



Aalborg Universitet

**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
DENMARK

## Envisioning Greenland

*Contested naturecultures in the making*

Ren, Carina Bregnholm

*Published in:*  
Conditions

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Ren, C. B. (2012). Envisioning Greenland: Contested naturecultures in the making. *Conditions*, (11/12), 154-155. <http://www.conditionsmagazine.com/>

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Unlike the cool vision, this new vision of Greenland is one of industry, urbanity and mobility.”

in what I have termed the hot vision, nature and culture both play necessary and decisive roles. But as shown, the roles played by nature and culture are far from permanent and far from being recognized by all of the stakeholders who take part in the shaping and negotiation of Greenland's future. Nature gets in the way of hot visions as environmentalists challenge the building of facilities for mineral extraction in vulnerable areas: as wind and weather conditions preclude the (profitable) building of a long-haul airport at central tourism sites; as drilling for oil turns out to be too difficult due to the geological composition of the bedrock: as global climate advocates

urge Greenland to support an agreement on lowering carbon dioxide emissions. A hot vision of a possible Greenland, cultivating without attending to viable connections with what Bruno Latour calls non-human actors, is far from accomplished. A question remaining is what kind of vision, what kind of representation are we given of Greenland by the possible Greenland exhibitions? And second, how might these visions of a possible Greenland impact on the future framing, experiencing and enacting of Greenland? The answers to these questions are not (yet) given. Hopefully, the discussions and reflections the exhibition will spark in Venice, in Greenland and elsewhere, will help future lawmakers, public commentators, business entrepreneurs and citizens to carry on the work of not only envisioning, but also building sustainable Greenlandic natureculture futures.

References  
Latour, Bruno. We Have Never Been Modern. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.  
Law, John. "On the Subject of the Object: Narrative, Technology, and Interpretation." Configurations 8, no. 1 (2000): 1-29.

## CONTESTED VISIONS

on which to envision, build and represent this new Greenland. As ice makes way for the bedrock, natural resources can more easily and less expensively be extracted and new industrial and dwelling zones can be developed. As the Northwest Passage becomes ice free, container ships and cruise liners suddenly gain access to attractive new waterways, not only attracting business opportunities, but also geopolitical interest. The hot vision of Greenland can help demonstrate that Greenland is not organized by nature; rather it is organized along with and through nature. Also, the hot vision shows that nature is simultaneously being organized with and through local and global change. Hence, Greenland's reality is one of contested and contesting naturecultures.

The deep-frozen cool version of Greenland is challenged by an emerging vision of vital enterprise and industriousness, easily identifiable in the media, politics and public discourse of contemporary Greenland. This vision of social and economic transformation is primarily connected to development plans in the oil, gas and mineral industries, and is heralded by its advocates through a hot vision of Greenland where Greenlandic society and citizens claim their rights to act, to industrialize, to enter and engage with a global economic and political agenda. Unlike the cool vision, this new vision of Greenland is one of industry, urbanity and mobility. It is populated by entrepreneurs, oil drills, buildings of glass and steel, long haul airports and cargo plants, representatives from foreign powers and stopover tourists. Unlike the cool vision, this vision is one of cultivation. Similarly to how the cool, natural version of Greenland entailed a meticulous assembling of components that where highly cultural, this hot vision requires or absorbs elements from what we usually see as belonging to a natural sphere. Nature plays a crucial part in the composition of hot Greenland. Climate change and melting ice are but two actors engaging in uncovering grounds

## HOT GREENLAND

necessarily be lowered—or silenced. The question is whether the inclusion of naturecultures can help pave the way to a more balanced envisioning and enactment of a vision.



# ORGANIZED BY NATURE ENVISIONING GREENLAND: CONTESTED NATURECULTURES IN THE MAKING

Currently, the traditional “cool” representation of Greenland as a frozen landscape devoid of people and human structures is being challenged by an emerging vision of Greenland as “hot.” This article presents and describes these two versions of Greenland, showing how demarcations of what is “nature” and what is “culture” play active roles in representing and performing Greenland in very different ways. The visions of a cool and hot Greenland may be seen as contesting and contested naturecultures (Latour 1993) that enact Greenland through shifting configurations, making some elements visible while others disappear. By attributing performative capacity to entities that we usually confine to the role of prop or backdrop to human agency, many new and alternative actors emerge on scene in creating possible Greenland(s). The question is how the current uncovering, distributing and reshuffling of resources, whether of a human or non-human kind, may contribute to visions that are able to sustainably integrate and bring forward Greenlandic, and global, naturecultures.

BY CARINA REN, ASS. PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF CULTURE AND GLOBAL STUDIES, AALBORG UNIVERSITY

## COOL GREENLAND

Portrayed in travel and nature magazines, in documentaries and in the popular imagination as a colossal, remote and frozen landscape of silence and solitude, Greenland is by most people perceived as a place of nature. An example of this is how Greenland is marketed in tourism material. Brochures and webpages display ice-covered sceneries devoid of people and human structures. Only rarely (although increasingly) are the tourism representations of a country of ice, water and rocks challenged by dots of human activity and habitation. However, as any traveler to Greenland would know, gaining access to Greenland's tourism sites and experiences requires a careful composition of entities of which only a few would we usually describe or perceive as natural. Airplanes and cruise ships, travel agents, ticket purchases and documents carry us out to “nature.” Local guides and service providers, lodging and outdoor equipment, maps and GPS ensure that we return back home safe and sound. In a tourism context, all of these entities, which we usually think of as cultural, work to perform the vision

and enactment of a cool and “natural” Greenland.

Imagining a place perceived as nature begs the reproduction of stereotypes, for instance of indigenous peoples living in harmony with nature, consuming nature through food products and clothing, inhabiting and passing across the landscape in seamless, almost symbiotic ways. This vision of a frozen, empty landscape of purified nature, only populated by people entirely conditioned by nature, has worked as a potent representation of Greenland, not only in tourism, but also in many other spheres of the social-historical imagination.

## NATURECULTURES

The representation and imagination of a place as a place of nature impacts the way not only our ideas, but also our experiencing of this place are framed. Representations and experiences of place reinforce each other through their mutual framing and hence, visions and the imagination can have a very real and powerful impact. As argued in the above, where nature reigns in our imagination,

culture must necessarily yield. This occlusion of presence, of activity, of representation is the reason for which we should question and challenge our idea of purified nature and culture. The example with tourism demonstrates that the cool nature vision of Greenland is an abstraction, an illusion, an impossibility. Traveling to, or—as proposed in the exhibition through its four themes—inhabiting, connecting, migrating and cultivating Greenland requires much more than just nature. Instead, enacting Greenland requires a provision of naturecultures (Latour 1993).

The vision of a cool Greenland may be seen as a network of naturecultures that enact Greenland through shifting configurations, making some of its actors visible while others disappear (Law 2000). When the ice, fjords and polar bears step into the fore, people and industry disappear. In an emerging hot vision of Greenland presented in the following, roles are shifted as local empowerment and global interest, mining equipment and foreign investments access the top of the agenda. As development discourses triumph, voices of sustainability, conservation and climate change must