

MAP 1  
**INTRODUCTION**

**TOWARDS TOGETHERNESS**  
PROBING AS A DECOLONIZING APPROACH FOR ARTISTIC INQUIRY

PhD in the Arts – LUCA School of Arts  
Rosanne van Klaveren, 2018

**LUCA**  
SCHOOL  
OF  
ARTS

***"Where in the world could the drive for  
the truth have come from?"***

(...)

***What about these linguistic conventions  
themselves? Are they perhaps products  
of knowledge, that is, of the sense of  
truth? Are designations congruent with  
things? Is language the adequate  
expression of all realities?"***

Nietzsche, On Truth and Lie  
in an Extra-Moral Sense, p. 81.



In the art-based PhD project *Towards Togetherness: Probing as a Decolonizing Approach for Artistic Inquiry*, probology is examined and put into action for the purpose of participatory artistic inquiry of decolonization processes. Probology, which is an approach that uses probes to encourage subjective engagement, empathetic interpretation and a pervasive sense of uncertainty (Gaver et al. 2004), functioned as the guiding paradigm of the artistic inquiry. Shared creativity, commensality, ambiguity and imagination are among the key values of the participatory practices that aim to stimulate, structure and enrich knowledge sharing. Decolonisation processes, including us-and-them dichotomies, set the stage for putting in place the approach of probology, as sets of cultural probes, artefacts, Picnic-Quizzes, and the creation of an online platform and an interactive road-movie. As an artist, I worked artistically with probes and probing. Probology opened up my creation processes towards participation, and enhanced inclusion of different viewpoints.

Within this PhD, two art projects are realized. In the *Food Related* project (2009-2012), a prototype of an online platform is designed to collect, map and exchange facts and experiences related to Arctic food culture. Food as the topic within this project was explored during short fieldtrips and is grounded in theoretical arguments. In the *Niva to Nenets* project (2011-2018), participatory strategies during a road-trip towards Arctic Russia enabled people to share opinions, experiences and concerns about gift-giving and decolonization processes, which resulted in an interactive road-movie. Food is again an important component within a strategy for participation that I designed and carried out for public events during the *Niva to Nenets* project: the Picnic-Quizzes. Probology was put in practice for both projects. For the *Food Related* project, the probing led to valuable discussions about ownership issues and thus uncovered the need to postpone further development of the project until partnership is found within the Arctic regions. For the *Niva to Nenets* project, probing enabled me to build relations with the participating co-drivers and to stimulate their imagination about the shared journey before the road-trip took place. The Picnic-Quizzes allowed me to probe for the opinions of other participants during the trip.

Empirical findings from these two case studies give insights in my experiences and approaches as an artist working with probes during artistic participatory practices. The findings give possible answers to the question how these practices can establish connections between people(s) and stimulate knowledge sharing through probing. And, how these probing practices can be beneficial for decolonization processes that are very central to contemporary discourse in art and design research.<sup>1</sup> Special attention is given to the role of the artist acting out the probing, being myself. This role is multiple in essence, as it includes the initiation, organization, creation, approach, moderation, artistry, presentation, and more. All these various aspects might contain possibilities to

decolonize. However, I only review some points of concern through critical self-reflection, realizing that it is impossible to fully grasp them all. I illustrate how in-between positions can support connections, how exchange is strengthened through giving and receiving, and how to balance openness with composition and moderation. Conducting this research as an artist, the focus lies within the art practice itself. This includes the designing of the probes and the participatory practices. Subsequently, the art projects that were realized are just as much part of the outcome as this written reflection.<sup>2</sup> Altogether, my findings reflect upon a deeper understanding of (aspects of) life itself, as this has been, above all, the general purpose of art for many centuries.



[www.foodrelated.org](http://www.foodrelated.org)

#### **Food Related**

The *Food Related* platform provides recipes, news items, drawings, video messages, old myths, thoughts, personal concerns, research outcomes, facts and fiction; all related to Arctic food and food culture. As a proof of concept, this prototype illustrates how an artistic approach can enable or stimulate the collecting, sharing, and combining of different kinds of knowledge.

The more than eighty entries form a broad collection that can be explored and replenished. The design of the website has three modes to access the contributions:

a Geographic View shows entries in relation to their geographic location, a Foodgroup View shows entries in relation to their ingredients or food items, and a Historic View shows all collected entries in order of publication.

Parts of *Map 2* (pp. 8-14) and *Map 4* (pp. 8-16) have been published before in *Anthropology and Art* from Ethnoscritps: Zeitschrift für Aktuelle Ethnologische Studien, Jahrgang 17 Heft 1: 2015, eISSN 2199-7942. These parts are now sometimes slightly altered. Parts throughout the whole thesis arose from previous writings for symposia and conferences: for *Map 1* mainly on pp. 9-11, for *Map 3* mainly on pp. 19-22 and for *Map 4* mainly on pp. 17-23 and pp. 31-36. In particular presentations and participation at the Cumulus – Northern World Mandate (Helsinki, 2012), Participatory Design Conference (Roskilde, 2012), and Art of Research (Helsinki, 2017) has supported the existence of the texts on these pages.

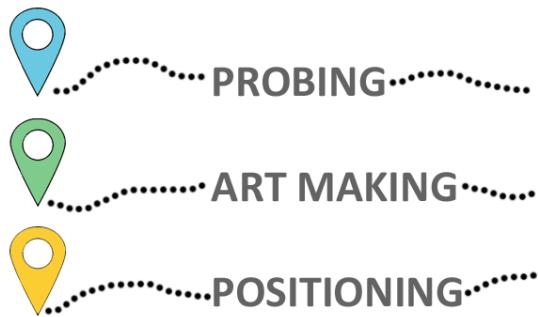
Participation at the Inuit Studies Conference (Val d'Or, 2010), the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA) Congress (Akureyri, 2011), the American Indian Workshop (AIW)(Leiden, 2014), and the VIU Graduated Course on Northern Territories and Indigenous Peoples (Venice, 2018), contributed to my ideation in general and to a better understanding of decoloniality in working with Arctic peoples.

#### Niva to Nenets

In the *Niva to Nenets* project, a Lada Niva is driven from Belgium to the Nenets people in Arctic Russia as part of an interactive road-movie. My wish to support the Nenets by giving them my car is the premise in this documentary story and gave cause to many valuable discussions on the road. The Lada Niva functioned as a small mobile film studio, equipped with seven GoPro cameras. Situations and conversations on the road were recorded simultaneously from different view angles, while participants drove certain parts of the long trip with me. Public events (the Picnic Quizzes) enabled a broader audience to share their opinions, experiences and concerns. An interactive story is composed out of over 350 hours of film footage (2,37 TB), in which people can switch viewpoints and storylines. This road-movie can be watched online and in an exhibition setting.



[www.nivatonenets.org](http://www.nivatonenets.org)



The thesis consists of five maps, bundled with a booklet for notes, a leaflet for references, and a summary in English and in Dutch. Two yellow maps, being this introduction map (1) and a concluding map (5), give a foundational framework for the research practice. In it, the aim, approach and characteristics of the research are explained and, when appropriate, grounded in theory. The additional goal of the Introduction (1) is, by default, to introduce the research while the additional goal of the Discussion (5) is to summarize, conclude and round up. Two green maps, Food Related (2) and Niva to Nenets (3), focus on the two case studies of this PhD. One blue map, Probology (4), deals with the specific probing forms or strategies in which the practice took place. Inspired by the notion of travelling, all five maps encourage readers to explore its content. Although chronological reading is possible, readers are encouraged to read following their interest. One can choose to follow specific trails throughout all maps, by following directions and markers. Similar to the indicatory icons on regular maps, markings point out whether a specific paragraph deals with probing (blue), art making (green), or positioning (yellow). Additionally, icons for ANT (a looking glass), us-and-them (a globe) and knowledge sharing (two hands) indicate related content of the text. Altogether, these markings try to strengthen the explorative character and multi-faceted content of this doctoral research.



Illustration 1. *La Rencontre* or *Good Morning Mr. Courbet*.  
(G. Courbet 1854. Musée Fabre, Montpellier)



## POINT OF DEPARTURE

It interests me how artists position themselves during participatory practices. Thus, at the start of this doctoral research, I looked back at previous experiences from my participatory art practice. In relation to projects that were commissioned by city boards, provinces, or art institutes that operate for them, I often felt a certain conflict of interest. On the one hand I asked people to share their sincere opinions and experiences of a certain place, while on the other hand the local government was paying me for this activity. This influenced the flow of information in the activities.<sup>3</sup> Every now and then potential participants asked me about this entanglement and I usually answered that, as an artist, I would never give up my independency of action. Nevertheless, it sometimes felt as a label attached to me. The strongest label I could feel during participatory practices, however, is the one mentioning ‘outsider’, when given by ‘insiders’. Doomed to this position, first impressions have a big influence on the practices itself, as on the end results. When it comes to rapprochement, I have been inspired by one of the pioneers in merging art with society: Gustave Courbet.

The French artist Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) inspired many people with his statements and realistic paintings that led the Realist movement in 19th century French painting. He was one of the first artists to address social issues in his work, which he named ‘living art’. His realistic focus on everyday life was far ahead of its time and exceeded the canvas of his paintings. For example, as a man with great sympathy for the gross, Courbet wanted to eliminate all street names in Paris that recalled imperial victories, replacing them by the names of benefactors of humanity. The way he addressed social issues as a living art,



Illustration 2. *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*. R. van Klaveren, 2001.

including his anarchistic longing for freedom, inspired me greatly. Still, I find one of his paintings a bit troublesome. I am referring to 'La Rencontre' (The Meeting) from 1854, which documents his arrival at Montpellier, depicting his patron Bruyas, accompanied by a servant and a dog, greeting him (Illustration 1). For an artist who is so concerned with social issues, it shows off how in this painting his ego absorbs all attention. Courbet painted himself obviously as more important than anything else presented in the scenery. The whole gesture of this painted artist emanates superiority. The two men are there to show their respect towards the great artist with his powerful toolbox arriving in their humble community. Only the dog is showing no submissive response to the dominant character, unless his scale is purposely reduced.

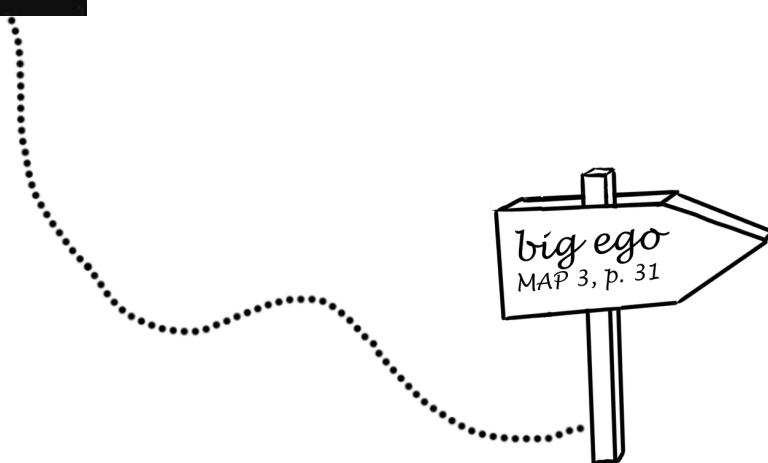
I am not the only one who found the representation of the artist offending. The writer and journalist Edmond About criticized that Courbet "... carefully emphasized all the perfections of this own person. Even his shadow is graceful and full of vigour: it displays a pair of calves such as are seldom met with in the world of shades. .... Neither master nor valet casts a shadow on the ground; there is no shadow except for M. Courbet; he alone can stop the rays of the sun" (Mack 1989). The painting was soon nicknamed 'Bonjour Monsieur Courbet!' and even 'Fortune Bowing before Genius' when it was shown at the Exhibition Universelle. Courbet's paintings instigated scandals before when he refused to represent reality more beautiful than it was. But this time he upgraded the representation of himself, unless he truly valued his appearance as such a honourable man. In either way, it was not appreciated.



But we should of course be careful when judging work from another era and especially when filling in the reason why Courbet presented himself like this. The position of artists was different in his time. Therefore, we can assume that his painted gestures were an act of self-empowerment. As an artist he wanted to be autonomous. In result, he probably refused to bow for his bourgeois benefactors. We should give Courbet many credits and can even be grateful to the size of his ego, because without his often described arrogance and self-importance he would probably not have been able to introduce Realism that well.

For me though, 'La Rencontre' will always be a reminder of the big ego artists can sometimes have. When entering a community in order to establish participatory practices, we must be aware of the fact that we are the guests that rely completely upon the hospitality and goodwill of the community members. Perhaps we can take example by the humble gestures of the patron and his servant; better to show a bit too much respect than a bit too little. If you want to practice community art, it is a good exercise to greet everything around you with respect. Don't stop with people: also your attitude towards objects, situations, stories and experiences is influenced by your ego and will therefore have an underestimated impact on the quality of the participatory practices.

I tried this myself when I visited Greenland for the first time in 2001 (*Illustration 2*). While entering the town Ilulissat after a two-day hiking trip I asked my companion to make a picture of my greetings. Though it is partly my heavy backpack filled with basic necessities that makes me bow while my sticks support a different kind of balance than Courbet's, I believe my gesture addresses friendliness. The dogs show two possible responses you may expect in return: interest and indifference. No matter how friendly you are or become, lack of concern is usually encountered too. Practice your gestures as often as needed to overcome the first handicap for creating togetherness: an ego too big to give room to others.





## POSITION WITHIN THE ART FIELD

As an artist, I have been interested in working with participants since my graduation in Fine Art at the HKA Art Academy (Arnhem, the Netherlands) in 1999.<sup>4</sup> After this four-year education I studied a two-year post graduate programme in Photography at the College of Fine Arts and Design St. Joost/Brabant University (Breda, Netherlands), for which I graduated in 2001. In both exam works, the digital storytelling projects *The Wentinck Pages* and *Journey to the North*, I enabled viewers to participate in the course of action. During the professional art practice that followed these educational programmes, I still combine collaborative storytelling with new media use. This resulted in many participatory projects, often with a prevalent online presence.<sup>5</sup> Altogether, I have experimented with a variety of ways for participants to express themselves. Although I often work with new media, I never tried to impress people with the tantalizing and imposing powers of new technologies. On the contrary, I search for the human scale within every implementation and value human emotion above technological experiences.

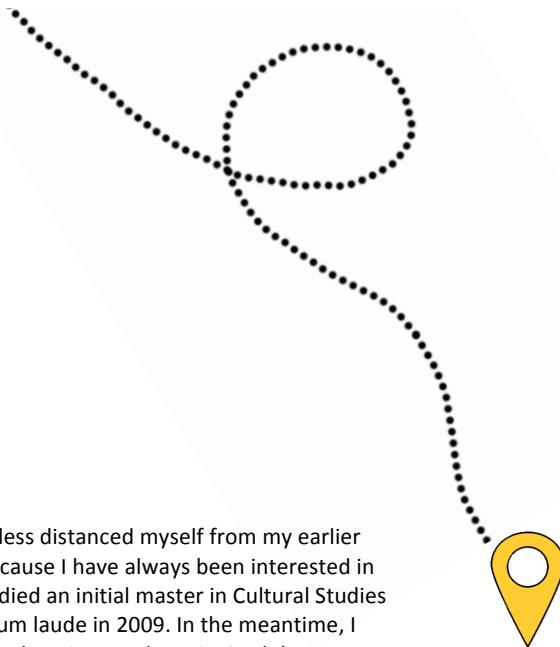
In the projects that were directly or indirectly commissioned by regional governments, I often combined digital storytelling with inquiries of local knowledge. For example, the *Verhalend Vathorst* website (2005) enabled old and new citizens of Amersfoort to express their memories and opinions on an extensional part of the city through the publication of photographs, poetry, short stories, and written or spoken anecdotes. In the *Vogelvlucht* project (2005-2006), people were motivated to reflect upon a natural area and its reorientation plans, *De Venen*, in the west of the country. A search for a fictional bird species maps the collected specifics of this region on the website of this project.

The *Braintec* project (2002-2006), however, did not focus on the collecting of local trivia but was aiming at shared imagination. For this autonomous project, a plausible and inviting story space was built around a fictional research centre in Portland, Oregon, where memories are reintroduced to the brains of test subjects. After I recruited test subjects on the Internet and during art fairs or other public events, an online science fiction story was written collaboratively with fourteen participants in fourteen hyperlinked diaries. Although new media was an important component of the *Braintec* project, artefacts and performances became a major pillar too. Altogether, *Braintec* stimulates the imagining of possible future scenarios for neuroscience and triggers critical thoughts about plausible side effects.<sup>6</sup>

As I often combine collaborative storytelling or the collecting of local knowledge with new media, artefacts and public events, it is troublesome to fit my art practice in one single category. It is probably best to position it on the crossroad between media art and participatory art, with a side-path towards action research.

Many artists and art projects inspired my art practice.<sup>7</sup> Within the field of media art, it was the early work of Mouchette that introduced me to working with fictional characters from a poetic approach.<sup>8</sup> In the late-nineties it was common among net artists to play with online identities.<sup>9</sup> Mouchette presented herself and her passions on a website, claiming to be nearly thirteen years old. In contrast to an imposing and overpowering use of media that was often seen in other pieces of net art,<sup>10</sup> this website was low tech and almost appeared to be made by a child indeed. Such pragmatic use of media, which is employed by the work of art and not the other way around, became foundational in my work approach. Just as I distanced myself from *l'art pour l'art*, I refrain to use media for the sake of media use.

Within the field of participatory art, sometimes referred to as community art, I am in debt to, amongst others, Jeanne van Heeswijk. When I started working with participants during my early career, she already worked with communities for almost a decade. Throughout her whole oeuvre, Van Heeswijk succeeds to engage local citizens for whom and with whom she establishes interventions, mostly in the public domain.<sup>11</sup> Through lectures about her work, for example at V2 in Rotterdam, she motivated me to include the voices of locals in my commissioned projects. Later, in her speech for the Annenberg Prize, she explained how she focuses on "encouraging people to make in their territory an environment in which they can create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to their own cultural expressions" (Heeswijk 2011). In most of my participatory projects, I have built environments as creative spaces where similar activities can take place. In Van Heeswijk's approach I recognize how a sincere interest in (potential) participants and their concerns is among the most decisive aspects for the collaboration to succeed.



When I moved to Belgium in 2006, I more or less distanced myself from my earlier works, as I wanted to start a new chapter. Because I have always been interested in theories about and behind art practices, I studied an initial master in Cultural Studies at KU Leuven, for which I graduated magna cum laude in 2009. In the meantime, I worked as an art teacher at the Media, Arts and Design Academy in Genk (MAD-faculty, now LUCA School of Arts) and at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam, on the topics of interactive storytelling, participatory practices, artistic research and photography. The research climate at the MAD-faculty in Genk influenced me greatly. Even before I finished my initial master, they offered me the option to prepare a PhD in the arts. As my interest in academia was not yet satisfied, while I was searching for possibilities to continue my art practice, I enthusiastically got enrolled. I am grateful for the opportunity to focus deeply on certain aspects of my art practice, while working on new projects.

For these new projects, *Food Related* and *Niva to Nenets*, I experimented with creative ways for participants to share their knowledge. Here I am in debt to my colleagues of the Social Spaces research group, who share their valuable and inspiring experiences with me up until today.<sup>12</sup> Most of these experiences derive from participatory design practices. The MAP-it project, for example, for which a participatory mapping toolkit was developed, showed me how methods for participation can be attractive, engaging and structuring. The MAP-it method “facilitates risk-taking by provoking social friction and by forcing the designer to give up a significant part of her/his control over the participatory practices” (Huybrechts & Laureyssens 2012). Similarly, I searched for friction to allow differing or contrasting knowledge to exist next to each other.

Participatory practices are, for example, initiated in user experience design. Designers can open up their design process through participation if they wish to include needs, opinions and experiences of the people they design for. In a common scenario the designers sit around one or more tables with members of their target group, the participants, and focus on a certain design challenge. Various methods<sup>13</sup> are available to structure these participatory moments, amongst which mapping sessions are common. Aesthetics can be found in the end result, but also in the encounter, in the expressive space, or in the experience of the participants.<sup>14</sup>

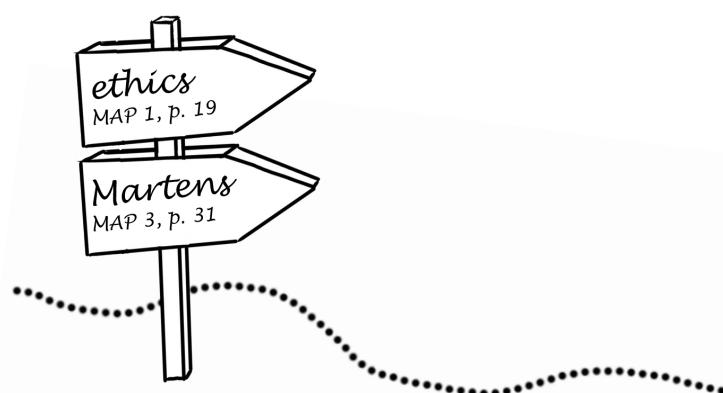
The PhD research is influenced by anthropologic approaches as well. Out of personal interest, I have been a frequent traveller of the Arctic regions for more than twenty years. The Arctic cultures interest me deeply. My interest includes the drastic change most peoples of these regions endured and currently endure, in which Western cultures and globalization play a part. To improve my understanding of Arctic matters, I followed and finalized the BA program in Circumpolar Studies of the University of the Arctic.<sup>15</sup> The art projects that are part this PhD focus on Arctic cultures and challenges, and aim to include Arctic people(s) in my understanding of their world and worldview.

Although knowledge of the different cultures turned useful, it was mainly the approach of anthropologists towards the people they work with that inspired me. Anthropologists that I met ‘in the field’ and during conferences made me familiar with current approaches in anthropology. For example, the Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Research Centre (IMMRC) of KU Leuven introduced methods and perspectives of anthropologists. But particularly the Dutch Research Group on Circumpolar Cultures (RGCC), an independent working group of mainly anthropologists, helped me to find a detached position from which I could give more space to the people I worked with.

Generally speaking, artists tend to approach (indigenous) people in a less restrained way than anthropologists, for whom research ethics are often a daily grind. Renzo Martens, who's approach I discuss multiple times throughout this thesis, became an example for me on how not to approach indigenous peoples. For example, he placed a neon sign saying 'Enjoy Poverty' in a Congolese village, for a documentary movie with the same title (see: [www.enjoypoverty.com](http://www.enjoypoverty.com)). Martens utilized the power imbalance between him and the villagers in an attempt to criticize development aid and neocolonial power structures. The main ethical code he ironically said he had broken "is that the public must be protected from the consequences of the economic and political system" (Van Goethem 2009). Indeed, his movie motivates his Western audience to gain understanding of the unfairness of global markets. But the way he puts his audience and his art practice before the protection of the people who participate in his movie, illustrates how easily he breaks ethical codes. Although his movie informed many on the situation in Congo, which might have some benefit to the local people, his approach inspired me how *not* to act. Besides the fact that it is not in my nature to act ironically or provocative in the way Martens does, I strongly believe that it is important to approach the people I work with respectfully, especially when they are an oppressed people. I therefore put more value in the ethics of anthropology, than a so-called artistic freedom that justifies unethical behaviour.

Common ground with artists that prefer to approach decolonization processes constructively, has been found through Kuratorisk Aktion, a platform for curators engaged in a critical practice along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>16</sup> The Greenlandic-Danish artist Pia Arke examined the colonial-historical identity and myth of Greenland through artistic (re)presentations of scientific material from public archives, which she combined with the personal keepsakes and memories of ordinary people.<sup>17</sup> I recognize her underlying social-political attention, which her aesthetic expressions beautifully unveil, in craftivism. Within this artistic form of activism, collective empowerment, action, expression and negotiation are highly valued. Practitioners are engaged in the social, performative, and critical discourse around the artwork, which is central to its production and dissemination (Carpenter 2010). In its basics, art-based participatory action research covers similar characteristics.

Last but not least, the design of my projects is influenced by the digital art of Jonathan Harris. His interactive frameworks helped me imagining possible design solutions for aesthetic rearrangements of collected data. In *The Whale Hunt* project, the viewers are allowed to rearrange photographic elements of his visit at an Inupiat family in Barrow, Alaska.<sup>18</sup> Besides our shared interest in the Alaskan whale hunting culture, Harris searches for possibilities to allow people to extract multiple sub-stories from his material as well.





## METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

When art practice is studied within academia as artistic research, working methods are often applied more consciously. Artists can adopt (elements of) existing methods or develop their own. Departing from Gaver et al. (1999, 2004), I examined cultural probes as a methodological approach for participation. Cultural probes, sometimes referred to as design probes, are small creative tasks that invite participants to think imaginatively about certain topics or matters of concern. It comes close to my own strategies for artistic participatory practices. My own probing practice, however, does not inquire for design solutions. Instead, I probe to collect participants' experiences, opinions, and other contributions to include in my art making. Probing results are an integrated part of the artwork that influence the discourse of the art making. I probe to establish or strengthen connections with the people or the topic I am working for. Thus, the probing entails more than collecting responses. Opposed to the knowledge gathering of individual interviews, surveys and checklists, participatory methods facilitate the process of knowledge production (Veale 2005, p. 254).

The act of probing implies that there is logic to giving prompts. For example, behaviourists study responses to stimuli. As psychological influences deepen the complexity of human behaviour, responses to probes are rather complicated than plain, straightforward reflexes. B. F. Skinner introduced the concept of *private events* and argued that thoughts and feelings form a private world of stimuli, which, under certain social contingencies of reinforcement, control our responses (1945, pp. 272-273). The private world of stimuli includes the current motivational state of mind, which is influenced by the current environment. Thus, next to the internal stimuli, the external, environmental condition in which the act of probing takes place provides a myriad of influencing stimuli. The *environmental events* of probing are a main focus of the facilitated process of knowledge production during the Picnic-Quiz (see *Map 4*, pp. 31-36) and during the road-trip within the Lada Niva (see *Map 3*, pp. 14-17).

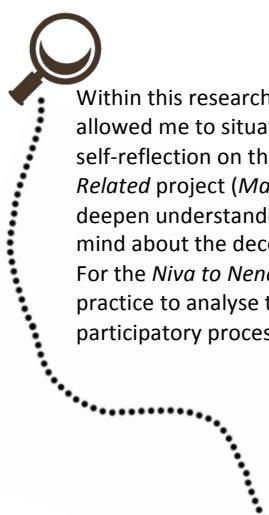
My artistic approach to probes and probing implies that there is more involved than the logic. Attention is given to include the imaginative, the subjective, the poetic, the romantic and the intuitive in all stages of the probing practice. *Logos* and *mythos* are not handled as contradictive but as complementary qualities for enabling rich accounts of the world. The use of the term 'probing' and 'probology' underlines its use as an artistic approach and process, rather than as a 'method' to

achieve a goal. Often, these contributions become part of the art works as well. Thus, I handle probology as the methodological strategy that was put in practice for both projects that were realized during this PhD, *Food Related* and *Niva to Nenets*. My empirical experiences with this strategy are described and reflected upon in depth in *Map 4*.

As knowledge is produced through experience (Sutherland and Krzys Acord 2007), I try to deepen my reflections on the empirical experiences as profound as possible. Most of the knowledge that derived from my research relies on improvisation and is personal, dynamic and not always articulated. Donald Schön (1983) described these characteristics of practical knowledge as 'knowing-in-action'. He suggests reflection as the best way to share and transfer practice-based knowledge. With 'reflecting-in-action', one is not dependent on the categories of an established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case (p. 68). Personal, dynamic and not articulated knowledge can also be described as tacit. Tacit knowledge, as opposed to formal, codified or explicit knowledge, is more difficult to transfer through communication. One can try to transfer the tacit into explicit through a codifying boundary object to link people to documents, or one can personalize the tacit knowledge to link people to people (Hansen et al. 1999)

Boundary objects, as boundary-spanning elements in between the tacit and the explicit, are potentially both intangible and concrete (Koskinen 2005). For example, they are metaphorical such as figures or speech, or illustrative in renaming a phenomenon. When I describe my experiences as practical knowledge, I usually prefer the personalized people-to-people approach. As a result, my writing is sometimes auto-ethnographic in essence.

The probing within my art practice mainly focuses on participation<sup>19</sup> and decolonization. Participatory practices can moderate circumstances for people, opinions and traditions to meet. With human relations and social context as a possible point of departure, artists can handle a varied range of skills, methods and tools to create space for shared activities. Probes can support the creation of such a space, as a tool or a method, and turn it in a place for exploration. Probes can initiate or structure the shared activities. They can inquire social context and build or strengthen human relations with or among the participants. Probing differs from regular scientific tradition, as it has a strong focus on the personal. Its qualitative approach allows the collected knowledge to be not only intimate, but also ambiguous, spiritual, discordant, artistic, or contradictory. Instead of global culture, the probe method illuminates the local culture in which people 'play out their lives' (Crabtree et al. 2003). As such, probing can be beneficial when opening up the research setting towards different cultures. Through creativity and artistry, probes can bypass constraining aspects of intellectuality. Instead, probing encourages subjective and imaginative engagement. Everything is possible and anything can be important. When unexpected and less comfortable contributions are welcomed, probing can invite participants to include and highlight what they find important.



Within this research, actor network theory (ANT) allowed me to situate my art practice and guided my self-reflection on the research processes. For the *Food Related* project (*Map 2*), ANT is put in practice to deepen understanding of how and why I changed my mind about the decolonizing approach of this project. For the *Niva to Nenets* project (*Map 3*), ANT is put in practice to analyse the role of the Lada Niva within the participatory processes. Within the methodological

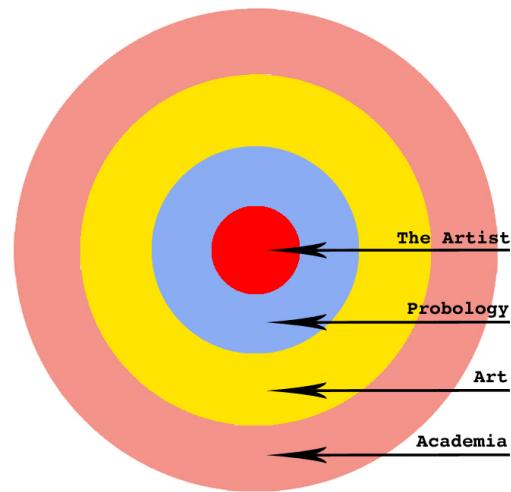


Figure 1. Position of the artist within this PhD research.

chapter of this thesis (*Map 4*), ANT supports reflections on the agency of the probes. ANT is considered a theoretical framework or ontology that helps exploring relational ties between things and concepts. Although the name suggests otherwise, ANT is referred to as a material-semiotic method and not a theory (Latour 2005). As such, it supports reflective thinking about situations, circumstances and relations between them. In ANT, the rigor of investigation is located one step further into abstraction "so that actors are allowed to unfold their own differing cosmos, no matter how counter-intuitive they appear" (p. 23). According to ANT, agencies are "never presented simply as matters of fact but always as matters of concern, with their mode of fabrication and their stabilizing mechanisms clearly visible" (p. 120). Referring to Heidegger (1977), Latour pleads to take these uncertain agencies, which are real, objective, atypical, and above all interesting, not as objects but rather as gatherings (p. 114). During participatory practices, an ANT focus can keep the mind open and responsive for unexpected turns.<sup>20</sup> Because of probing activities, relational connections can be found and followed.

Common to artistic research, this study is qualitative in nature. It relies on lived experiences, sensibilities and perceptions, which I tried to frame in a bigger picture to create meaning and understanding outside my practice. However, I never aim to uncover generalizable truths. The research outcomes, as idiographic reflections, are particular to the situation, and are only generalizable in principle. During the participatory practices within my research, 'lived experiences' are created, shared and

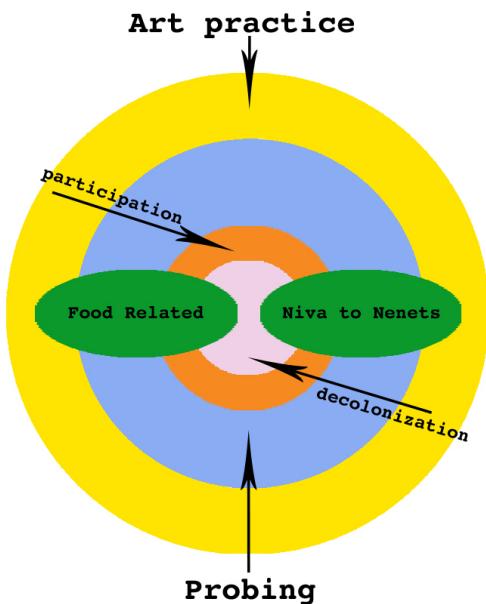


Figure 2. Position of probing within the art practice.

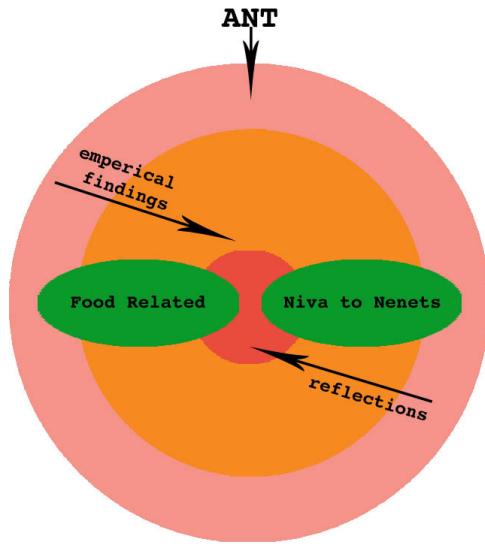


Figure 3. Position of the art practice within academia.

transferred. They explore the projects' themes: food and food culture within the *Food Related* project, and gift-giving and decolonization processes within *Niva to Nenets*.

Motivated to find a category that frames the underlying social-political aspects of my PhD project, participatory action research (PAR) seems to fit best as an acknowledged model of research as my way of working has similarities in its approach. PAR departs from the 'lived experience of people' (Reason 1991, p. 328) and can democratize inquiry and empower marginalized groups (Gray & Malins 2004, p. 75). Being situational and intervening, PAR enables researchers to "explore the themes, practices, and contexts of artistic inquiry, emphasizing the imaginative role in creating, criticizing, and constructing knowledge that is not only new but also has the capacity to transform human understanding" (Filardo 2009, p. 11). The process of a PAR study is fluid, open and responsive (Kemmis & McTaggart 2005), while the researcher is deeply involved in the activities being studied (Hutzel 2005). This relates so closely to ANT that, in practice, they merge easily.<sup>21</sup> Within this research I focused on ANT, with only a few references to PAR. Nevertheless, I acknowledge how the fluidity of PAR is part of my artistic inquiry.

The literature that justifies this body of research derives mainly from two directions: on the one hand it departs from anthropology and sociology, on the other hand from creative approaches. (De)colonisation matters are discussed throughout the whole thesis, including

references to Appadurai (1988), Chilisa (2012), Freeman (2000), Hutzel (2005), and Rath (2012). The ANT study leans on Latour (1994, 2004, 2005, 2013), while reflections on relational agencies are deepened by Buber (1958, 1961, 1966, 1992), De Laet & Mol (2000) and Ingold (2011). Food, including relational aspects of food culture, is discussed through Calvo (1982), Fischler (1988, 2011), Rozin (1996) and Simmel (1910), mainly on *Map 2*. Relational aspects of the Lada Niva and the act of travelling find ground in literature by Donath (2007) and Turner (1969, 1973, 1978) in *Map 3*. Power relations from gift-giving are discussed in *Map 3* too, supported by Kuokkanen (2005) and Mauss (1950). Literature on creative matters includes Bourriaud (2002), Dewey (1910, 1934) and Gauntlett (2011). My study on probology, which is mainly discussed in *Map 4*, departs from Gaver et al. (1999, 2004), Crabtree et al. (2003) and Mattelmäki (2005, 2006). It elaborates and deepens from a focus on bricolage and the agency of probes through Louridas (1999), Lévi-Strauss (1962) and Barthes (1985, 1993). Thus, literature from multiple fields is combined and intertwined.

Interdisciplinary exchange forms rich grounds for fresh ideas and innovation. The artistic aspects of my probing practice can be inspirational for anthropologists who wish to upgrade their interview techniques. Anthropological aspects of my findings and my approach can be inspirational for artists and designers, especially those who work with participants. Altogether, I praise plurality and inclusion as a basic attitude for a decolonizing approach.



## US-AND-THEM DICHOTOMY

While I was looking back on my art practice, I questioned the relationship I had towards the people I was working with. It fascinated me how contradictory easy it sometimes was to engage people to participate, while at other occasions this was painfully difficult. Not being rooted in the community was the main course of my complications; people often approached me as 'outsider'. Being an outsider can be a handicap for those who conduct participatory practices.<sup>22</sup> If you are not 'one of them' (or 'one of us' when seen through the eyes of the community members), you can be excluded from essential aspects or community life. Local knowledge about specific customs and relations between individuals, or about the locality in general, stays hidden. In looking back at these previous experiences, and in looking forward at starting an intensive research period, I was motivated to gain more understanding of the position of artists conducting participatory practices. How do artists position themselves within the groups of people they work with? How do they approach these people if they are considered outsiders, and how can they overcome this us-and-them dichotomy?

Dichotomies create distance. Anthropologists have studied groups of peoples that were foreign to them for many decades, underlining the differences by calling them 'natives'. According to Arjun Appadurai (1988), this was a colonial act that strengthened not only the dichotomy, but the suppressing powers as well. Although dichotomies can be handy during the process of identification, they often lead to oversimplification and exclude others too easily. Dichotomies, therefore, should be avoided. But how can you do that, if the people you work with label you 'outsider' and stick to that label? In order to overcome the distance of being an outsider, artists can invest a great amount of time in building relationships with community members.<sup>23</sup> If you spend enough time and effort in familiarizing yourself with the people and their circumstances, for a purpose that does not seem to harm them, community members might share more of their local knowledge with you. But typically, due to a limited amount of funded working hours, deadlines, or a binding workload, artists can hardly afford to spend more than just short amounts of time with the people they work with. This motivated me to search for other ways to reduce distance. Thus, how artistic participatory practices can create circumstances that overcome us-and-them dichotomies is one of the main questions of this research. While searching for answers from practice, a temporary feeling of togetherness is aimed for, which can be described as a feeling of solidarity or connectedness.<sup>24</sup>

During intercultural encounters, I experienced a separation between us-and-them like the one I encountered during community art practices. Out of personal interest, I have made many travels within the Arctic regions. For example on Greenland, I was often aware – or made aware by others – how cultural differences influence our sense of belonging. In regions where one people has been overruled and oppressed by another, as happened to so many indigenous populations during colonial times, us-and-them feelings are usually experienced strongly. This is the case for almost all Arctic peoples. Unprocessed pain and anger create an extra layer of challenges for the current generations, on top of accelerated climate change and the pressures of globalization. Working for and with indigenous peoples of the Arctic therefore not only includes strong(er) feelings of us-and-them in my research practice, but requires more responsibility as well.

If participants have a history of marginalization, collaborative research is only possible on the basis of trust (Rath 2012). Trust is generally considered the most critical element of relationships, and is earned by actions. These actions include honesty, closeness, empathy, and emotional involvement (Bergold & Thomas 2012). Above all, I strongly believe, initiators of participatory practices should take their participants seriously and feel responsible for what the action generates.<sup>25</sup>

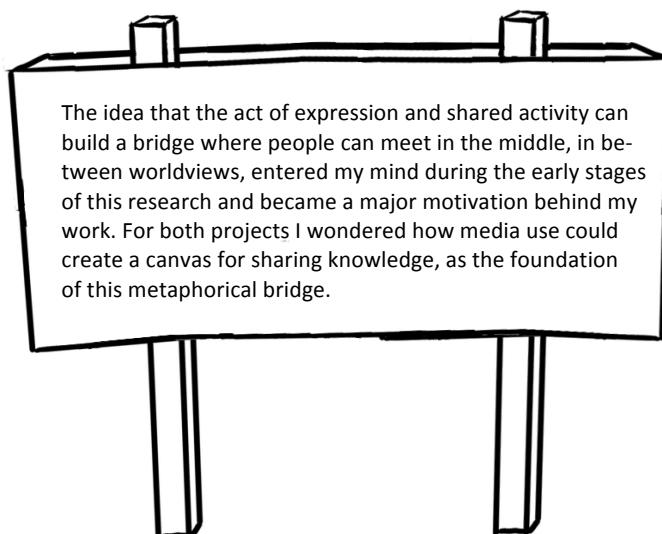
Ethical skills are inevitable in dealing with the persistent us-and-them dichotomy, and artists lacking them can learn from anthropology. "It finally comes down to who exploits whom for what and why," summarized Lucy Lippard (2010), who requires both artists and anthropologists to explain in depth why they are working in communities at all. This elementary question is understandable to most of us when it concerns indigenous communities, but is just as necessary in working with any other group of people. Insider or outsider, us or them, the true reason behind the wish to interfere always needs to be known from both directions. This transparency and ethical approach are fundamental to start a true symbiotic collaboration.

Dewey (1934) described art as a function that strengthens social bonds. Shared stories and meanings create a sense of unity, in which "art can introduce cross-cultural significances or enlighten our inherent personal and social understandings" (Hutzel 2005, p. 20). In all its functions and possibilities art has the option to be strongly embedded in societies, in dealing with social and political issues. For example, community art became a common art practice during the previous decennia. Hence, the process of art making can be shared with a community. Being creative, together, can unite and strengthen bonds. This can bring people together, temporarily.

In relation to the possible positions for artists conducting (artistic) research with participants, the anthropologist Paul Stoller (2009) inspired me. He

acknowledges the us-and-them dichotomy but positioned the anthropologist in the 'between': "...between 'being there,' as the late Clifford Geertz put it and 'being-here,' between two or more languages, between two or more cultural traditions, between two or more apprehensions of reality" (p. 4).<sup>26</sup> This 'between' is a very powerful and creative space for anthropologists, where strength can be drawn from both sides and where a creative air of indeterminacy can be breathed.

In avoiding negative impact of the us-and-them dichotomy during participatory practices, a 'between' can be a prosperous position for artists too. Gloria Anzaldua (2007), who inspired my thinking about positioning even more, positions herself in the borderlands. She described borders to be "set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (p. 25). In between these borders, or in between this us-and-them, lies a borderland. A borderland, she writes, "is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'"(p. 25). Even stronger than Stollers' invitation to go 'in between', this tempting definition lured me to cross borders to inhabit the borderlands.



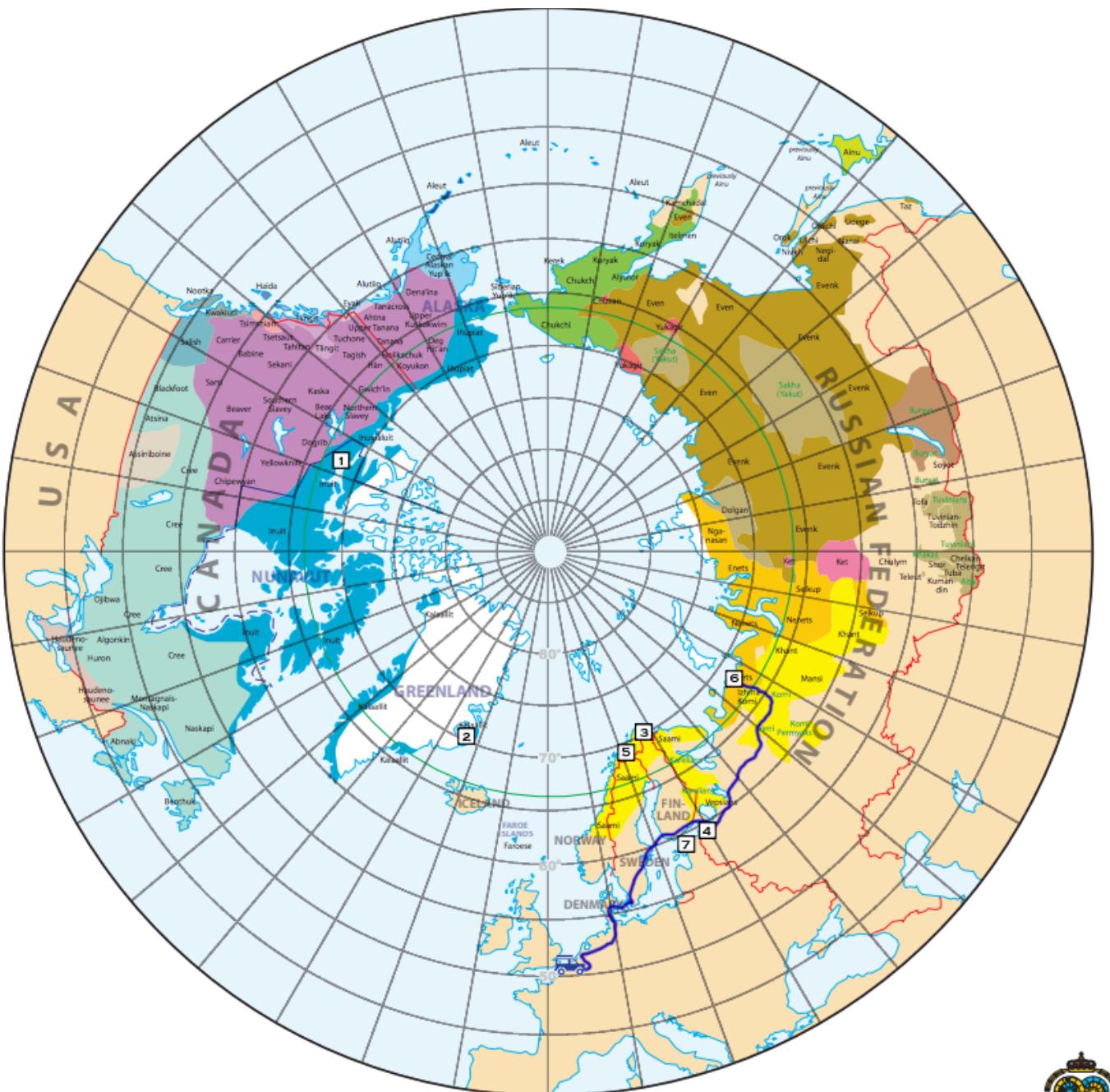


Figure 4. Arctic map.

compiled by W.K. Dallmann  
© Norwegian Polar Institute



- █ Sami
- █ Inuit
- █ Nenets
- █ Evenk
- █ Chukchi
- █ Dene
- █ Cree

#### Fieldwork:

- 1** **Kugluktuk, Nunavut, Canada**  
April 2009, 10 days
- 2** **Ittoqqortoormiit, Greenland**  
May 2010, 7 days
- 3** **Tanabru, Sapmi, Norway**  
August 2011, 1 day
- 4** **Kronstadt, Russian Federation**  
July 2012, November 2012, July-August 2013, 18 days
- 5** **Kilpisjärvi, Sapmi, Finland**  
September-October 2011, 65 days
- 6** **Naryan Mar, Russian Federation**  
November 2012, July-August 2013, 21 days
- 7** **Tallinn, Estonia**  
January-June 2014, 160 days

- Road-trip Niva to Nenets project**  
June-August 2013, 42 days



## KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Knowledge is handled in different forms throughout the whole research. First of all, knowledge is approached as a qualitative, unmaterialistic commodity. Knowledge can be tacit or formal, private or public, local or global. All the people that participated in the projects, including me, possess these commodities. The second form focuses on the containers that hold the knowledge. For example, memories, concerns, understandings, values, habits, skills, drawings and stories all contain knowledge. These containers enable us to transfer the knowledge during communication, as they give them a context or a body. Through probing, I sense for knowledge and trigger the participants to share their containers of knowledge. When the participants respond to the probes, they share knowledge. Sharing can lead to transfer of knowledge, and to the production of new knowledge. Third, I mediate the containers of knowledge. They are published on the websites of the two projects: on the *Food Related* platform as entries, and in the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie as recorded scenes. The mediation is done to enable transfer towards a broader audience, but to enable connections between the different containers too. This leads us to the fourth form in which knowledge is handled: through connections and relations. During the Picnic-Quiz I facilitate the sharing and discussion of responses on the spot (see *Map 4*), which naturally lead to connections between, for example, viewpoints and concerns. The clustering and realigning of the mediated knowledge on the two websites occurred more formal. Each connection and relation was contemplated and reconsidered, in order to facilitate knowledge production among the broader audience, beyond the scope of the participatory practices. The fifth and final form in which knowledge is handled throughout this PhD relates to knowledge production within the field of academic research. Throughout the whole research process, I gained and integrated theoretical and ontological knowledge from different fields, including practical knowledge. This enabled a deeper understanding of my working process and the process of art making in general, lived knowledge in relation to probology and ANT, and last but not least awareness of my own behaviour and appearance. I am sharing this knowledge within this written thesis but it is contained within the two projects too. Thus, in accordance with Latour's preference for 'science in action', the transfer of this knowledge cannot be limited to reading this document.

In my art practice I search for new ways of knowledge sharing through an artistic use of new media. The artistic aspects of my media use include aesthetics, ingenuity and imagination. The media use within my projects tends to mediate between people and/or between different kinds of knowledge. The social power of art lies in the possibility to create an expressive space in which the rules and regulations of social reality are reshaped, state both Bourriaud and Rancière (Trienekens & Postma 2010). Thus, art can be an encounter, but it can also be a space. In these expressive spaces, participants can creatively and

imaginatively share their knowledge. In these spaces, the artistic participatory practice gets initiated or takes place.<sup>27</sup>

Lippard (1997) provided the challenge to make art more inclusive and participatory. Besides being a framing device for the visual, art can grab and display social experience. But, according to Lippard, "it is difficult for an artform to dispense altogether with the frame, or to change frames on the spot, offering multiple views of the ways in which a space or place can be and is used" (p. 286). Together with the challenge of combining

different kinds of knowledge, I found motivation in Lippard's challenge to focus on the inclusiveness of my art practice. Therefore, I allowed and encouraged multiple viewpoints – both during the participatory practices and within the media use that communicates the outcomes of these practices.

Participatory action research (PAR) engages people in examining their knowledge, say Kemmis & McTaggart (2005): "It is a process in which all individuals in a group try to get a handle on the ways in which their knowledge shapes their sense of identity and agency and to reflect critically on how their current knowledge frames and constrains their action" (pp. 281-282). As such, people can only do this kind of research 'on' themselves, either individually or collectively. "It is not research done 'on' others" (p. 282). As it handles 'lived experiences', we can consider these kinds of knowledge 'lived knowledge'. The lived knowledge that is collected and shared during participatory practices can, among others, display the assets, the difficulties, the concerns, and the beauty of the marginalized people. Art can highlight what people consider important to their culture, and even provides the means towards a more equal and equitable society (Hutzel 2005, p. 24). Thus, it can give people a voice. Ideally, it allows multiple voices to exist next to each other in a boundary-free space.

Within the Arctic regions, scientists from various fields increasingly aim to include local knowledge in their research.<sup>28</sup> But, conceptual models or frameworks that enable combinations of and links between different worldviews are absent in most cases. According to Bagele Chilisa (2012) and other patrons of indigenous research methodologies, we should realize that combining different kinds of knowledge comes with pitfalls. For example, the interplay between indigenous knowledge and Euro-western science strategies is one of the auspicious challenges in contemporary (social) sciences. Most research methods have a tendency to exclude truths that contrast the Euro-western research paradigm.<sup>29</sup> Indigenous knowledge is often too spiritual, too sensitive, too local, too tacit, too implicit, too flexible, or too relational to fit in the paradigm of Euro-western science strategies.<sup>30</sup> In a similar way, artistic knowledge can be hard to communicate in an academic regime, as probably every artist in academia recognizes. It can be just as intuitive, sensitive, specific, personal, tacit, indescribable, dreamy, spontaneous, and intertwined. Less restricted by empirical thinking and often trained to think out of the box, artists are able to

bypass the burdens of ruling knowledge structures through creativity and artistry.<sup>31</sup> If an artist succeeds to include artistic knowledge in academia, some of the tools or strategies that enabled this inclusion might enable indigenous knowledge to fit in. Artists handle different tools and usually work in different conditions than, generally speaking, most academics. Thus, departing from the challenge to include and combine different kinds of knowledge, I search for inclusive approaches and methods. Probology, which is discussed in *Map 4*, can be practiced beyond the worlds of art and might be inclusive for both artistic and indigenous knowledge. As the sharing of knowledge can lead to a transfer of knowledge, or to the creation of new points of view, the main purpose of the online platform for *Food Related* and the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie is to facilitate expressive spaces for this sharing to occur.

Latour's notion of actor-network theory (ANT) departs from the idea that there are "several types of truth and falsity, each dependent on very specific, practical, experiential conditions" (2013, p. 18). The reason why these different kinds of truths and falsities are so hard to combine lies in the domain boundaries. Borders are set up to distinguish *us* from *them* (Anzaldua 2007, p. 25) and prevent merging. If, for example, the Euro-western science paradigm considers mythical or magic thinking to be no part of 'them', excluding it from their domain and perhaps even label it 'fantasy' or 'falsity', protective boundaries are created.<sup>32</sup> Only a border crossing state of mind, independent from restrictive domains, can move freely and follow its own course. ANT can be strengthening for these mindsets. Connections of a given element or action are followed to find out where it leads (Latour 2013, p. 30). These connections trail throughout multiple domains and even cross the spaces in between, the borderlands. In accepting the notion of network instead of boundaries, we get the same freedom of movement as the actions we follow. At the heart of ANT lies the principle of irreduction, from which trails reveal series of associations. These trails "makes it possible to understand through what series of small discontinuities it is appropriate to pass in order to obtain a certain continuity of action" (p. 33). Within the field(s) of investigation many trails can be followed from various positions, leading to multiple viewpoints.

The ontological ANT tool gave me the mindset to approach expressive spaces as boundary-free as possible. For example, the aimed freedom to allow

different kinds of knowledge shaped the design of the *Food Related* platform. The representation of the probed knowledge resembles ANT thinking. For example, the interface design of the *Niva to Nenets* road-movie literally allows people to follow certain trails of selected scenes throughout the whole collection of recordings. Within the paradigm of PAR we can find inspiration for an inclusive approach towards knowledge and knowledge sharing as well. The primary aim of participatory research is to trigger and include the voice of marginalized or oppressed people, in the shape of their experiences and their everyday knowledge.<sup>33</sup> In the differences in worldview between the participants and the researchers lies an asset, which must be exploited through mutual curiosity about the knowledge and ability of those on the ‘other side’ (Bergold & Thomas 2012). Ideally, all participants contribute their unique skills and knowledge, through which all participants learn and are transformed (Brydon-Miller 2001). This includes the researcher(s), who participate in the process too.

The more artists and/or researchers are familiar with the everyday life of the participants they work with, the better. Especially during intercultural exchange, it is essential to be informed about the idiosyncrasy of the other culture. Since 2005 I have done volunteer work for the Dutch human rights organization Arctic Peoples Alert,<sup>34</sup> and gained understanding of the Arctic cultures through literature study. I deepened and replenished my knowledge of the Arctic situations at the start of this doctoral research, with a bachelor program in Circumpolar Cultures at the University of the Arctic. And to increase the possibilities for communication, I went to Russian and Danish language courses. In practice, some knowledge of the different cultures and a minor understanding of these two languages turned useful. It helped me to ‘tune in’ and showed to others that I was truly interested in their culture. The fact that I made an effort was appreciated. However, I believe it was just as much my personal approach, combined with the position I took in or was put in by others, that coloured the willingness or unwillingness towards sharing. Besides familiarity with the culture you work with, also aspects of the private identity, gestures and other personal characteristics can make or break an aimed feeling of togetherness for intercultural knowledge sharing.

## THANKSGIVING

*Many people\* have been helpful during this artistic research project. I feel supported in many ways: sometimes support challenged and thus deepened my thinking; sometimes support enabled the circumstances that were needed to realize the work.*

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### Thoughts and comments about artistic research:



### Thoughts and comments about participatory practices :



### Thoughts and comments about us-and-them dichotomies:



### Thoughts and comments about knowledge sharing:



**MAP 1**  
INTRODUCTION

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