup of tea. We sat there for a long time, maybe an hour. It was quiet, an uninterrupted, calming silence. Then the girl stood up, quietly said goodbye, and was about to leave. Augustine said: “You know where to find us. You’re always welcome to come back another time.” The girl smiled and said thank you. Then she left.

It would seem obvious to think that the girl needed to talk about something, to confide in us, say something that was difficult to say. But we do not

know. What we do know is that we created and shared a space of listening silence together that generated a feeling of respect for the shared experience of being present. That is all we know.

Maybe sometimes we are too quick to project ourselves onto others. To not actually notice their singularity and uniqueness. We are too quick to explain and interpret, we have endless words at the ready about the nature of sadness, the character of the crisis, the (un)reasonableness of falling in love, the hidden truths of loss and missing someone. All too rarely do we let go of the need to know, because knowing about others, about life, boosts our egos. We talk and talk from a position of knowledge, when what we are actually saying is “I know best”. Lacan apparently claimed every discourse to be a form of delirium<sup>5</sup>, i.e. a paranoiac figment of the imagination and defence against the real. Which might be taking things a bit too far, but those of us in that hushed room needed no explanations. We had no need to use theories to calm ourselves. What is important about knowledge is not the actual knowing, but the seeking of knowledge, just as Poe’s two angels say in a dialogue held high above earth in a continuously expanding universe.<sup>6</sup>

Theories of knowledge talk about producing knowledge, constructing knowledge – its formation. That is not the language we use in Siunissaq. In Siunissaq we talk about striving to create and build knowledge together. That is what our knowledge is, a social movement. It takes guts to say, “I don’t know”, but if we add “But we can try to find out together” then it is a living movement. Like the clouds, manifold and already rushing past far above the windows of the room with its calming silence. Knowledge is a movement where the universal and presence fold into each other.

This can only be done with honesty. Pretence, concealment, suppression and secrecy alienate, whereas direct and visible honesty unite. This is what the young people tell us. Talking behind people’s backs, concealment, and disrespect destroy trust and solidarity. This is evident, self-evident.

Honesty also emerges in the openness with which the young people speak about their lives. Sometimes this is sudden, but it always happens when a space of presence and trust has been created. There is great strength in this openness, but it could lead to increased vulnerability if not treated with respect. It is therefore key to respect and acknowledge what is said. These are moments of significance, turning points that can change the direction in which a life develops.



Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut – Uagut inuunerput  
Our Rights – Our Life  
Tasiliq, 2015

Which is why in Siunissaq our ethics are very direct and very simple:

- We do not speak negatively – not to each other, and not about people who are not there.
- We do not send e-mails, texts or messages, etc. to others about each other.
- We do not take something for ourselves when it has been given to everyone to share.
- We speak openly to each other.
- We believe what others say.
- We say no to violence, disrespect, abuse and injustice, and we do so openly.
- We say yes to the peaceful resolution of conflict, dialogue, affirmation, and respect for others.

And we dare to stand up for all of this in practice – also in the face of icy winds and freezing rain.

2. Kangillinniguit (2014). *Kangillinniguit atuarfiat*. [www.kangillinniguit.skoleintra.dk](http://www.kangillinniguit.skoleintra.dk)  
See also: Asen, E., Dawson, N., and McHugh, B. (2018): *Multiple Family Therapy: The Marlborough Model and its Wider Applications*. London: Routledge.

3. Arendt, H. (1963). *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: The Viking Press

4. Bleichmar, S. (2004). *Jornadas sobre Diversidad Cultural*. [www.silviableichmar.com](http://www.silviableichmar.com)

5. Miller, J-A. (1988). *A Contribution of the Schizophrenic to the Psychoanalytic Clinic*. Opening lecture of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Rencontre of the Freudian Field, Buenos Aires, Argentina. [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com)

6. Edgar Allan Poe (1845). ‘*The Power of Words*’. [www.eapoe.org](http://www.eapoe.org)



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# Chapter 2

## Our Perspective on Creating Change



Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut – Uagut inuunerput / Our Rights – Our Life, Tasillaq, 2015

**Today we have arrived in one place**, but we are still on our way. We have not found definitive answers to many of the questions that have emerged en route. We have travelled through many different landscapes – numbers and statistics, accounts and descriptions, concrete moments, poetical sentences, and ways of being present. During the journey, through these different landscapes and under changing skies and in every kind of weather, we have moved towards a series of approaches we find rewarding, liberating and life-giving. Where we are not on repeat, but move forward to create new opportunities and possibilities.

Our goal is to create change where life has been destroyed by suffering, or where we feel trapped, unable to express ourselves in the world, in relationship to each other, and in playfulness and joy. Every project sets out to make a change, and ours is no exception. But we want to do something more than that. We want to create change with space for the unfinished, things in flux, the singular, strange and wonderful that we do not yet know, but that life, the young people we meet, and everyone else is part of and that holds the potential to carry us forward, bring things into focus, and create poetic forms of expression that can create a sense of social responsibility and agency in the midst of the wonders of everyday life.

Our experience-based approach is to unite art and psychosocial interventions, and in doing so create new ways of seeing young people and the resources and challenges we share. Photography is central to the artistic component of the collaboration we create together, because photography is a democratic medium. It is accessible, and with the right guidance everyone can tell a story, express a mood, and present a point of view. A photograph is a way of representing one's world – an opportunity, also for young people who feel left out, isolated, overlooked and without opportunities to participate in society. Photography also makes it possible for people in the group to see and be surprised and inspired by the photographs of others. And be surprised by others witnessing what they see and show. A photograph is proof of life, of an experience. It is also a form of communication that creates a sense of mutual connection and community in being seen.

The psychosocial component is aimed at creating a space where everyone can relate to their own and our shared resources and challenges through a range of activities. A safe space for learning together, so the agency of the

group and its members can develop to support what works, and to confront, cope with, and overcome adversity and risk factors. This learning is shared, creating a social network that can be transferred to and sustain everyday life. The collaboration is guided by the determination to:

- Strengthen prosocial values in practice, including basic human rights, through an approach that emphasises affirmation, respect, participation – also in decision-making – equality, and collaboration in practice. We do what we say. Practising this is a catalyst for change.
- Focus directly on issues that are relevant for the young people we meet, including experiences of low self-esteem and self-confidence, feeling alone in the face of difficulties, love relationships, sexual relationships, and experiences of neglect, abuse and violence, including the psychological violence of denigration, bullying and exclusion.
- Collaborate closely with local teachers, social workers and psychologists, and anchor the process of change in local educational, social and health institutions.
- Be in dialogue with civic society through community meetings and events in public space. In both Paamiut Asasara<sup>7</sup> and Siunissaq democratic, inclusive events in public space that strengthen social networks in an integrated and inclusive way across different age groups, social segments, sectors, etc. have been very well received.
- Create affirmative forms of communication through dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution, including not criticising but focusing on affirmation, resources, affirmative reformulations and alternative stories that generate self-worth, a belief in our own abilities and agency, and mutual respect.
- Reinforce young people's sense of positive contact – also with adults – and show that there are alternatives to violence and denigration in practice, i.e. listening to each other, mutual respect, and shared visions. In our experience the young people we have met really want to create

communities, respect each other, believe in themselves and others, and create better prospects for their futures in terms of education, jobs and stable social relationships.

- We also operate with five basic principles, which we explore in Chapter 5.

Social resilience and well-being are created by experiencing environments where young people can see and have hands-on experience of mutual support and the space for singularity, affirmation and cooperation without fear of violence, denigration, ridicule or betrayal. A safe space for learning skills that can be transferred to other social spaces by gaining the competence to build stable and supportive social networks.

Some social issues might be specific to young people, but many of them have common features. Many live with violence, sexual violence and substance abuse, as well as coming from backgrounds with low levels of education and income. These are challenges that affect society as a whole, local communities, families, and the individual young person. These are experiences many of us share. Many social interventions treat the individual family or the individual, often with positive results. But violence, dropping out of school, sexual violence, substance abuse, unemployment and suicide are still serious social issues. These are issues that affect everyone, and cannot only be addressed through individual treatment because they are 'produced' at a pace that outstrips individual treatment. These social issues have to be addressed through joint preventative initiatives.

Siunissaq takes a community perspective, working together to create better opportunities for everyone. If too many young people do not get an education and feel isolated and lonely, excluded and depressed or despondent, angry and aggressive, then the social network falls apart and is unable to provide a safety net for people who need help, or give them the tools they need to deal with their lives, their education, and their role as citizens. Social sustainability is essential so young people are not left alone with the after-effects of conditions in their upbringing. Creating spaces for affirmative experiences with others can create a foundation to build on.

This is something Siunissaq does through an approach based on shared experience and community that unites artistic expression with social agency.

In summary, the model for change shaped by our experiences is comprised of the following:



Workshops including drum dancer Anda Kuitse, Tasiilaq and Nanortalik, 2015 – 2017

**1. A documented account of background factors, including risk factors and supportive factors in the young person’s home and local environment.**

Many of the young people live with violence, neglect, sexual violence, and substance abuse in their homes and community. This creates an unsafe and unstable environment characterised by the breakdown of stable, secure, protective and mutually supportive social relationships. This establishes a subculture of disrespect, objectification, distrust and fear, which is expressed in behaviour (bullying, violence, abuse) and the way people talk about themselves and others (criticism and insulting others, self-denigrating descriptions and stories, isolation, and the concealment of and taboos about sexual violence and suffering).

This coexists with a subculture of openness, respect, support, warmth and interest in each other, with the love of their families, a longing for good social relationships, a love of life, and shared laughter.

Central to our approach is using the latter to limit, challenge, overcome and eradicate the former. That sounds major – and it is. But in practice it has proven to be much easier than anticipated to draw on elements that sustain and support, because they are already present in so many instances, relationships, forms of behaviour, and actions where people reach out to each other. These are real-life experiences, and they are vital and viable. They just need to be supported and strengthened, something we do by focusing on community, solidarity, and social support.

## 2. A systematic and documented account of young people's reactions to their family and community background.

The young people have emotional, social, behavioural and cognitive reactions (symptoms) to the subculture of violence and disrespect outlined above. This culture is something many of us share, although its elements can vary in degree and combination from one young person to another. It is, however, a culture familiar to us all. They recognise what people are talking about when they refer to it, and are often surprised that what they thought was something only they were experiencing is often a common and shared reaction to the context they grew up in. We use this recognisability to create shared understanding and the feeling of being part of a shared, lived experience, and precisely because of this to be able to tackle challenges in life and contribute to an overall balance and interconnectedness as the unique people they are. Through action, reflection and artistic expression all our remarkable, unique, lives can be united in practice to change the future by saying a loud and clear NO to everything that creates suffering, and an equally loud and clear YES to everything that is affirmative and creates the possibility of solutions and the potential of a life of well-being, participation, and solidarity.

## 3. A clear and workable description of the goals and processes in the project as a whole, as well as the individual workshops.

The goal of the workshops is to create a context that ensures: 1) protection, 2) a sense of security, 3) an experience of control (participation in decision-making and sense of agency), 4) social support, and 5) that generates hope by seeing that change and a better future are possible by making conscious choices, as well being willing to take responsibility for our own future and that of others. These five points are what we practice in all our activities and dialogues in Siunissaq's workshops and other initiatives, in our collaborations, and in the way we express ourselves in images, books, articles and the other ways we communicate.

## 4. A clear and workable implementation of the core concepts of Siunissaq.

In practice we develop activities that involve caring (mutual respect), trust, meaningfulness, justice, skills (agency, mastery), participation in deci-

sion-making, solidarity (whilst acknowledging the right to difference), freedom of speech, other human rights, cooperation and collaboration, and a love of life (drive and resilience). These are converted into skills and concrete actions, i.e. ways of navigating and negotiating life in order to find a viable path to improved well-being, solidarity, social responsibility, and possibilities for self-expression that create a sense of belonging and community.

## 5. A toolshed full of concrete activities.

The activities we have created and facilitated are concrete, but should always be seen as potential pathways through the landscape we are part of here and now. Activities based on listening and creating dialogue and shared meaningfulness sometimes work, and at other times they have to be adjusted and flexible. What is central is dialogue and presence. The activities themselves have potential, but this potential withers away if it is not in dialogue with what is happening among and between us here and now. The activities are not prototypes. One activity might be a good cycle to travel along a certain path, but if we feel like thirsty fish longing for the vast expanses of the ocean then a cycle is not what we need to keep us afloat and get us closer to what we find important and beautiful in life here and now.

6. On the basis of our activities and comparisons with other successful projects for children and young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland we have made **a list of factors that contribute to their success in the form of achieved goals in projects for children and young people in the country** (see Chapter 7, pp. 130-132).

7. Both the concrete activities in the project and the overall approach are dependent on the way they are carried out. **There are specific practical and ethical principles**, something we return to in more detail in Chapter 5.

8. A principle goal of Siunissaq is **to anchor the results and future developments of the project in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland in a sustainable way**.

9. Siunissaq has a joint, democratic form of leadership in accordance with its practical and ethical principles, as well as three other central principles:







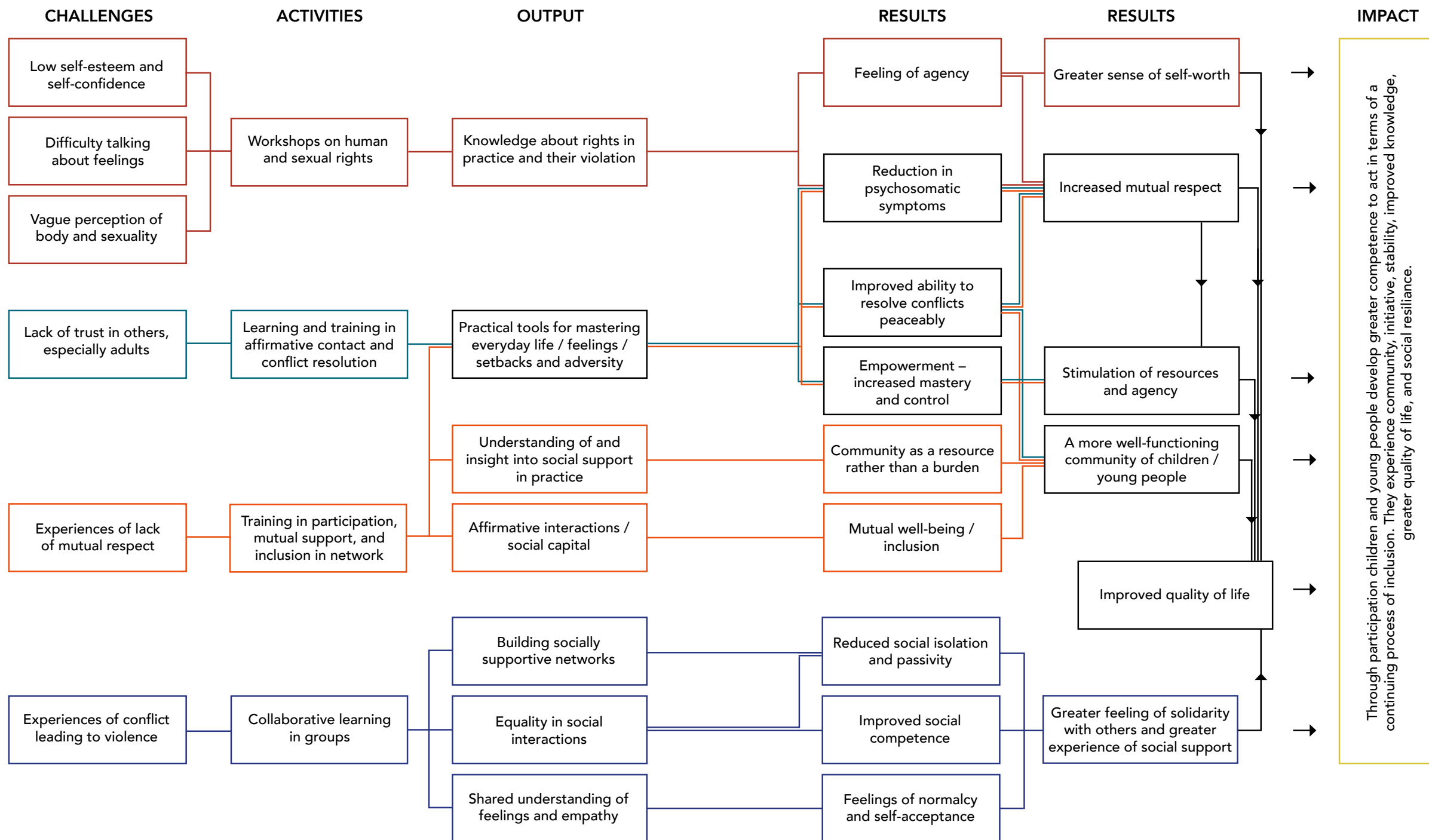
*Transparency* – everyone, including the public, has access to the project’s budget. This is a key factor in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. Our experience with Siunissaq has taught us that it is important for us and our associates in the project to be visible locally. It is through direct contact with the local population, its young people, and local professionals that Siunissaq gets support and gains in resilience and impact. It is when people need guidance, when a young person urgently needs an adult to talk to, when local teachers and social workers need to talk about their hopes, worries or burnout that it is important to be there, be visible, and be present.

**10.** This is not an absence of boundaries – it is presence, visibility and transparency. Being there, being present and visible in the local community, and ensuring transparency at every level is central to our approach in Siunissaq. The project has generated and continues to generate a vast amount of solid, documented knowledge to which these three principles are central – central to providing successful, respectful, socially and culturally sustainable initiatives for young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. These principles are present in all of Siunissaq’s activities, as the table of activity goals and processes on pages 42-45 shows:



*Visibility* and *presence* are central concepts in the experience-based knowledge generated by Siunissaq, when one of the young people is invited to spend Christmas with us when they are in Denmark, when we communicate with them on Facebook, and are there for them when they need us. We always have the time and energy to talk to young people who come to tell us about their joys and sorrows – also at night. We are available, visible and can be relied on to be there for them on their own terms – also after hours.

Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut – Uagut inuunerput  
Our Rights – Our Life  
Nanortalik, 2015



Impact

Through participation children and young people increase their sense of agency in terms of continued inclusion, as well as experiences of community, solidarity, initiative, increased knowledge, improved quality of life, and greater social resilience.

In the applied principles and all activities nobody is singled out as weak, vulnerable, inferior or wrong, and therefore in need of help, discipline or treatment. We see the actions of the participants – and we count ourselves among them – as attempts to find solutions. We do not criticise, and nobody has the right to force anybody else to participate. Siunissaq is a place for dialogue, not discussions or arguments. How we communicate is reflected in the table opposite charting the impact of different approaches.

Siunissaq’s theory of change is that we can make major changes by using approaches that provide an experience of being able to build and create what it takes to achieve results in practice. This happens in the moment, here and now, when we are all present. And it is integral to every relationship, dialogue, process and path of development in the project.



Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut  
– Uagut inuunerput  
Our Rights – Our Life  
Tasiilaq, 2015

7. Berliner, P., Larsen, L. N. & de Casas Soberón, E. (2012). ‘Case Study: Promoting Community Resilience with Local Values – Greenland’s Paamiut Asasara’ in

Ungar, M. (ed.): *The Social Ecology of Resilience*. pp. 387-399. New York: Springer.

WHAT CREATES RESULTS	WHAT CAN BLOCK RESULTS
Actions	Accounts or descriptions detached from actions
Shared laughter	Laughing at others
Self-identified needs and goals	Needs and goals defined by others
Shared reflection	Pre-defined fixed views and theories
Affirmation	Negative descriptions of specific individuals or groups (e.g. as ‘at risk’).
Solutions	Focusing on problems
Dialogue	Arguing and fighting about ‘the truth’
Trust and security	Competitiveness, exploitation and objectification
Trust and security	Coercion and punishment
Singularity	Uniformity
Equality	Hierarchies and inequality
Realistic hopes and aspirations	Fixed and limiting narratives about how difficult things are (e.g. “A long, hard slog”)
Closeness (empathy and solidarity)	Externally defined goals and rules for interaction

**Through action, reflection  
and artistic expression all  
our remarkable, unique,  
lives can be united in  
practice to change the  
future by saying a loud and  
clear NO to everything that  
creates suffering, and an**

**equally loud and clear YES  
to everything that is  
affirmative and creates the  
possibility of solutions and  
the potential of a life of  
well-being, participation,  
and solidarity.**

# Chapter 3

## Travelling Dialogue



Photo booth, Tasilaq, 2017

**We have consciously avoided the word ‘work’** when talking about the joint learning processes we have participated in with young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. What we try to create is a good way to be together as people.

The workshop we find ourselves in when we do activities together is like a forge where we make signposts or beacons or buoys that can float at sea. But we do not melt everything down and recast it in the same currency. Ours is a laboratory where we can experiment with how to create a good life together under safe conditions. You might also call it organised chaos. We can never predict what will emerge out of the many voices that meet, the many actions that dance among and with each other, sometimes helter-skelter and sometimes as elegantly coordinated as synchronous swimmers far out on the glassy surface of the sea.

Central to our map – the map we have to cross the river and move onward – is trust. Trust is difficult to plot onto a map, but it can be done. Instead of marking longitudes and latitudes, our map charts justice and beauty. The compass does not only point north. It points to mornings, to sunrises, to joy, to working together, and to reindeer moving down to the shore. Our map also includes friendship and the joy of being together under the clouds floating above the bay, far out at sea or above the mountains.

This is the map we use in Siunissaq. A map of beauty, of greens, blues and yellows. Not a map you have ever seen, but a map everyone who has sailed the waters of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland knows by heart.

On maps like this safety is a destination, a place to travel to and from, like the towering cliffs where the sheer precipice down to the powerful draw of the water is ever present. It is there, right here, that we can leap between lives, between visions, and between dreams. Towards the others or deep into the crevice where the mountains and sea meet. Safety is what Siunissaq is all about.

It is in the present that the future is formed. Life has its own path, life is irrepressible. We humans, with all our despondency, envy and joy, are just part of life’s great puzzle. Which is exactly what makes us significant: that we are not alone, that we are part of a whole. It is when we acknowledge this that the creative process can begin. It is from here we absorb our impressions, from here we develop ways to express ourselves.



Protection, safety, agency, social support and hope are what carry the activities in Siunissaq forward. They are present in every second of the time we spend together. They are not remote goals or glorious principles. They *are* the project. They are movement in all its materiality and tactility, presented, carried out, produced and lived in multi-faceted ways. The painter Francis Bacon once said: “I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror”.<sup>8</sup>

In Siunissaq we are not afraid to scream, but we also see the experience, sensation and presence of the scream as an expression of longing, loss, and indignation. We too are not interested in the horror, we are interested in the power of the scream, its liberating force, its vital roar for human dignity – a powerful voice that drowns out the suffocating self-righteousness of violence.

This is where the psychosocial dimension comes in. Art disrupts rigid thinking through experience, opening up a space for new thoughts, different kinds of thoughts that grow out of the artwork itself and our encounter with it. This is an encounter with the life of the artwork itself through experience. In our psychosocial workshops and activities we take this liberation into thinking about and being in social relationships in ways that nurture security, meaning, agency and shared hopes. This takes place through dialogue and shared reflection where we relate consciously to the experience, but we do so in practice, i.e. by changing how we behave and the language we use. This is our basis for creating new stories. We see and hear the scream and relate to the horror in a way that transforms it here and now in the space we share, a space where it is retold as a longing for justice, resilience and solidarity. We allow the two processes to interfold and form a movable whole. It is through shared reflection that we can put the immediate experience of wonder, horror, joy and caring that art can give us into a framework of security, safety and trust in ourselves and others. Art’s potential to disrupt and astonish is not in itself the path. The path is something we create together.

The photographer Joan Foncuberta<sup>9</sup> recounts how his wife gave birth to a premature baby, a powerful story retold here in our own words.

The child was laid in an incubator. The parents were not allowed to see it, so the only human contact the baby had was with the nurse that looked after it as it lay there slowly growing in its artificial womb. Foncuberta asked the nurse to take a picture of the baby every day so he and his wife could see

their child growing as it approached a birth that had already happened. This was a source of great joy, but one day the photographer heard an almost inaudible whisper in his mind: “What if the baby in the photographs is not yours?” He started to examine the photographs closely. Laying them out in order and comparing the background to see if it was the same. Sometimes he thought he could recognise his own features in the tiny, sleeping face. And sometimes when he tried he could find no similarities between the tiny dreaming face and his own. He started to have difficulty sleeping. Lost interest in anything else. Stopped eating and survived solely on coffee and red wine. When he looked in the mirror searching for the features he shared with his baby he saw an exhausted face that was growing paler, its features blurred. But then on yet another grey morning, as he lay tossing and turning in bed, he suddenly realised that this was the power of photography, that we can always add something.

Photography is not the world or a direct representation of it. Taking and looking at a photograph is always a creative process, an encounter. A photograph is a small section of the world that can make us think. Photography is not a substitute for life, it is a way of engaging with life. Photography does not represent life, it is part of life. This is its reality, its punctum. The concept of the punctum comes from Roland Barthes in his description of the personally touching detail in a photograph.<sup>10</sup> For Foncuberta what is important is the meaning the photograph has for the viewer. He emphasises that the photograph is not a representation of reality, even though it is often seen as such – as a form of evidence or proof. Which it is not. Gilles Deleuze writes of the work of art that it is not figurative, but that it creates figurability – it creates a form.<sup>11</sup> But he also argues that works of art, including photographs, have a life of their own. They cannot be reduced to their reception, i.e. to the meaning the viewer gives them. The photograph has its own dynamic. It does not represent reality, but creates a world of its own.

The world has so much more potential than restrictive categories of me and you, us and them, categories that have led to divides, abuse, loss, grief and exploitation – created by ourselves, others, and our surroundings. Similarly, the categorical division into us and them has generated endless cruelty. There is no you and me, them and us. We are all interwoven, inseparable parts of a whole. And why should we be separated, as fragments or factors?





*Uagut oqaluttuagut*  
*Our Stories,*  
 Nanortalik, 2017

Why should the world be torn into pieces, into fragments drifting in the endless grey sea like shards of wreckage?

We need to continue to explore and investigate in a process in which it is the investigation itself that is rewarding, not its results. The results are only rewarding if they foster curiosity. An investigative process is a brainstorm, not a repetition of everything that has already been thought or imagined. It is a roundtable conversation where everyone is free to say what they want, and where everyone has the right to contribute to the dialogue however they choose – as long as it does not limit the right of anyone else to participate. This is a convention in the broadest sense of the word, a meeting where there is dialogue about what is important and a shared understanding that stems from a dialogue about what we can do together. A flow of dialogue where nobody forces anyone else to want the same as them, where nobody forces anyone else to believe the same as them, and where nobody wants to make anyone else think the same as them. Instead we have multiplicity, freedom, and generosity.

In the following we describe some workshop activities where we create the signposts for our journey into a new social landscape together. These signposts are visual, physical and poetic. They tell stories, sing, and make music. Some point back in time, some to the present, and others to the future. Some point in all directions, others in a specific direction. They can all be moved.

Many years ago an old weather cock on the roof of the main building of the teacher-training college Ilinniarfissuaq got jammed by rust. This was something that took a long time. After it was first installed on the roof, bold and freshly painted, it stood there for years and years, turning around so its open face and proudly puffed chest always faced the wind. Year after year the salty winds of the sea came whistling across the fjord, hitting the weather cock as it stood with its head held high on the roof of the red building full of bustle and brainwork. Time passed, and the weather cock grew more and more rusty. One day the rust ate its way through the screw that held the weather cock upright, and one quiet winter night as the snow fell silently there was a rusty cough and the weather cock tipped over so it ended up with its rump in the air. And there it kept turning, dragging itself around with its behind facing the wind and its head shamefully bowed. At first people looked up and wondered why. Then they lost interest and forgot all about it. But the wind did not forget. It kept whistling from the sea, and the rust ate deeper and deeper into the body of the weather cock. And one clear, frosty night it could no longer move. It was stuck on the roof, unable to turn. No matter which direction the wind blew, the weather cock did not move. It had to take every gust of wind full on instead of rising against them as it had in its spirited youth.

One day a group of student teachers looked up as they heard the weather cock keel over on its side with a metallic sigh. It was a warm spring day, which the students were wasting sitting with pre-exam nerves in front of the teacher training college. They informed the principal about the fall of the weather cock. The principal found a really long ladder and crawled up and up into the blue sky until he reached the top. He managed to crawl down with the rusty weather cock resting tiredly in his arms, and gave the students the task of cleaning it, removing all the rust, oiling its joints, and repainting it in bright colours. They forgot about their exams and turned all their attention to the weather cock. And just a few days later there it was, up on the roof standing upright and proud in the face of the wind. And it is still there today.

Our signposts are like that weather cock. It takes attention, care and maintenance to be such a landmark. It takes the kind of community and solidarity that can free us of rust and rigidity.

Pictures, music, singing, bodily movement and stories are central to all thriving communities. This is the background for Siunissaq's combination of creative and psycho-social workshops.

### Photography as Material and Form

To photograph and write – like other expressive forms – are creative processes that stimulate the brain in a liberating way by opening up for a flow of feelings and thoughts that are visualised and written down and thus created, developed and freed from rusty, rigid interpretations. A lot of the young people who participate say they do not think they can photograph, write, make music, or contribute to creating a community. But by creating sustainable tools together to make this possible in many different ways, we can open up to creativity, invention, and development. This process of opening up makes it possible to express our feelings, make our values visible, embody knowledge, write beautiful, moving texts, and create a whole world of allegorical and astonishing pictures.



*Collaboration, Dialogue, Trust*  
Art and Communities  
Atammik, 2019

We are still standing, and we stand together. Hope is present in this realm of life-affirming experiences. It is what is expressed in the photographs, stories, drawings, songs and videos created in Siunissaq. It is expression that makes hope visible, audible, tangible, physical and alive.

### The Shared Experience of Communal Storytelling

Storytelling is deeply rooted in the communities of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. Stories are part of life, everyday existence and communal experiences. We have communal and individual ownership of our stories. They are alive: changing, being created, being listened to, weaving in and out of each other. A whole world of stories, each of them unique and therefore meaningful. It is important to retell old stories, but it is equally important to tell new ones.

This demands social courage, which is something very different to but connected to individual courage. It involves challenging prejudices, smiling tolerantly at ridicule and disrespect, and overcoming the after-effects of colonisation by showing that we are still standing and have the courage to live the life we choose without coercion, oppression or losing heart. Historical traumas can be overcome by hope. In his novel *Rayuela* (1963) Julio Cortazar writes: "Of all our feelings the only one which really doesn't belong to us is hope. Hope belongs to life, it is life itself defending itself."<sup>12</sup> Life reveals itself in a multitude of expressive forms that make it possible to remove the rust from the kind of life-denying experiences we have all encountered.

Storytelling is a central part of cultural heritage in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. Stories are told, passed down from generation to generation, and have always been part of the long dark night of winter or long hunting trips. The prior research we did talking to people in the villages made storytelling an obvious focus in Siunissaq. It was the personal meetings we had with teachers, social workers, the staff at the local shop and in the kitchen at our guesthouse, hunters, fishermen, mothers walking prams across the frost-cracked tarmac on spring days, and local young people that inspired us to create the framework for Siunissaq's creative workshops.

**“I teach personal development, and I’ve found participating in the workshops really inspiring. I can see the students really embrace it. We don’t have many words for feelings in Greenlandic, but talking together and putting feelings into pictures means I see more students participating in a more engaged way, opening up to each other in class and participating actively in the group. They get tired quickly, but if it interests them enough you can get them to listen and participate.”**

*Juliane K. Fleischer, school principal in Atammik*

Along the way it became clear to us that time and returning again and again to meet with the same young people were key to a successful process. It takes time to establish the kind of dialogue that can give all of us the strength to throw ourselves with courage, agency and creativity into photographing, looking at photographs, reflecting together, sensing together, and being open to new possibilities. It takes time – moment after moment – and continuity to turn something new and different into shared experiences, living knowledge, and practical ways to shape and understand life.

In Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland we are used to seeing outsiders come and go, which is why it is important for people to know that you will be back again and again and be part of making something together. Visibility is crucial: being present in a shared social and physical space is key to the entire process. That is why the workshops often lead up to a local event in the school assembly hall, village hall or in public space – in a central square, in the harbour, or outside the village hall. Here the event becomes a living and moveable part of community life, surprising people and gathering thoughts, impressions, understandings, and not least people in a communal activity.

Continuity is important. In Siunissaq the creative activities combined with psychosocial workshops are thematic. We address shared themes, always based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to food, the right to a good life, the right to an education, and the right to be heard. This takes place in several consecutive workshops. Experience-based learning can happen instantaneously, in moments that create

insight, joy and engagement. And these can form a series of experiences that can be drawn together in agency in everyday life, and the versatile and surprising ways life unfolds. Which is why we appreciate people coming back: meeting again, continuing the dialogue. When students from Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) returned to participate in another workshop one of the young boys in the workshop said: “You came back – that’s great. I didn’t think you would. But now you’re here, and that makes me really happy.”

Continuity in the project also lies with the involvement of local teachers. They give advice and contribute to forming the process at every stage, and they help ensure that the impact continues after the workshop is over.

Our starting point is reflecting on the rights we have and what they mean in our lives. What specific rights do we have as children, young people, and people in general? What is our history? What are our traditions, our food, and the culture we come from? What already exists, and what we can create together? These reflections are transformed into visible actions and works of art.

Coming forward and being visible in the group is a new path for many young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. It demands a prior process and a confidence-building environment. The combination of psychosocial workshops and art is a good way to open this path. It creates shared experiences generated by daring to try and by building practical and embodied knowledge and agency by doing things here and now. Through activities in the different but interlinked workshops this shared action-oriented knowledge is fostered through exercising our rights, especially:

The right to not feel fear / The right to be safe and protected  
 The right to look after each other / The right to secure basic human rights for everyone  
 The right to express ourselves / The freedom to think and speak freely  
 The right to have feelings / The right to self-determination  
 The right to develop freely / The right to education, culture and free time

Over the next couple of pages we explore some examples of concrete workshops.





**Workshop:****Identifying Our Feelings and the Feelings of Others**

Among the older students there are some – if not all – that need affirmation, to increase their level of self-respect, and to develop concrete tools to support each other. Some of them have only ever had rare experiences of success in the educational system, and some of them have experienced bullying as well as violence and abuse growing up. But the young people in this group are also moving forward: they want to get an education and achieve their goals in life. They have also had many good experiences. These are important to focus on and use to establish self-confidence, peaceful ways to resolve conflicts, mutual support, and a love of life. It is important that we create good, strong communities together, and the space for everyone to be part of them. This can be done by building on everything that already works well in their lives, and by expanding this to include more and more young people.

Identifying our own feelings and those of others is central to overcoming feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem and self-confidence, risk-taking behaviour, and insecurity in close relationships. Being able to identify feelings means we are not in doubt in contact with others, and do not need to resort to offensive or excessive behaviour. We also do not need to hide behind shyness and reticence when what we really want is to say what we think – and to be seen and heard by others. Being able to identify our feelings makes us feel more secure, it makes us conscious of what we want – and what we do not want. Identifying the feelings of others also makes us feel more secure because it means we can avoid difficult or dangerous situations by being aware of the intentions of others in time. Once we can do that, we become less insecure in relationships. We can start to establish safe and trusting relationships to others precisely because we know when we are safe with them, and when we need to be careful and alert. Once we can do that, we can learn how to form good relationships to others, even if we have grown up with violence and neglect. Drawing on shared experiences in the group young people can generate new insights into how to build safe, secure relationships where they can express themselves without being afraid of criticism, ridicule or violence.

Which is why we start every workshop by remembering good experiences in different ways, experiences where people have felt safe.

**“I was so sad and angry. After I had cried I could distance myself from what I had experienced, and felt relief afterwards. I discovered that when I turned off the computer my experiences no longer had the power to hurt me. I can see my life in a new way now.”**

*Sikkersoq, young workshop participant*

Drawing and telling stories about good experiences can create a counterbalance to other situations where people have not felt safe. After this we focus on feelings. Based on lived experience, we name them and show them, i.e. make them visible and transparent. We then develop a series of concrete tools together that can be used to influence feelings – both our own and those of others. This increases our ability to support each other in difficult situations, as well as to prevent violence by being aware of our own reactions and those of others in time. We establish ways to hold onto constructive feelings in ourselves and each other using activities that include masks, photographs, words, images, theatre, stories, etc.

**Workshop:****Gender, Body and Sexuality**

Sexual violence is widespread in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland, although levels vary from town to town and village to village, which shows that this is a problem that can be addressed and changed. Trust, safety and security can be created for everyone, especially in small communities where everyone knows each other. Numerous reports, including annual police reports,<sup>13</sup> show that sexual violence is a serious issue that has a long-term, damaging impact on its victims. Our second workshop therefore focuses on sexuality and how we can achieve self-determination, desire and joy in our sex lives without violating the rights of others.

The workshop, like all the psychosocial workshops in Suinissaq, is organised in close collaboration between psychologist Elena de Casas and the young participants, and offers training in providing information and guidance on sexual issues. Knowledge about sexual rights among children and young people in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland is apparently limited. The goal of this workshop is to strengthen our body awareness, social confidence,



and thereby self-confidence – as well as fostering healthy sexual behaviour. The goal is to promote healthy body perception, responsible sexuality and self-confidence by putting sexuality into the broader perspective of sexual rights, equality and health.

Neglect and violence in the home as well as bullying can lead to risk-taking behaviour in the form of violence and multiple sexual contacts, as well as sexual jealousy.

Sexuality is a source of joy, intimacy and love, as well as being impacted on by sexual assault, rape, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, jealousy, and violence. Way too many of us experience negative aspects of sexuality. Many of us have only a limited knowledge of how our bodies work, as well as how to protect ourselves from negative experiences. If our self-respect is low, if we have difficulty identifying our feelings and those of others, if we are afraid to say what we think or want, then we are at greater risk of sexual assault and abuse.

The goal of the workshop is to put young people in a better position to take care of themselves and others, and to reduce the risk of being subject to sexual abuse or subjecting others to sexual abuse. Through a joint learning process we build knowledge of sexual and reproductive rights in order to strengthen mutual support, respect and safety in sexual behaviour. A large part of the violence in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland is sexual, and it can be prevented. In the workshops we use noticeboards, sculptures, kites, mobiles, films, texts, photographs, drawings, and stories.

The workshop creates a space to express ourselves freely without taboos about sexual subjects. The goal is to make the young people guides for themselves and others in this area. The focus is therefore on activities that can be used to communicate their knowledge to others, and thereby contribute to the competence of the community in creating conditions for safe and life-affirming sexuality.

The success criteria for the workshop is that the young people can express themselves freely about sexual subjects, that they know about sexual and reproductive rights, that they can protect themselves from sexual violence, and that they understand the suffering sexual violence causes its victims, as well as the destructive effect it has on mutual respect, safety and trust in the entire local community, and especially in families and couples.

**“We have lots of taboos about sex. You’re not allowed to talk about it. Only do it. That’s strange when we know how many people have had awful experiences of sex. Why can’t we talk about it? Why is it so dangerous to talk about sex? We got rid of lots of the taboos. Suddenly we were able to talk about sex without being ashamed.”**

*Ajaatu, young workshop participant*

**“I never told anyone I was homosexual before. There were some people in class who had said they were homosexual. But not me. It was a relief to say it, even though I think everyone already knew. But everyone was still really kind, and nobody started to bully me.”**

*Inuk, young workshop participant*

### **Workshop: Photography and Writing**

This workshop is based on the previous workshops and the opportunity they give people to reflect on their lives and their dreams for the future. We use the young people’s stories in order to reinforce shared reflections and constructive feelings, individually and as a group. Our starting point is knowing and telling lots of different stories about ourselves, each other, and life in general so nobody gets trapped in a single story. Expressing ourselves in photographs, texts and portraits builds new experiences that reflect the values that mean something to us individually and as a group. The focus is an active reinforcement of respect, trust and security between everyone present.

The young people make a series of photographs of feelings, places and objects that are important in their lives and dreams. The process of photographing contributes to shared experiences that are sensory, direct and highly present. It is a way of expressing ourselves at the same time as making our feelings, life, hopes and dreams visible to others.







**“I’ve learnt different ways to take pictures. Most of all I’ve learnt how to take pictures of what I feel inside.”**

*Aputsiaq, young workshop participant*

The writing process – co-facilitated by the writer Niviaq Korneliussen, follows the photographs – or vice versa. This is determined by how the process develops, and how the young people in the workshop want to present their work. Photographs and texts form part of the collated material from the workshops, and are used in the materials Siunissaq produces in books, exhibitions and community-generating projects in public space. The materials are used to create dialogue, and provide a basis for other young people to identify with the themes articulated in the works.

One participant told us: “I feel I have so much to say in both photographs and text – I hope you can use it.” After which she put a piece of paper on the table in front of us where she had written:

*I want my future to be bright.  
In my future I will have a good life. I will have an education,  
a job and a safe home. I think about that every day. But unless  
the grown-ups help me I won’t make it. Without a safe home and  
without going to school I definitely won’t make it.*

*Children have the right to go to school.  
And children need help to go to school.  
Without love and care, we can’t do our schoolwork.  
Without food and sleep, we don’t have enough strength.  
Without strength, we can’t get an education.  
Without an education, we have no future.  
Without a future, we have no food, clothes or work.  
Without love, we have no children. And we need children.  
They are the future for us all.*

*Nivikka, young workshop participant*

## **Workshop:**

### **Building Security and Trust in Close Relationships**

The goal of this workshop is to use experiences from the previous workshops to continue to master feelings and sexuality in ways that create well-being and reduce the risk of being subject to assault and abuse. Furthermore, the goal is to be able to express ourselves in ways that create trust and a sense of security – especially in close relationships. Being able to build good, stable and mutually supportive relationships is an important part of young lives, and provides a foundation for young people to shape their future in a positive and sustainable way, including being able to deal with conflict peacefully without avoiding the issue of the conflict (conflict avoidance rarely resolves conflicts in a useful way). We use drawing, photography, theatre, music, film, make presentations, and interview each other and people in the local community about values. We address concrete and current conflicts in the lives of young people directly in order to find peaceful, lasting solutions together.

### **The Path We Travel**

The path we travel with young people in Siunissaq, as well as with teachers and other local professionals, parents and the community, is full of shared experiences and encounters, impressions and creative expressions, sensory experiences and reflections. We would like to close this chapter by presenting an overall view of what unifies the many dimensions of the experience.

All the workshops share the goal of supporting young people in talking together openly, also about difficult issues in their lives. The communal activities create a space of mutual respect, trust, security, solidarity and mutual support. This is done by building on good experiences the young people have already had in safe groups – experiences of trust and respect – then expanding these experiences to include everyone and to fill more in everyday life so there is less space for violence, ridicule, bullying, sexual violence, and betrayal. Instead there is space for surprise and wonder, freedom from feeling trapped, and the possibility of unfolding the vast potential of life.

Taken as a whole, the creative and psychosocial workshops form the prelude and rhythm of Siunissaq by gathering sensory impressions and reflections in a broad spectrum of experience-based learning and agency. The workshops form a whole, but can also be held individually. They can be



The first locally organised meeting by Eli Abelsen, principal of Majoriaq Re-entry College in Tasiilaq in 2015. These photographs mark the beginning of Siunissaq.

combined in different ways, as long as people remember the complex whole they are part of. They are stepping stones, and the path ahead is established en route with the young people themselves, their parents, and their teachers. The workshops are precisely that, forges where we make signposts. Workshops where we can make a mould to cast a good life by practising it here and now in a safe space.

In these workshops and on this journey everyone contributes to the dialogue in different ways. The contribution made by the young people is closely connected to creating a sense of social responsibility here and now. Their contributions are statements that directly co-create social relationships and presence. As such they are live evaluations of the process that show what they want in relationships. The young people take responsibility for the process with their written and spoken comments and evaluations.

This way of evaluating our shared learning is full of human dignity, because it demonstrates the solicitude they have for each other and for us, the adults who have travelled from afar to meet them. The young people – just like the towns, local communities, schools and teachers – are generous, caring and attentive hosts. And they rightly demand

that their hospitality is not abused, that we do not keep saying “Yes please” long after the pantry is empty without bringing new food to the table. Siunissaq is built on gratitude for the generosity, solicitude and human presence we meet in the towns and villages of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland.

A concrete presence full of real faces, warm handshakes and beautiful, moving moments, like when Anders raced through Nanortalik on his bike faster than the helicopter to greet us on the pale blue summer night when we landed there. Our shared laughter sailing in light blue soundwaves across the bay and up to the sharp peaks marching northwards.

*I want to have a goal in life while I’m still young,  
My inner strength is growing.  
I can feel it, the joy and will to live coming back to me.  
The difficult things in my life have become stories.  
Memories I have learned from, and learned how to live with.  
I never thought I would get out of  
The black hole I was in before.  
I did, and I’ve come so far that I feel fine.  
My life is what’s most important to me  
– and I don’t want to lose it anymore.*

*Aaja, young workshop participant*

8. Deleuze, G. (2005). *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

9. Fontcuberta, J. (2016). *El beso de Judas – Fotografía y verdad*. 3rd edition. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili.

10. Barthes, R. (2010). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.

11. Deleuze, G. (2005). *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Minneapolis. The University of Minnesota Press.

12. Cortazar, J. (1984). *Rayuela*. “Probablemente de todos nuestros sentimientos el único que no es verdaderamente nuestro es la esperanza. La esperanza le pertenece a la vida, es la vida misma defendiéndose.” Madrid: Edhasa, p. 196.

13. [www.politi.gl](http://www.politi.gl)

It is in the present that the future is formed. Life has its own path, life is irrepressible. We humans, with all our despondency, envy and joy, are just part of life's great puzzle. Which is exactly what

makes us significant: that we are not alone, that we are part of a whole. It is when we acknowledge this that the creative process can begin.

# Chapter 4

## New Landscapes of Photography



Nerisagut / Our Food, Tasiliq, 2016

**Taking ownership of our own stories** and sharing the journey to new places that are meaningful here and now where life is happening is the starting point for all the activities involving art we create together in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. Through this shared process of wonder and learning we – the young people and ourselves – can make tools to imagine another world, build faith in the future, and create a sense of shared agency to deal with the present. Small steps along the way are more important than distant goals. Every step has to justify the end – not the other way round. Sharing our experiences is a joint process, just as Josef did at the cultural centre in Nuuk one day in March:

*I hadn't seen Josef for a while. He'd participated in a photography workshop a couple of years before, and we'd been in touch ever since. I was really happy to see him and see how well he looked. I immediately started asking him how he was, telling him how good it was to see him, and turned to the exhibition hanging on the wall – photographs by German artists of icebergs and the Northern Lights. I asked Josef what he thought of the pictures. Josef turned to me and with a determined look said: "I'm not impressed!" His response surprised me, he wasn't buying into what people usually see as beautiful images or good photography. That was when I realised that Josef had understood the power of photography. He understood that beautiful images are not what are important for young people in Greenland. What is important are powerful, honest pictures from their own culture that tell their own stories: images that say what they find important and relevant.*

*Tina Enghoff*

Like many others we have met on our way, Josef taught us to listen to the vast knowledge and self-knowledge that exists in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland, and which can be given the chance to flourish through dialogue. This book explores art as a way to build culture and community. Aesthetics, ethics and the creation of good opportunities for development for everyone are part of the integral whole that form the philosophy of a culture that has survived in the Arctic for centuries. We focus more on the process than the result. Art is part of life. Art is not separate from life, because creating images,



seeking beauty, and experiencing wonder are life itself, the very process of life – its vitality and vigour. Art as part of the process of perception and realisation is itself a tool for agency in practice that strengthens community in the towns and villages of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. It is in context that a work of art has meaning. Art and life are inextricably linked. Art is part of the endeavour to create balance and wholeness in a life that can sometimes be broken, falling apart, or fragmented.

Photography can give us something unique when it comes to understanding and channelling our feelings. Using a camera and taking pictures is basically an out-of-body experience. We experience something where words might escape us, but that we can show visually. When we are asked if we can take a photograph of joy, anger or power, we open up to showing something that we recognise, that has resonance for ourselves and others. We look for an image, a moment, that shows what we might have experienced or understood, or that is elusive or gone but can be captured in a picture. The image creates a form, creates a frame for a particular moment in time, and it appeals to shared understanding through the recognition others experience when they see it. An image is an experience we share with others – the comprehensible and incomprehensible, the transient, the waning light of the late afternoon, a ball suspended in the air, a somersault frozen in time against a cloudless sky.

A photograph is something we create, but it has a life of its own. It can be seen by others who respond to it. In this way it can create a shared experience. Photography is an encounter, and it can create an opportunity for dialogue. Dialogue is a form of communication where the experience of each person is taken seriously. Dialogue is an act of mutual listening and affirmation of the right to think, speak and believe freely. Dialogue can contribute to shared understanding. Dialogue is community in action. It is looking at a photograph together, thinking respectfully about what people are expressing, and in doing so finding a way forward into the landscape.

Photography differs from other artforms because the actual act of photographing involves the person who is photographing moving in their life-world, meeting it, interacting with it and engaging with it with a camera. This engagement is alive and on the move, a sum of the photographer's spontaneity and the cracks, movements and coincidences of life that coalesce in the photographic moment.

**I am an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I'm in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse's mouth. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, manoeuvring in the chaotic movements, recording one moment after another in the most complex combinations. Freed from boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.**

*Dziga Vertov<sup>14</sup>*

The choices a photographer makes in terms of what and where to photograph always constitute a form of a self-portrait. And this is precisely where we build community, because the self-portrait is already part of the world, is visible to others as a vision, a hope, and way of being in the world. In the photography workshops we are in this process together, because a series of photographs can be seen as an extended self-portrait – a portrait of the self as a unique part of the vast flow of life and a portrait of us, the people living this moment together in a shared world of sea and mountains. This is where we can meet. This is where understanding arises. Here everyone – old and young alike – is in the same place at the same moment in time.

It is precisely in this shared moment – here and now – that we have to deal with our insecurity in facing others. We have to overcome our shyness and meet the world that surrounds us in a sensory way that holds the potential for change. Being a photographer sometimes means we have to dare to ask someone to change position, look up, smile, etc. The photographer is present, in contact, and invites dialogue about what we want to express and how we want to present ourselves. Taking control in this way in collaboration with others creates a form of shared, aesthetic co-participation and co-creation that fosters self-confidence, curiosity and the power to create new visions



*Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut  
– Uagut inuunerput  
Our Rights – Our Life  
Nanortalik, 2015*

and understanding. The power to think, to understand, and to experience enjoyment through pictures. Photographing in this way demands establishing a basis for mutual relationships here and now in the moment, but also before and after the act of photographing. The photographer is part of the situation, and has to be interested in what is happening right now. The photographer has to be alive and participate, rather than being a spectator in life.

Giving and receiving gifts is the basis of friendship, something photography can help us to train and learn. We give in order to receive. The exchange of gifts is something Tor Nørretranders links to his understanding

of what he calls ‘Homo Generosus’, i.e. the generous human.<sup>15</sup> This human being is giving, gives generously, and can play and develop with a sense of freedom and responsibility.

Photography is an invitation to play, experiment, investigate, and explore. Making mistakes is not wrong, but part of the process. Personal experience is more important than the final photographic result. Taking a photograph of someone is to give them something: I see you, you matter. Sharing photographs with each other is an act of trust and generosity, and can help us understand ourselves and the action and reaction patterns we all have. Photography can give us a small push towards opening up and being more confident, and in doing so can take us along a path of creating opportunities for growth, development, and well-being together. This is something we do in a playful, innovative and sometimes painful or humorous way. But it is always liberating: it makes things visible, breaks down secrecy and oppressive taboos, and creates the space to breath freely, think anew, and dare to show the unmentionable and powerful within us without discrimination or prejudice. This happens when we play with ideas, with visions, and with imaginary worlds together, and in doing so open up for what the workshops create: visual storytelling where new sides of the story are made visible in an insistent, necessary, surprising and humorous way that demands we participate and act.

### Shared Wonder

In the workshops we always look at the photographs that have been taken, either in the afternoon or the following morning. This generates a visual whole and sense of community that stems precisely from the multitude of images. The photographs are not the same. They are unique, singular, and in being so can create a whole – a balance. This balance opens up for the possibility of challenging ourselves by taking new photographs that celebrate singularity due to the contribution it makes to the whole. Nothing is ever outside, ever excluded, because a balanced whole can only be created by being open to and making space for singularity. Otherwise it represents not a whole, but uniformity – a totality that can exclude and alienate. Creating a balanced whole means making space and opening up to difference – an equilibrium without a centre. This creates the security to create something

unique, entirely new, or to see something familiar in a new light. This is a moving whole, but with repetitions and therefore recognisability.

### What Matters

It is important to address what is important in life. This could be a feeling of social marginalisation, a feeling of communion with nature or animals, or the feeling of not belonging to your own culture, of feeling like an outsider. Or not feeling at home in your own body or sexuality. What is key is that we deal with what is important, what is meaningful, what matters to us. This is what the photographs show. This is what is shown to everyone else in an exhibition in the workshop or in public space. It is by showing what matters to us that we can be co-creators of our shared future: deciding to make specific sides of the life we share visible and insisting on the good things in life and on changing what creates suffering, inequality, and imbalance. In expressing ourselves visually we can create knowledge in pictures and – in the subsequent dialogue – words that are beautiful, calming, joyful and respectful. That are present and contribute to community building.

### Freedom

The space the young people create together is a space of free expression – of freedom of speech, a human right in action and practice. This is an end in itself, but it is through the means, the process, that the end lives. The photography and psychosocial workshops are a serious playground with a broad spectrum of affirmative as well as challenging experiences. In this space of free speech there is also space to be insecure and get into deep water – to learn to dare to make mistakes and feel vulnerable.

One topic for a photography or writing assignment can be freedom. Here is it important for the teacher of a photography workshop to show what freedom can look like in a picture. It is abstract, but experience has taught us that young people in Greenland are excellent at thinking in this way, especially if they are given the inspiration and opportunity. An image of freedom can provide a catalyst for important conversations in the group. It is a concept many know by heart, but might never have put into words or pictures.

Uagut pisinnaataaffigut – Uagut inuunerput / Our Rights – Our Life, Tasilaq, 2015







## Affirmation

Showing photographs that create wonder, demonstrate freedom of expression, and open up for dialogue is at the heart of the workshops. It creates a space of mutual listening, support, and affirmation. Everyone has the opportunity to make suggestions and give feedback in an affirmative and motivating way. This fosters a shared consciousness that we all have something of value to give others. It is a formative process that creates the space for everyone to step forth in a new way, not only in relationship to their family, friends and local community, but also in relationship to themselves.

“I see you, you have my attention, I think you’re doing a good job.” This is often called ‘critique’ in art and creative writing classes, but it should not be seen as criticism. It is a conversation with curious and shared reflections on what is presented in the workshop. Each workshop participant is to be taken seriously and asked why they have chosen to take a photograph or write a text in a particular way. As workshop teachers we can contribute with points of view and suggest small challenges, but otherwise we let each participant feel that they can find the answers themselves with the help of the group. When it comes to photography this can include asking the participant to go out again and think about the background they use or the angle the photograph is taken from. “Could this be done in a different way? What do *you* think?” “Give it another shot – I’m curious to see what you come up with.” The young person will experience contact with someone who is genuinely interested in what they are doing and as a result make an extra effort. Below we split a concrete workshop example into involvement and affirmation.

A young man had spent the first two days disrupting the workshop, constantly interrupting and telling the group he was in he was not interested in what we were doing. He tried making fun of the participants presenting their work. There was only one path to take, and that was to get him interested in participating. He had to be seen and taken seriously. We told him that it was obvious that he had a lot of creativity, that he could probably take really great photographs, and that some of the things he said really made sense. He looked totally astonished when we said that he made sense, and that we were sure he was creative and full of ideas that were just waiting to get out. Humour was useful here, laughing together at all the weird, funny pictures he would probably take. This was a dialogue about solutions, not the problems he was causing in the workshop. The next day everyone in the class

was given the assignment of taking the funniest, most surprising photograph they could think of. There were no limits, but there was one rule: nobody was to be laughed at. We could, however, laugh together in mutual respect. He used all his energy and came back with lots of funny photographs, full of togetherness and humour that made the others laugh. It was a good atmosphere. On the following days he often stayed behind after the workshop was over.

This example leads us directly back to one of the ethical and practical principles we have established for Siunissaq: separating the problem from the person. The problem is a problem, but the person is our ally in solving it. No person is ‘wrong’, but there are problems that have to be solved by strengthening and supporting everything else that person can do.

We would like to end this chapter with a quote that puts this very well, and that opens up for further thoughts and considerations – something we return to in the next chapter.

*“Since its invention photography has been used to police and persecute people, to oppress and shame them, and to violate their rights. Although the cameras used in those situations have been operated by the oppressors or by their proxies to serve their interests, they have often betrayed the latter’s intentions and encapsulated enough of these violent situations that could at any moment, when a photograph was taken or years after, be potentialized. A violent past cannot be completely undone but its memory and consequences can be transformed so that other forms of life will not be buried forever under the ineluctable fact of history. Spectators’ active engagement is necessary for releasing those situations from the template of power relations imposed on people as the only one possible, so as that at any moment the balance can be reversed and new alliances can be formed across times and places.”<sup>16</sup>*

14. Russian Soviet film director, 1896-1954, quoted in John Berger (1972). *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin Books, p.17.

15. Nørretranders, T. (2005). *The Generous Man: How Helping Others is the Sexiest Thing You Can Do*. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press.

16. *Collaboration: A Potential History of Photography* (2018). A project by Ariella Azoulay, Wendy Ewald, Susan Meiselas, Leigh Raiford and Laura Wexler.



**A photograph is something we create, but it has a life of its own. It can be seen by others who respond to it. In this way it can create a shared experience.**

**Photography is an opportunity for dialogue.**

**Dialogue is a form of communication where the experience of each person is taken seriously. Dialogue is an act of mutual listening and affirmation of the right to think, speak and believe freely.**

## Putting Pictures into Words

Kristian, Tina Enghoff and Peter Berliner sit down together to talk about ten of Kristian's photographs a year after he had participated in his last photo workshop. Kristian was born in a small settlement 1992 and spent most of his youth in Tasiilaq, East Greenland. He has participated in six of Siunissaq's psychosocial and artistic workshops, as well as project events in public space.



Tasiilaq, 2018

**Kristian:** For me these two images are light against darkness. I like my life, but sometimes there are dark things that pull you away from the light. But just wait, things get better again – and the water symbolises that it helps to have a good cry.

**Tina:** For me the two together are a self-portrait. We all have dark and light sides. The dark cliff is almost like a living creature, a reminder of prehistoric times watching over life and giving you the strength to tackle difficult things. The images have sharp and soft forms, familiar forms from nature that are brought to life in new stories.

**Peter:** They are generous images that show the forces out there in the mountains and cascading water. The first shows the ice – water in solid form, water that might be locked in a frozen state for a while, but shifts constantly between freezing and melting. It's not a permanent state. Something happens, the water breaks through in a torrent. The rocks are like ancient sculptures, slowly disintegrating in a slow yet sedate process of change. The ice can stand upright like a moving sculpture that melts in the warm autumn air. It's good to wait, it's good to cry from time to time, it's good to come alive again and feel the power of the flow of life.



Tasiilaq, 2018

**Kristian:** You have to remember you can always reach for the light. I could see that my friend was feeling sad, so I said: “Can you stretch your hand towards the light?” I showed her the picture and she said, “Wow! That’s beautiful.” I asked her what she was thinking and she said: “I’ve taken the light back.”

**Tina:** I see so much joy and closeness in this photograph, and I can’t help thinking about how we are in eternal harmony with nature and animals – that everything is interconnected. And right in the middle of the photograph sits your friend. Is she bigger than the mountains, or are the mountains bigger than her? It’s the hand we focus on, rising above the mountains and showing us how to catch the light.

**Peter:** The light and hand form a whole, at the same time as having a life of their own. The boat moves on the glassy water. Your friend is smiling, holding onto the light – but is seen through the eye of the photographer. There’s a dialogue we can’t hear, only sense. The dialogue creates joy, as does seeing the photograph where she takes the light back afterwards, something she couldn’t actually see when the picture was taken. In that sense the image is part of a process of reflection shared by the photographer and the woman that includes the actual creation of the image and the experience it gave the woman, who could then see herself taking the light back. The sky opens up for the light in a long, blue crack between floating clouds, giving the light its special strength. The light might only be there momentarily, but it can also become part of the hand that reaches for it.



Tasilaq, 2017

**Kristian:** This is a photograph of helping someone that is really sad and about to fall into darkness. I'm a man of light, telling her that I'll pull her up into the light – that she should hold onto my hands and let me help her. That there's a good life on the other side.

**Tina:** Describing your photograph you put helping someone into words. I've sometimes found it difficult to express helping someone in words in a workshop, whereas it's not difficult to take pictures of how to help someone. That's where your photograph helps make what we really want to express visible – reaching out to help. The river roaring in the background is the danger that waits if she falls. It would carry her away if you weren't there holding on, solid as a rock.

**Peter:** When I only look at the photograph I see balance. At the precise moment the photograph was taken a balance had been created. A balance between two people. It is a moment, and part of you pulling someone else up into the light. Instead of drowning in darkness, the girl can move towards the light. Maybe light and darkness are not opposites, but part of a balance. That's exactly what we see here, how light and darkness are present in the same image, the same moment. They can also be set in motion, their balance can be influenced and changed, which demands constant alignment and joint coordination.



Tasilaq, 2017

**Kristian:** I'm so happy that I'm where I should be in life, surrounded by nature. And that I've met a girlfriend that brings so much colour to my life. I'm full of joy. The yellow colour comes from God. I'm looking up at heaven and looking at the sun.

**Tina:** I see this image as a sharp contrast to the dark pictures – a happy life, full of joy. A life of ease, a life without anger as you write in your poem on page 91. You are at one with the universe, and your face is like the sun that's smiling down on you. Your life makes sense, you are in the midst of nature, satisfied, happy, dreaming, on your way ... I feel like the sun looking down at you and giving you strength and happiness, and the feeling that you want to share that with others. We can have such different feelings within us, as your next image shows ...

**Peter:** There is joy. There is presence. The jacket and vegetation have the same colours – lots of different yellows, greys, blacks and greens. It's a relaxed picture. A summer day, where life is easy. There is the sun on the face, and the gaze is turned towards the sun. There is a girlfriend somewhere, but that's not something we can see in the photograph. She is there – in all the colours. As Tina said, we see you from the sun's point of view, maybe even from our imagined experience of God's point of view, filling us with a warm sense of joy and rapture.



Tasilaq, 2017

**Kristian:** The photograph shows that I'm really, really sad. They had just called from the hospital to tell me my foster dad had died. I didn't want to live anymore. I was ten years old. There are no colours and I need help – I need colours. My family helped me – my cousin took care of me and gave me bright colours and the desire to live back.

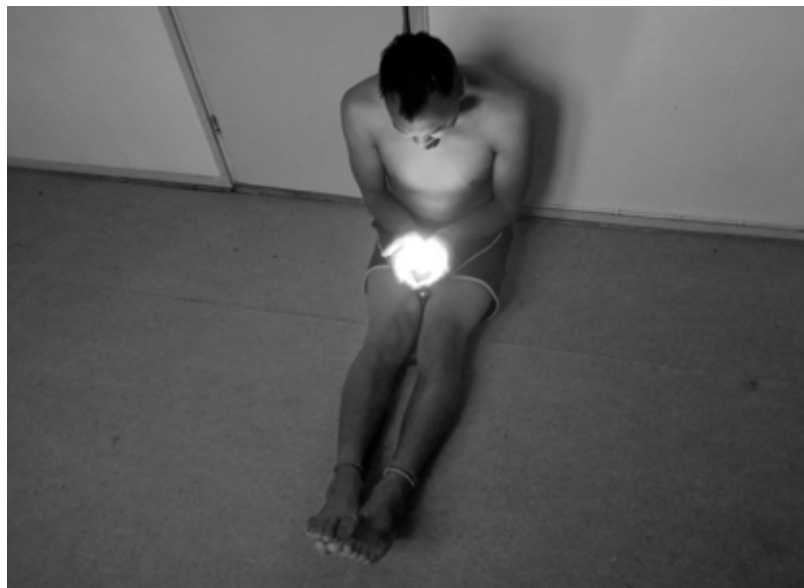
**Tina:** This picture can help you talk about something that is really difficult. Memories that are stored in your body and are part of your story. We are in no doubt that something is at stake here. The picture is full of symbols: the reflections in the window, the blurred face virtually dissolving in the wet glass. It hits us hard, especially when we've seen the other images that are so full of light and hope. But it's important that we can identify the different feelings we have, and this is where you manage to put what fills your soul with negative thoughts into words and images.

*Nature is wonderful  
Peaceful,  
The sound of the river  
Where the trout are,  
It smells good here.  
The birds sing,  
The reindeer run  
With other animals that make my life easier.  
They help me breathe,  
They purify my life  
The sound of the waves at sea.  
Seals  
and other marine animals  
emerge from the sea.  
A happy life, full of joy.  
An easy life without anger.  
Families and parents that respect each other.  
A life where I'm taken good care of,  
A life where my father is here.  
A life where he's not an addict.*

*Kristian, young workshop participant*

**Peter:** It's an intense portrait of a grieving person merging with his surroundings, almost disappearing into them. There are no anchor points, just the sense of drowning in your surroundings, in the glass, in the reflection – but in doing so being at one with them. It can be experienced as shutting things out, disappearing into your own grief. But grief actually connects us to the world around us if we see the love it contains. Grief is also an expression of the capacity to love another person, to love other people. That's where the power of the image lies. Not in its pain, but in its deep connection to the world in grieving for the foster father who is no longer here. Your love of your foster father is clearly expressed in this picture, which shows both pain and interconnectedness with the world, and so shows that they belong together.





Tasiliq, 2017

**Kristian:** You can't live a life without colours. You have to grasp the colours that are there. They are here in my hand. I can find my feelings, take my light, and think there are always new friends out there.

**Tina:** Here you've chosen to sit almost naked in a room, vulnerable and concentrated. Shades of black and white run into each other. It creates a feeling of loneliness, but in the vulnerability underlined by your nakedness there is also hope, the hope of a brighter future, which is what you put into words yourself. When we showed our photographs in the workshop a lot of people said they liked this particular picture. They saw its symbolism, and it gave us the chance to talk about how the feeling of trying to find light in life can be held in a single image of someone catching the light.

**Peter:** In a picture like this I see you, a human being, experiencing joy but also amazement at the light shining out of your hand. The light moves through the hands and through the image and as such comes simultaneously from within and without. Light moves, is on a journey. It has speed, the speed of light. Even while you sit completely still on the floor looking at your radiant hands the light speeds on. There is a light that refuses to die. And you want to use it to find colour, also where the beautiful colours are precisely those here – shades of grey gathered around the light, but also spreading, disappearing out of the image. They have a life of their own, a world that creates space for the light. It is your light, and the light of the world. You are in the world, and the world is in you.



Tasiliq, 2017

**Kristian:** I've painted my hands black. That's the darkness in life. But I love colours, and always look for colours in my life. They makes me happy and give me hope. The leaves are the colours in my life. They overcome the darkness, lie on top of the darkness. Hands mean a lot to me. We can use our hands to show if we're feeling good or bad. An open hand means I'm fine, a closed hand that I need help. When you meet another person you can give them colours by asking "How are you?", "What's your name?", "Do you need help?" It's like flowers. If you water them they grow in every colour of the rainbow, including red that means "I love you", or blue that means "I want to help you".

**Tina:** The hands are open and full of colours – hands that invite people in and reach out. Around the wrist are the two colours you describe here: red and blue. I see the hands as two people dancing with each other in a drum or mask dance. Solving problems, challenging each other with fear, humour and sexuality. Let's use your photograph, which is not only strong in form and colour but also content to talk about the important things in life.

**Peter:** It's a beautiful image, and very thought-provoking. Before I heard what you just told us I saw two hands holding onto the earth. But a planet that is hospitable today, that breathes and is alive, can also turn into a barren wasteland if we don't take care of it. The black hands show that we are part of the earth, that we are made of earth. That might sound as dark as the hands, but it is also fertile. It is out of darkness that flowers full of colour grow. Darkness forms a background for colours. It is darkness that makes us able to see colours, that gives them life. And once the flowers are here we can water them, give them to others, give them space to grow into something big and beautiful, but also something as tiny, fragile and ingenious as love and togetherness. Like the red colour that joyfully and boldly shouts "I love you", or whispers it almost inaudibly to someone who has already fallen asleep with their arms wrapped around you.





Tasilaq, 2018

**Kristian:** This photo means a lot to me – it's my life. The sea is very dark, and I've been down there to fetch light. I want to show everyone: see, I've come with light, and I can give it to you. If you need it, I can bring more light from the dark water. I'm not afraid of the sea anymore like I was when I was a child and my foster father drowned. Then I was really scared of the sea. It was like a monster. But I taught myself to overcome the fear and make friends with the sea. Today the sea is my friend.

**Tina:** It's so good to confront and overcome something you're afraid of. Here it's the sea, but the sea can also symbolise new challenges in life: an education, a new school, a job, maybe having to leave your town or village. Here you're at one with nature, like a fish in water. You have staged yourself doing something you were afraid of before, an act of cooperation between you and your friend. This is not a tourist shot or a photograph of a whale taken by a professional nature photographer. It is based on your understanding of creating a different kind of picture of something familiar, something usually photographed by tourists and professional photographers. You've used your creativity and personal history in a carefree, playful way that amuses people who see it and challenges our view of photographs of Greenland.

**Peter:** The sea is a master teacher precisely because it doesn't not want to teach us anything. It just is. The sea can kill us, but not on purpose. And it can give us life, carrying us on its broad back out to the distant horizon, and much, much further. The sea is deadly calm, the sea heaves in long swells, casting waves against the outermost island where the sky meets the sea. The sea is teeming with life – sea animals, fish, sharks and thousands and thousands of other living, moving creatures in myriads of shapes and sizes. The sea is dark, it is blue, it is green. It was from the sea that we first crawled onto land. The photograph shows us a person emerging from the depths of the ocean – or sinking into them. Or simply showing that he and the sea are playing together.



Tasilaq, 2017

**Kristian:** I'm really sad, thinking about suicide. I just want to die. But see me as I am, don't see me as a bad person. Some people say I'm bad because my father is a bad person. But I'm not. I can catch the light and give it to people – to people that need it – just like I've needed light in my life.

**Tina:** Light and darkness are recurrent themes in your photographs. This picture is full of hope. Your body floats in time and space, in freedom, in the dark of night that makes the image calm and harmonious and makes me want to come with you on your journey to the light, to the stars. You reach out to everyone who wants to accept your help. You are a generous and giving person, and that describes who you are Kristian, a person who wants others to come on your journey with you, who reaches out their hand and says, 'Come with me!'.

**Peter:** It is an overwhelming and in a way strange image with its depiction of a person who looks as if they're hanging from the light. The face is recognisable – devoted, concentrated and happy, all at once. The body is only visible as arms and torso, almost insect-like. The arms reaching for the light and holding it are long and look strangely thin because of the way the light falls. The picture is about suicide you say – it comes from just wanting to die – but from that comes the desire to be seen as the good person you are. You want to be seen as you are – as someone who can reach for the light and give it to others because you know what it's like to live in darkness. To live in the dark is to be in a place where others say you are a bad person. But there are no bad people. There are people who do bad things. It's the bad things we don't like. And you are a good person, because you want to reach for the light, find it in dark and inaccessible places, find it in the dark depths of the sea and give it as colour and hope to those who need it.

# Chapter 5

## Ethical and Practical Principles



Uagut pisirnaatitaafiqut – Uagut inuunerput / Our Rights – Our Life, Tasilaq, 2015

In earlier chapters we have described Siunissaq as a journey, an open process where we operate with a set of key values. These values are not abstract, remote or unattainable. They are signposts for and in everything we do. They are Siunissaq's *inua* – its spirit and soul. As such they cannot be seen directly, only in the things we do and the dialogues we are part of. Our values can be seen in our actions and words. They can also be formulated, but values are without value unless they are present in everything we say and do.

Values exist in actions and dialogue. They are systematically ontological, i.e. they exist and are therefore real, but they are neither absolute nor self-contained. They have to be practised, and have no life without. They exist. Etymologically the word 'exist' comes from Latin, and means to come forth, stand forth, arise, be. The sense of moving forward is clear, stepping beyond the present moment by continuing onward and forward. This movement takes place in time and place and at the different levels of context we use to understand and be in the world.

To 'stand forth' is key to this social movement, which is precisely about moving forward, choosing a direction that frees us from damaging silence and points to the open landscape. Ahead, away, forward, into the open, onward, out, out of hiding, outward.

We see protection, safety, participating in decision making, caring and hope grow in the same way. They exist with a power of their own in our actions and words, and they also exist in our understanding of them. This existence and understanding are not the same, but can also not be separated. As such they are like the biological phenomenon of mutualistic symbiosis:

*Only 10 % of the cells in the human body are actually human cells, the rest are something like 100 billion (100,000 million) bacteria belonging to 500-1,000 different species. Most of these bacteria we really need, and some of them we cannot do without. And many of the bacteria cannot survive without us. We are dealing with mutualistic symbiosis, i.e. a symbiotic co-existence that benefits both parties.*

*Jesper Hoffmeyer<sup>17</sup>*

Even though the comparison with bacteria might seem strange, we see values in practice as equally essential to the sustainment of life. And we understand them as having a life of their own in mutualistic symbiosis with our understanding of them. As Hoffmeyer writes: “We talk about our gut bacteria as if they are not us, but we would die if we did not have them.”<sup>18</sup>

Life as a whole, where it is difficult to say where one life ends and another begins, is our starting point. We do not talk about our worldview embodying our deepest, most personal experiences. We do not think we can identify a person solely on the basis of a description of their experience, because that would distract our attention from how events develop, from the life of the photograph itself, from the multiplicity of life surrounding us. Lining worldviews up next to each other does not create dialogue.

If we only focus on worldviews and their allegedly authentic presentation in an interview, we forget that the person being interviewed is creating a narrative, and it is precisely the life of the narrative that contributes to our shared understanding. Just as the photograph is not a direct representation of reality, but includes the intention behind it, the experience of it, the actual picture – its material and format – and the symbolic meaning that reaches out to us at the same time as we move towards it. Similarly a short film, a drawing, a movement through the room, a remark that is written down and used later, a work of art, is a product that once created carries the process of its making within it, but also has a life of its own. Walter J. Ong’s analysis of the similarities and differences between spoken language – including oral history – and written language shows how written language materialises.<sup>19</sup> The finished text can be kept and be read aloud in different contexts and in this way ‘walk away’ from its author. We have many myths about the author as a unique creative person, which is far from wrong. Yet many creative people talk about the text ‘virtually writing itself’. We are seized by inspiration, and have been ever since Plato, who saw poets as either divinely inspired or disturbed and irrational, but who argued first and foremost there was no point asking poets about the intention of their works.

This is part of Plato’s dialogues, but the point is clear: the work of poets is the result of divine inspiration, and its content is not something exclusive to the poet either during conception or during its life after publication. We find something similar in Inuit culture, where song comes from breathing,

i.e. an irrepressible source flowing from the life within us. Also here people talk about the labour of joining words in song, the song of life we have within us. So the song is personal, but it extends beyond the self when performed – when it becomes communal, is shared with others, and in being so is given a life of its own.

This is something we use in Siunissaq, where photographs, films, texts, drawings, bodily movements, sculptures and songs are seen as works of art in their own right. They are created, produced, and now they are here and have a life among others. We see these artefacts, these creations, this craftsmanship as materialised forms of expression travelling into the world. A journey where they can generate shared understanding by others seeing and relating to them with thoughtfulness, surprise, and curiosity. The artefacts disrupt rigid thinking, they disrupt individualisation and fragmentation by being here, materially and visibly among us, by creating dialogue.

In Siunissaq nobody is left alone with their creative expressions. We do not leave anyone alone on a stage without others to share it with. We see each and every creative expression, each and every work of art, as part of the community. We start with safety, caring and shared possibilities for action, and use them to reach a place where we dare to react with wonder, curiosity and creativity to ourselves and others through shared sensing and reflection. Which is why it is so important not to see creativity solely as individualised, but instead to see it as a contribution to a dialogue that can develop precisely because the work of art has a life of its own.

Ethics is about taking social responsibility. It is a dialogue with the here and now, where life is moving forward and onward. There is never the kind of break or the peace and quiet that means we can cancel all movement to stare backwards. This does not mean we have to conclude that life is impossible to understand, just that understanding it is part of the development of life itself.<sup>20</sup>

This is the background for the ethical and practical principles outlined below. We do not see these as rules or guidelines, but as moveable experiences that constitute a living map full of signposts. These principles are our stepping stones, just as others have to find their own stepping stones after the next high tide or big spring thaw.

Siunissaq’s Map and Signposts

In Siunissaq we have key principles as well as concrete principles for how to meet the young people in the project – and how they meet each other – with respect.

Key Principles

- 1. The young people are active participants and can form their own situation. It is important to listen to the young people themselves – as well as their families and local community – in ways that encourage active participation, also in decision making.
- 2. Feelings need to be expressed so we can use them to understand ourselves and others. This creates social competence, i.e. the social intelligence central to looking after ourselves and others. It is important to avoid being in dangerous situations where there is a risk of violence and sexual assault, and to avoid social isolation, feeling alone and ‘wrong’, as well as to be able to establish safe and stable relationships with others. Feelings can be expressed in photographs and writing, creating a form of ‘externalisation’, i.e. feelings are made visible outside ourselves, making it possible to relate to them both intuitively and reflectively.
- 3. Violence and sexual abuse are learned behaviour that can be prevented and stopped by building a shared understanding of human rights, mutual respect, and empathy. In Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland there is a clear social imbalance in the violence people experience. Those with low levels of education and income are most at risk of becoming both the perpetrators and victims of violence. Improving education levels and incomes are themselves ways to prevent violence. At the same time, it is important to create a culture of mutual respect where we take care of each other. This can be achieved through openness about sexuality and violence in society, as well as by valuing peaceful conflict resolution. Conflict avoidance and silencing are not solutions to conflict, they are subjection to conflict. Instead, conflicts can be resolved through open dialogue and mutual respect. Peaceful conflict resolution can be taught, especially in schools, which are a good context to demonstrate it in practice. Children and young people learn by seeing what the adults in their lives do.

- 4. Values are central to building safe, affirmative, learning communities. Our values determine how we act. It is our values that make it possible for us to get through adversity without losing heart. It is our values that mean we can get out of bed in the morning because we have a purpose in life. It is our values that mean we can develop sustainable social relationships. Everyone has good experiences in life, and these can be used as a basis to formulate values that mean we can see ourselves and others as valuable and worth taking care of. It is our values that make us want to contribute to society.
- 5. It takes a whole society to give a child opportunities in life. The child has to grow up without violence and abuse, both inside and outside the home. So we need to send a clear message that violence damages the development and well-being of children and young people, so that we as a society can support the mission of increasing safety and security in their lives.



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Art and Communities  
Atammik, 2019

Practical Principles

Siunissaq’s practical principles relate to the way the young people interact and relate to each other:

- 1. An affirmative approach based on respect and recognition that includes focusing on finding solutions instead of criticising. According to evaluations of schools in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland<sup>21</sup> criticism is all too prevalent



in schools – parents criticise teachers, teachers criticise parents, teachers criticise students, and vice versa. This criticism results in anger, a lack of dialogue, and a lack of engagement. It does not create solutions.

Children and young people want mutual respect instead of criticism, so problems can be solved through cooperation in a good and socially sustainable way, i.e. lasting solutions instead of quick fixes for acute but often long-standing problems.

This does not mean tolerating behaviour that has an adverse effect on others. It means entering a dialogue and stopping the behaviour through a shared understanding where everyone is part of finding a solution.

**2. Dialogue** where we listen to each other and think about what is being said. A dialogue is not a debate or discussion, but a way to reach mutual understanding without arguing, falling out, or simply walking away.

**3. Listening to each other with respect** – the result of following principles 1 and 2.

**4. Separating the person and the problem.** We want to solve problems, but without attacking or criticising anyone. If a young person hits others we have to stop the violence – it is the violence that is the problem and something we can help them with. If someone drinks too much, then it is alcohol abuse that is the problem and it has to stop. The problem is the problem – the person is our ally in solving it. Nobody is ‘wrong’ but problems exist, problems that can be solved by supporting and reinforcing everything else people are capable of in their lives.

**5.** If someone wants to change to get rid of symptoms, a negative self-image, or self-destructive thoughts, this is a process we actively support. But it has to come from within through a learning process, not be externally imposed by force. **Change comes from shared learning**, where we learn to see ourselves and others in new ways that open up for the possibility of experiencing trust and security with others.

**6. Solution-orientation:** We try to find solutions that are workable and can be implemented in everyday life to create structure, mutual support, and

respect. This improves our capacity to take action to improve our everyday lives, overcome adversity, and use the possibilities for development it creates.

**7. Formulating affirmative alternatives to the stories we tell about ourselves.** A young man whose girlfriend has left him, for example, calls himself ‘a loser’. The affirmative alternative is that he is a young man with a gift for love that he should be proud of. Both stories can be ‘true’ depending on the perspective, but the alternative story has the potential for feelings of pride, self-esteem, self-confidence, and a love of life. Stories like the one about being a loser can lead to depression, self-contempt, and suicidal thoughts. Learning to formulate alternative stories is easy and exciting, and it generates trust, calm, self-esteem, self-confidence, and affirmation by others, and thereby often the confidence and competence to seek out new challenges, get involved, and grasp opportunities for development.

**8. Equality:** Everyone is equal, and everyone has the same human rights. Humankind has many strengths, one of which is collaboration. And collaboration demands difference. Everyone is needed, because we all contribute something different. Different stories and forms of collaboration strengthen our community through the realisation that wholeness is created by creating the space for many different ways of being alive.

**9. Freedom to participate:** Life is an offer given to every child and young person, and we have to make sure it is an offer that generates trust, safety, and stimulates development. This does not mean we do not set boundaries, but it does mean that nobody should be forced to do anything that can damage their experience of security, respect and affirmation as a human being. All children and young people need structure in their lives, and therefore also need to learn how to control their feelings, to plan, to defer need fulfilment, and to aim for a goal with concentration and persistence. And everyone should know that the limits to their own freedom lie where their freedom limits that of others by forcing them to do something they do not want, as in cases of sexual abuse or assault. Freedom means we have the right to be unique and thereby different.



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Art and Communities  
Maniitsoq 2019*

**10.** Siunissaq is also based on the principle that **we can understand each other** because our feelings are so similar, as are our hopes for a good life. We can recognise each other’s feelings: love for those close to us, the need to love and be loved, which makes us capable of empathy and able to learn from each other. By recognising feelings in this way we can see that we are not that different to others, that we are not ‘wrong’, and that together we can understand and thereby learn from our feelings in a good way that gives us a sense of calm, self-esteem, self-confidence, and the belief that we can master our lives and opportunities to achieve what we want. Talking openly about

feelings can create the foundations for a supportive social community that can help everyone who is part of it.

**11. That we all have a purpose – that we are heading somewhere.** When we want something, we have a drive. Sometimes it can be hard to find it, for example if we feel depressed, despondent, despairing or helpless, but we can use alternative stories to help us find it again. Despondency comes from a lack of good things in our lives, but can remind us of them and that we want them.

**12. We are all part of the vast flow of life.** Understanding life as a development, a process full of possibilities to form ourselves, improve ourselves, overcome adversity, and grow. That it is not us versus them, humans versus nature, or the individual versus the community, but understanding that everything is part of the whole, a vast system we are all part of and can therefore form, develop and move in a direction that creates well-being and opportunities for all children and young people.

As mentioned above, both the key principles and practical and ethical principles of Siunissaq apply at all times, in all places, and in every process in the project, i.e. in project management, internal and external communication, and in describing and envisioning future developments.

**Research Principles**

Since its inception Siunissaq has linked real-life change to the development of concrete, applicable knowledge, i.e. research in a holistic perspective. We have an ongoing collaboration with Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) including the Centre for Children, Youth & Family Research. Siunissaq operates in accordance with Ilisimatusarfik’s values and ethical principles for research, and also contributes to them.

The research conducted in Siunissaq represents a contribution to the vision and mission of the university to ensure, improve, and continue to develop expertise and welfare, as well as culture, democracy and respect for human

rights in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland through research, research-based teaching, dissemination, innovation, consultancy and international collaboration. The research also contributes to the university's vision of Kalaallit Nunaat's/ Greenland's dynamic participation in and contribution to sustainable global development.

In this process it is key that our research is based on and promotes the basic values held by both the university and Siunissaq:

All research is to focus on human rights in both content and form. In both methodology and practical implementation all research is to respect and strengthen respect for human rights. This is an ethical imperative for social research in general today, and especially at a university that sees human rights as the bearing principle of its activities.

This means everyone has equal rights, including the right to participate in research regardless of gender, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, faith, age or bodily capacity.

We also have a specific responsibility to protect the rights of indigenous people.

- Research is to contribute to teaching at the university being research-based in a way that enables students to strengthen their creativity, have the freedom to think independently and without prejudice, and have the competence to contribute to society as responsible, well-educated citizens.
- Research is to be conducted in ways that ensure affirmative and respectful contact between people at every stage and level.
- Research processes are to be structured to provide optimal conditions and opportunities for collaboration and open dialogue.
- Research is to be disseminated to the surrounding society, both through communication (including participating in public debates) and through continued dialogue about research methods and results, and is to generate exchange between traditional and local forms of knowledge and the competence of local communities and society at large. Research is to be creative and innovative.

- Research is to have high professional and ethical standards. This is ensured through a continuous dialogue about quality criteria.
- Research is to be transparent in both methodology and financing.
- Research is to contribute to the university as a centre of excellence in knowledge development.
- Research is to be conducted with an awareness of the cultural heritage of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland in order to contribute to innovative solutions for a dynamic, welfare-oriented, democratic nation participating in equal cooperation with other nations on sustainable development in the Arctic and globally.

We also see contributing to research orientation in vocational education, including the education of social workers, as a key part of the collaboration between Ilisimatusarfik and Siunissaq. One way of doing this is by giving students the opportunity to participate actively in research by being involved in concrete projects. Siunissaq has had and will continue to have strong collaborations with students who join us in the villages and participate in running workshops.

All Siunissaq's principles are based on being on our way, learning together, and avoiding being trapped by past experiences by being open to developments in life in a way that ensures growth and security by creating a space of solicitude, participation in decision making, and hope, i.e. trusting that we can master the future together.

17. Hoffmeyer, J. (2012). *Overfladens dyb: Da kroppen blev psykisk*. Copenhagen: Forlaget Ries, pp. 97-98. See also: Hoffmeyer, J. (2009): *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs*. Scranton: Scranton University.

18. Ibid., p.101.

19. Ong, W. J. (2015). *Orality and Literacy*. Oxford: Routledge.

20. As Søren Kierkegaard wrote in his journal in 1843: "It is perfectly true, as the philosophers say, that life must be

understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over that proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time simply because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting place from which to understand it – backwards."

21. EVA. (2015). *Grønlandsk folkeskole*. [The School in Greenland – evaluation]. Copenhagen: Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut.

**Everyone is equal, and everyone has the same human rights. Humankind has many strengths, one of which is collaboration. And collaboration demands difference. Everyone is needed, because we all**

**contribute something different. Different stories and forms of collaboration strengthen our community through the realisation that wholeness is created by creating the space for many different ways of being alive.**



# Chapter 6

## Creating Community through Public Art Events



Nerisagut / Our Food, Festival, Tasilaq 2016

**We have made a conscious choice** not to know which path we would take in advance. We have chosen to let the participants determine the direction to be taken by the art events we have held on the streets. We can never know in advance how a community wants to be represented in a cultural, artistic or research context. Knowing in advance exactly how a project will play out from beginning to end just makes a project out of the people it is intended for, which is like making a recipe for where something starts and stops. The purpose of Siunissaq is taking initiatives that can generate community, not creating communities on the basis of fixed ideas about how to do so. Because here too you cannot take what you have – your art, research, or project – impose it on people, then expect change. Which is why in Siunissaq we make ‘unfinished’ products, products or disruptions that are in the making, on the move. They are incomplete and imperfect, because aiming for perfection and completion can be oppressive. Whereas participatory art is creative, a site of constant realisations and playfulness: a quest for expression.

Art, philosophy and research intersect in Siunissaq, an intersection where the local community we find ourselves in plays an active role. Art, philosophy and research move forward, looking for beauty, justice and truth. But in concrete projects these are to be found in the local, the tangible, and the present. In Siunissaq we hope to find solutions, find ways to create stable, socially supportive and peaceful communities with a high level of sustainability, well-being, and creativity. Which is simply not possible without being in open dialogue with the local communities where we are. This is where the vision of change arises, is formulated, and gains momentum.

It is important to emphasise that when we talk about art, we are not talking about art solely for art’s sake. In Siunissaq art is not self-referential, not confined to art history or the individual work of art. For us art is about the potential the aesthetic holds for reaching realisations and recognition, a course of *action* in public and private alike.

We do not want to change people, but we do want to create pragmatic, useful tools together. These tools often have no market/exchange value. They are joy, reciprocity, affirmation, empathy, shared wonder, and experiences of love and beauty. They are something between us, here in the world we live in. They unite experience, presence, community and the potential for reaching new understandings together.

**The venture into the public realm seems clear to me. One exposes oneself to the light of the public, as a person. Although I am of the opinion that one must not appear and act in public self-consciously, still I know that in every action the person is expressed as in no other human activity. Speaking is also a form of action. That is one venture. The other is: we start something. We weave our strand into a network of relations. What comes of it we never know. We've all been taught to say: Lord forgive them, for they not know what they do. That is true of all action. Quite simply and concretely true, because one cannot know. That is what is meant by a venture. And now I would say that this venture is only possible when there is trust in people. A trust – which is difficult to formulate but fundamental – in what is human in all people. Otherwise such a venture could not be made.**

Hannah Arendt<sup>22</sup>

Bodil Kaalund wrote, originally the Eskimo vocabulary contained no word for art in Inuit language. This she augmented was because all Inuit Art was part of life – or all life was art. Kaalund stated that everything people did was interwoven with the possibility of artistic creation. Pia Arke refers critically to Bodil Kaalund's arguments of Eskimo aesthetics (in the book *Grønlands Kunst* (The art of Greenland), Gyldendal, 1990) in her text *Ethno-Aesthetics/Etnoæstetik*.<sup>23</sup> Something expressed in the poem below by the Iglulik woman, shaman and oral poet Uvavnuuk:

### ***Ecstasy***

*The great sea moves me, sets me adrift.*

*It moves me like algae on stones in running brook water.*

*The vault of heaven moves me.*

*Mighty weather storms through my soul.*

*It carries me with it.*

*Trembling with joy.*<sup>24</sup>

Today, however, there is a word for art in the dictionary: *eqqumiitsuliorneq*. An artwork is *eqqumiitsuliaq*, and the person who creates it – the artist – is *eqqumiitsuliortoq*. In verb form the word is *eqqumiippoq*, which with the affix *-llior* (to do) can be translated as to do something strange or unusual, to do something singular or extraordinary. Art does all of these things, which is what makes it capable of disrupting fixed patterns of thought, opening up for surprise, opening up for new opportunities and understandings.

Art can provide fertile soil for dialogue, recognition, surprises, and new collective thinking. It can create a sense of mutual connection and belonging through respect for the right of everyone to express themselves freely and thereby be part of the co-creation of shared social visions. We can use art to disrupt rigid ways of thinking, social discourses, and prejudices. Art can thaw frozen mindsets by presenting us with different, new and surprising perspectives on the familiar, on everyday life, and on the roots of problems. Art can create colour and dare to say what everyone is whispering but does not dare say out loud. It can challenge silences, passive spectatorship, and the monotony of everyday life. Art can create life and movement where we find rigidity and a lack of freedom. Art can say no to symptoms, silences, and uniformity.

Art opens ways to express longings and envision alternative ways of living our lives, to see beauty and uniqueness in everyone as independent beings. In Siunissaq this happens through art that is visible and democratically and equally accessible in public space. We focus on photography as a democratic artform, since compared to other artforms taking a photograph feels more accessible for many.

In our experience people are open to taking photographs that show multi-faceted perspectives on life. People are interested in seeing the wide-ranging possibilities that exist for creating worlds, points of view, and other realities. This openness exists in each workshop participant, in each group, and especially in the local community.

Art can support and make visible the powerful desire we share for more solidarity, greater social responsibility, and more sustainable developments in local society. When we have held community-generating events in Siunissaq, almost everyone in the local community has supported us. People are more than willing to be part of these events, and it is this willingness that makes Siunissaq tick. We create them together, experience them together,







and build communities together. Community is not a goal – it is a process here and now.

Public spaces have always been a special arena for social life in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland. The communal houses of the past were full of shamanism, storytelling, and a strong spirit of community. In the summer there was drum dancing on the cliffs in front of people's homes, communal singing, and feasts that involved everyone. Through art events it is possible to re-kindle these traditions by making the perspectives, sufferings and hopes of others visible.

In Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland there is a longstanding tradition for learning through seeing or listening then doing – a visual and physical form of learning, often done by moving through the landscape and experiencing nature. Such experiences give people the strength to find their way, to overcome resistance, and to be with others. If these visual, sensory experiences cease to exist, it can be difficult to connect to the world and other people. We feel alone, disconnected, and without an anchor or path to follow. This is a highly social form of learning fostered by seeing others, listening to others, and experiencing with others – and it is connected by shared stories. This was common in the past, when people told stories and sang together. Drums and songs were used to entertain, but also to solve conflicts in a communal activity where everyone could participate.

In Inuit society realisation was reached using all the senses: spoken words, images, movements, the rhythm of drums, the trance led by shamans taking people to other dimensions. It was possible to reach altered states of consciousness in a shared space of collective experience and wonder. These events were sensory and communal, and they generated shared values about connections, the whole we are all part of, and respect for both. Today such opportunities – to see other perspectives and realities and to do so collectively through shared experiences that create and maintain shared values – have become rare.

Today this kind of social contact and cohesion is falling apart in Kalaallit Nunaat / Greenland. There might still be sports events, concerts and meetings in most towns, but communities are fragmented, and this fragmentation creates violence and isolation. Many people today experience loneliness, abuse, violence, and other symptoms of a lack of solicitude, solidarity, and

mutual responsibility. There is a high degree of individualisation in the health service, the educational system, and social services. It is no longer the local community that takes care of those in need of help, it is state institutions. This creates too many gaps in local society.

Social cohesion is under threat, something expressed in violence, abuse, despair, and alcohol abuse. Alcohol often creates anger and aggression in local communities. We need alternative ways to achieve feelings of intoxication: delight, wonder, harmony, self-expression, and the joy and laughter that has always been so central to a sense of community in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland, but which is now threatened from within by despondency and despair due to the decimation of community by modernisation.

*The community-generating events are in themselves political in a broad sense, because they contribute to the creation of a democratic space where people can express themselves, be listened to, and participate in a dialogue about life through media, photographs, movements and words. This creates a multi-faceted, open democratic arena where we can connect with other people. It is about being a human being – being kind, being present, and wanting the best for each other.*

*Tina Enghoff*

Far too many people live with violence and/or have experienced violence growing up. This inhibits our courage to face life, and creates a repetitive cycle of violence in our own lives, as well as a tacit acceptance of violence in local communities. We give up and become powerless and silent when what we really need is to envision something better: a passion for life, a life that can unfold freely and without fear. This is something a lot of people long for, something we see clearly in Siunissaq's workshops and community-generating public events. People rally round, they take part. They want to create something better together, and they want dialogue.

This was obvious during the meetings we held in local communities during our preliminary studies for the project. Through meetings, dialogue, and shared observations and experiences, it became clear that people wanted to create a local society that gave them the opportunity for physical activities,





Photo booth,  
Nanortalik and Tasiilaq, 2017

art, and for people to exercise their rights. Active participation was seen as a good basis for an active youth culture that could become a key factor in turning their town or village into a place of safety and well-being for everyone.

People of all ages told us they wanted Siunissaq’s activities to take place on the streets to create a communal, active and democratic space for everyone, the democratic aspect being that everyone – regardless of their resources or what they could contribute – would have equal access. Such a space can generate trust between people, create a social environment, and connect people by them being together in a meaningful way. The staff at the family centres told us that it was a good idea to combine sport, art and competence development, because then all families and young people could participate without anyone being singled out as ‘at risk’. Everyone would just be there to join in and have fun.

In Siunissaq the focus is on creating communities through shared experiences. There are different levels of community. Our key focus areas are the communities formed in the workshops, in events for parents and other locals, in contact with the local community, school and municipality, in the project’s internal collaborations, and in our collaboration with university students participating in the project. All these communities are interwoven in a complex system and network – a social organism.

By sharing their work with each other in workshops, in their everyday interactions, with their families, and in the open events for their parents and other people in their town, the young people in Siunissaq become active co-creators of these communities. The public events not only display the content produced in Siunissaq, they also demonstrate its principles in practice by making an event that demonstrates safety, participation in decision making, solicitude, and hope in practice. There is mutual respect – we listen to each other, clap, and participate however we want, but always with respect and affirmation.

The young people in the workshops tell us that contributing to the community is a source of pride. Daring to put themselves out there is a reinforcing, encouraging experience that generates trust in each other and self-respect. Others can identify with their stories and images. Their younger siblings see them as people who dare to stand up, open up and create dialogue about important issues, including the importance of taking social responsibility for

each other. Right there in front of – and together with – everyone else. This helps people believe that change is possible, which is hope in practice – hope in action. All of which contributes to believing that the impossible can be possible, something one of the young people expressed in a poem.<sup>25</sup>

**Dear Future,**

*I never used to think about you  
– you were, in a way, out of reach.  
Now you are constantly  
in my thoughts.  
I’m drawn to you.  
You make me smile.  
You give me hope.*

*When I think of you, my future,  
I imagine lots of things.  
Things that are out of reach, but  
Also dreams that can be grasped.  
I can do it. It’s my decision if  
My dream becomes reality.*

Maria, young workshop participant



Making Siunissaq’s activities into a personal as well as community project that everyone can see/look at/touch/turn the pages of/ taste/receive as a gift in the form of a photograph or book, creates the basis for an experience many local people can share. The product of a workshop can thus become part of a continuing process: a stepping stone and signpost, a concrete symbol. Creating something that can be given to others and thereby have a life of its own is also a way to be seen and acknowledged, something that generates dialogue between the viewer, the reader, and the surrounding society. This creates shared ownership and pride, and in doing so increased communal self-respect and personal agency through believing in our ability to contribute to a joint creative process.

**“Today I felt so proud of all our children, of my son who stepped forward tonight and showed what he’s good at. That’s why I’m a bit emotional.”**

The father of a young participant

Giving and sharing something with others has always been an important part of Inuit culture. As Rauna Kuokkanen explains, indigenous economies are often characterised by not having profit as a goal. They are more based on the survival of families and the community. If there is a surplus, it is used for ‘giveaways’ and feasts, ceremonial communal events that increase social cohesion and confer status upon those who give most, i.e. contribute most to the community.<sup>26</sup>

In Siunissaq we want to give: give samples of local food, give everyone a book, give a photograph of friends and family, give people an experience like sending 50 white helium balloons with texts attached into the sky.

### Reciprocity in a Photo Booth

Here we and the young people in the workshops created a democratic activity on the streets. We set up and ran a small photo booth where everyone – children, families, couples, friends – could take a photograph. The photographs were then hung in an outdoor exhibition everyone in town could see. Visually the exhibition took the form of a long row of photographs where it looked as if the people were holding hands – a symbol of solidarity in standing together to say “No to violence. Yes to solidarity.” Around 400 people in Tasiilaq, 250 in Nanortalik, 500-600 in Maniitsoq, and 100 in Atammik participated, and after the exhibition they were all given their photographs to take home with them. We met several people afterwards who proudly told us that they had had their photographs framed and put them on the wall at home. They had been given a gift that meant something to them, a photograph that framed a concrete experience with others in the community that the young people in Siunissaq had taken responsibility for making a success.

From its inception the project has focused on reciprocity in the relationships established in local communities and with the young people. Reciprocity and receptivity to local communities and especially young people is central to the project’s approach, which means we learn together. Part of this reciprocity is that we too get a lot of gifts, knowledge, surprises and challenges from our contact with both the young people themselves, as well as their parents, local teachers and social workers, and the community at large.

**“I keep the book by my bed and will take it with me wherever I go in life.”**

*Malik, young workshop participant*

### A Book for Everyone

Together with the young people in our workshops, we have published a number of books. A letter from the young people to local citizens was delivered with the book *Uagut pisinnaatitaaffigut – Uagut inuunerput* (‘Our Rights – Our Life’) in 2015, emphasising how important it was for them that everyone read the book. In 2016 the book *Nerisagut* (‘Our Food’) was also given

to everyone as a gift with a letter from the young people about the shared joy of Greenlandic food. We also made two more books together: *Eqqaamasa-gut* (‘Our Memories’) with a focus on good memories in 2016, and *Uagut oqaluttuagut* (‘Our Stories’) in 2018.

These books are keepsakes to hold on to – for both the contributors and recipients. The young people see their names in print and their texts and photographs in a book they can give to their family and friends to show what they have created with others.

### Food Creates Community

The food festival is an example of the way Siunissaq’s activities are thought through and put together to contribute to the creation of local communities where everyone can participate.

The food festival, which ran from August to September 2016 in Tasiilaq and Nanortalik, started as a series of spring workshops the same year and was part of the theme ‘Our Food’, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which includes the rights to our own food, our own language, and our own culture. Psychosocial workshops provided a basis for the young people to reflect on their well-stocked pantry of local produce, before moving on to collective learning about food culture, health and nature. Traditional recipes in people’s families and local communities provided a catalyst for stories about who we are, what we eat, and our pride in that. This was an identity-forming project, aimed at getting young people to think about their place in the world, their lives, and their rights via food, nature and local produce.

During the first part of the food workshops the young people gathered recipes from their families and at old people’s homes, children’s homes, and local hospitals. They also photographed nature and produce.

During the second part they used some of the recipes to make food and photographed the dishes they made.

The third part was a food festival with street food in both towns. Here the young people made the food, set up stalls and tables, and served samples for the local community. They also hung banners with photographs on the streets. The photographs and recipes were gathered in a cookery book that was printed and distributed to everyone in town by the young people themselves. Food, fishing, hunting and community are closely connected.



Food creates social relationships. The catch is shared, something that contributes to bonds in the local community, as does a shared respect for the animals people hunt on land and at sea.

Filling the Sky with Words

After a series of psychosocial, photography and writing workshops in Maniitsoq from 2017-2018, we decided to make a community-generating event in public space. The young people had learnt new ways to express their feelings: they had written texts, taken photographs, and shared them with each other in workshops. They then shared them with their families and local community in a public event.

Each of them chose words and statements they wanted to share with others in Maniitsoq like *Ataqqinninneq Tatigeqatigiinneq* (‘Respect and Trust’), *Imigassaq asanninnerunngilaq* (‘Alcohol is Not Love’), and *Atornerluis-arneq Unitsilli* (‘The Violence Has to Stop’). All of these were issues they had raised and addressed in Siunissaq’s psychosocial workshops, and now they were releasing them into the sky above the town: 50 white helium balloons pulling fluttering tails of words behind them. The texts attached to the balloons sent a clear message, and just seeing the balloons floating above us against the pale blue summer sky at night was a beautiful experience, a beautiful picture: big white balloons dancing higher and higher, connected to the earth solely by thin fishing lines.



Filling the Sky with Words, Maniitsoq, 2018

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Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

John Berger<sup>27</sup>



**We have made a conscious choice not to know which path we would take in advance. We have chosen to let the participants determine the direction to be taken by the art events we have held on the streets.**

**We can never know in advance how a community wants to be represented in a cultural, artistic or research context.**

# Chapter 7

## From Where We Stand



Eqqaamasagut / Our Memories, Nanortalik, 2016

**It can be good to know where we are** before we start to move on – to scout the landscape in order to find a path forward. We can follow one of the paths that opens before us, at the same time as remaining open to many other possible paths. Exploring new territory is to move through a landscape that determines the possibilities en route, as well as how we view them. And whilst looking ahead is important, it can also be a good idea to look back now and then, so we can see where we came from and retrace our steps if necessary.

*When I was young I told an old hunter that I'd been hunting for reindeer and had difficulty finding my way back to the boat. He looked at me and said, "Don't you look back as you go?" After that I always did.*

*Peter Berliner*

In research and evaluations we often talk about setting a baseline. A baseline is used to compare before and after, which means it only has any 'base' in the context of time – change over time that we want to measure in a controlled way.

There are many ways to make a baseline. We can use statistics, interviews and observations. We can make community-based baselines and rights-based baselines. All of them intended to provide an anchor in the process we are in the midst of. But the process is neither static nor controllable, which is why instead of a baseline, we operate with a 'movement line.'

This movement line draws inspiration from motion studies, process analysis, probability calculations, and complexity theory. But most of all we want to find a new word for our understanding that what moves is *the whole*. Any kind of baseline can move, shift en route, become meaningless, start meaning something else, and sometimes disappear entirely because it moves with everything else. Which is why in Siunissaq we call it a movement line, to reflect an all-round perspective and approach, a flexibility and incorporation of feedback at every level. Feedback is key to the baseline we call a movement line, because feedback enables us to understand where we started from the perspective of where we are now, where we have moved from and to. Freud used the term *Nachträglichkeit*<sup>28</sup> ('afterwardness') to describe how what happens later in life impacts on the meaning of experiences we had much earlier. So maybe it makes most sense to make a baseline retrospectively, an after-rationalisation in the best sense of the word. Looking back as we move forward, lest we forget where we came from.

Crime statistics and censuses, statistics for violence, unemployment and suicide can all provide insights. But we also need statistics for well-being and quality of life, which are much less readily available online. Plus there are no statistics for hope, love, solidarity, and presence. The goal of Siunissaq is not to generate more statistics, but we respect and take seriously those that already exist. Because they challenge us to take social responsibility. They contribute to dialogue. Such statistics are a reckoning with what has been done, with the actions of the past. An example: the annual police report for Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland provides an account of contact between citizens and police officers in the line of duty. As such it is an invaluable source of direct insight into society – from a police perspective.

When we set out on our journey towards unknown goals in Siunissaq, we actually made a baseline. But slowly but surely, the people we met taught us how to make a movement baseline with space for ‘afterwardness’.

Through talking to people, participating in community life, our nomadic journeys through towns, stopping up, listening to the silence, hiking in the mountains, and early summer mornings enjoying the sun shining on the heather, we have been invited into a world of differences, stories and possibilities. People in different towns, with different views of the sea had a lot of shared input for visions of how to create conditions that can give their children and young people a safe environment to develop and grow up in:

1. More activities where people can actively use and learn skills and competencies.
2. Democratic public spaces where people respect each other.
3. Creative methods for using language and other forms of creativity to express thoughts and feelings.
4. Collaboration and mutual respect so people participate and contribute because they want to, not because they are forced to.
5. Activities that generate self-esteem and confidence in people being able to achieve their goals.
6. Mutual affirmation instead of criticism and disrespect.

7. Good methods for peaceful conflict resolution in a society with a high level of awareness of social justice.

8. Equality and equal opportunities where everyone is seen as citizens in a democracy with the same social, civil, and human rights.

9. Opportunities to come together, especially in fun and laughter.

10. Opportunities to talk openly about joys and sorrows in life and be met with empathy.

These experience-based insights came from people with a strong commitment and high level of engagement in local communities. We have followed the developments in what they have to say by seeing and listening to:

- **The experiences of young people**

The young participants tell us about their experiences directly in evaluations, interviews, and spontaneous accounts. They give us insight into their lives through their actions. They tell us that social cohesion and solidarity where they live has increased – something we also see in practice.

- **The experiences of adults**

Through dialogue we have had the privilege of hearing people’s insights and anecdotes, their anger, joy and frustration in a way that demands our engagement. We have deep respect for the commitment of local teachers, social workers and their professional colleagues, their passionate commitment rather than just turning up for a routine 9-5 job. Other adults include parents, local citizens, volleyball players, hunters, choir singers, boatmen, and many more. We listen to them talk about whether our community-based methods work, and whether they create a basis for good collaborations.

- **The stories of parents**

Joy, respect and trust in young people dominate the attitude of parents, as told and embodied in the open evenings we hold for parents at the end of each workshop. This is when the freedom created by the workshops is opened up to parents and the local community, thereby becoming part of it.

- **The experiences of university students**

Students from two universities, Ilisimatusarfik, Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland and Aarhus University, Denmark, tell us that participating in Siunissaq has been an experience of learning in practice that both generates and is itself a process of shared learning and development.

- **Creative production**

This includes books, exhibitions, sculptures, kites, and helium balloons with texts – and not least the many photographs that express and contribute to the lives, dreams and values of Siunissaq's young participants. They all have immediate value, but they also have lasting value by continuing to exist after we have turned off the lights and headed home through the hushed winter night. They are still here when we wake up. They have a life of their own.

- **International dialogue**

Siunissaq has led to a new research project, *Collaboration, Dialogue, Trust*, which is part of the Nordic research programme Art and Social Communities<sup>29</sup> linking the combination of creative and psychosocial workshops to the creation of democratic public spaces and art. Similarly we have ongoing contact regarding social resilience with Inuit people in Siberia, the Sámi people of Northern Scandinavia, and in the North Atlantic.

- **Creating sustainable knowledge**

Siunissaq is sustainable because it generates knowledge about what works in this kind of project, and what creates social resilience in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland.

- **Locally embedded**

Siunissaq is firmly anchored in Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland itself through its local councils, educational and social institutions, and civic society. This has been made possible because local councils and Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) have joined us in different forms of collaboration. In the future Siunissaq will be part of research development at Ilisimatusarfik's Centre for Children, Youth & Family Research, established by the government of Kalaallit Nunaat/ Greenland as a platform for the democratic sharing of knowledge generated in and by the country.

From this perspective the evaluations we make are based on changes in context, i.e. what happens between us, what unfolds between us, beyond the individual. The young people expressed a desire for more agency in an environment where people supported each other's initiatives. Here the division between the self and environment falls away, but without the two merging or being the same. A bit like the word 'headache'. The head is there, and the ache is there, but the two remain distinct entities.

This is important when we evaluate the outcome of a workshop. We listen to what the young people say when they write a workshop assessment, but we see their comments as much more than an evaluation. We see them as actions, gifts – as signs in motion.

A famous and often quoted citation from Søren Kierkegaard reads:

**If one is truly to succeed in leading a person to a specific place, one must first and foremost take care to find him where he is and begin there. This is the secret in the entire art of helping. Anyone who cannot do this is himself under a delusion if he thinks he is able to help someone else. In order truly to help someone else, I must understand more than he – but certainly first and foremost understand what he understands. If I do not do that, then my greater understanding does not help him at all. If I nevertheless want to assert my greater understanding, then it is because I am vain or proud, then basically instead of benefiting him I really want to be admired by him. But all true helping begins with a humbling.**

*Søren Kierkegaard*<sup>30</sup>

With Siunissaq we can in all honesty say that we have no intention of leading anyone to any specific place. We do not want to lead anyone at all, and are perfectly happy to be in no position to know exactly where we should lead them. We also do not think there is any need for secrets in helping, in art, or in 'the art of helping'. We do not believe we should understand any more than anyone else. There are endless examples of superior attitudes



leading to disrespect, objectification and the direct abuse of others. The guiding principles of colonisation are patronisation and power.

We are also not convinced that all true help begins with ‘a humbling’. On the contrary, in our experience development, learning and agency begin precisely where humbling stops. Our experience is that it starts with solidarity, with a collective subjectivity, with a shared journey: the joy of setting off together in the morning, travelling into uncharted territory where everyone is part of the dialogue and everyone is free to leave their own sledge tracks in the snow. And if anyone tries to stop them doing that, we as a community have to make sure they – and everyone else – can leave their mark.

Kierkegaard is describing the risk of wanting to help turning into a sense of superiority, deafness to the voices of others, coercion and abuse. An unintended effect that often escapes our minds and eyes. We understand what Kierkegaard means, but have a supplementary solution – a different way forward. We understand that to help someone is not to be driven by the need for admiration, pride or vanity. It is to move forward in search of what we share.

To help is to leap into life together. Making sure that the rights of every individual are respected by sharing responsibility, by seeing and affirming each other. And if we see or experience dominance and coercion, that is precisely the point at which our shared experience has to be transformed into indignation and resistance – into action.

It is about justice, the justice that creates freedom and possibilities in life for us all.

We think here.  
We think through practice.  
We are right here.

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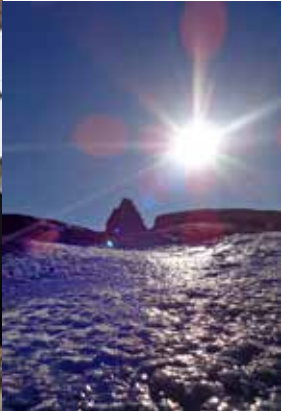
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**To help is to leap into  
life together. Making sure  
that the rights of every  
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experience dominance**

**and coercion, that is  
precisely the point at which  
our shared experience has  
to be transformed into  
indignation and resistance  
- into action.**

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Numerous articles and books have inspired us while writing this book. Some of them like old friends knocking at the door, others discovered because as the hands-on people we are, we not only draw inspiration from real-life situations, but are always curious about other people's thinking on similar experiences in similar situations.

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