

Being (in)formed by indigenous voices: First steps to using graphic narratives to decolonise speculative fiction

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ABSTRACT

The Greenlandic visual artist Nuka K. Godtfredsen and his literary and scientific collaborators have produced a series of four graphic narratives to represent distinct moments in Greenland's history, spanning the pre-colonised and colonial period. These narratives employ aspects of magic realism and adopt an approach to narrative that focuses on the supernatural and presents modes of being that contrast with their audiences' understanding of realities that are ordinarily (only) visible. I argue that these graphic narratives use strategies from speculative fiction that frame the modern European presence in Greenland and the narrative of colonialism as one of several multiple realities in the Arctic, rather than its central axis, leaving open the possibility for indigenous Greenlanders to speak on their own terms. This enables these graphic narratives to illuminate aspects of knowledge (including features of oral legend and supernatural encounters) that were previously discredited in colonial discourse. Furthermore, I show that attending to how embodied aspects of Greenlandic Inuit storytelling traditions can be captured in the graphic narrative medium may be an effective decolonial strategy, which could be employed by speculative fiction. I thus advocate methodologies for speculative fiction that strategically broaden its boundaries in order to address its intractable colonial legacy. Informed by approaches that focus attention on form — such as Marks's haptic visuality (2000) and visual theories of the power of hand-drawn comics (Groensteen 2010, Chute 2008) to engage the reader/viewer in both an embodied and reflective way — I assert that including graphic narratives which employ strategies of speculative fiction may present a unique opportunity for the genre to mount a powerful challenge to a colonial knowledge production.

Keywords: graphic narrative, speculative fiction, magic realism, Greenland, supernatural, oral legends, indigenous knowledge, haptic visuality.

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Decolonising Speculative Fiction

Introduction

This article proposes a strategy for decolonising speculative fiction through a reconsideration of genre boundaries by focusing closely upon a case of visual storytelling, the first book in a set of four graphic narratives in the *Oqaluttuaq* series. Created by Greenlandic visual artist Nuka K. Godtfredsen and, for books three and four of the series, by the writer and Inuit culture scholar, Lisbeth Valgreen, *Oqaluttuaq* reflects a decade of collaborative work with multiple people and institutions in Greenland and Denmark (including archaeologists and museum curators) with the aim of public dissemination of local ethnographic and archaeological knowledge about the history and pre-history of Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat, especially among young people (Gronnøw & Sørensen 2009:52).

Oqaluttuaq means ‘myth’ or ‘folktale’ in Western Greenlandic/Kalaallisut, and immediately marks these works not only as myths or legends (which Western readers of speculative fiction may be accustomed to by way of their familiarity with magic realism) but as related to the Inuit tradition of oral storytelling. As Ben Holgate (2015:634) notes, magic realism has already been shown to be effective for understanding ‘Aboriginal mythology, spirituality and traditional oral storytelling techniques’ in Western contexts. Chris Baldick (2004:138) defines myths and legends by their speculations about other worlds in which interactions with the technologies of the time are foregrounded. In the *Oqaluttuaq* these speculations are often transmitted by means of magic realist moments in the narratives, but importantly, these moments do not privilege a single world or normative centre. Holgate (2015:638) reminds us of the limits of magic realism as a strategy for decolonisation in that it may remain a Western critical strategy and be employed as part of an ongoing colonial framework if it is applied to indigenous perspectives in such a way as to make them seem binarily other than Western norms. I argue, by contrast, that the approach in the *Oqaluttuaq* is to foreground the fact that from another vantage point, Inuit stories and perspectives are non-anomalous and are normative in themselves, a crucial part of the plethora of perspectives available for knowledge creation, particularly on subjects such as the supernatural, invisible, not-wholly-knowable parts of reality. In this sense, Godtfredsen’s graphic narratives not only offer an alternative to reductive colonial narratives, but also offer a way for this alternative to be employed as a powerful strategy to hear indigenous voices speaking on their own terms within speculative fiction.

Decolonisation through (in) formed expansion of genre boundaries

The International Speculative Fiction Data Base (ISFDB) excludes graphic narratives for imperialistic reasons which lie beyond the scope of this article.¹ Despite this exclusion from the ISFDB, I argue that including graphic narratives not only helps provide an opportunity to decolonise the genre, but is also in keeping with a defining characteristic of speculative fiction. The genre is well-known to cross media and genre boundaries so that '[t]he varieties of speculative fiction and the looseness of the category itself give us the opportunity to explore systems of classification and uses of genre' (Gill 2013:71). My approach is in harmony with RB Gill's (2013:72) assertion that 'for literary purposes, a definition that suggests affinities with other types of works and that facilitates interpretation is indispensable' for decolonising knowledge. I contend that even outside the field, this approach makes sense. David Brauer (2009) reminds us that a tactic which draws on genre theory offers possibilities for freeing rhetorically focused disciplines, such as literary studies, from their traditional primary focus on content and supports a consideration of the strategic function of genre classifications (including the effects of form) on knowledge creation. The rationale for following this approach is also apparent from within the field. The ISFDB already contains works of magic realism, fantastic voyages and ghost stories with supernatural elements, all of which occur in the *Oqaluttuaq* series. In addition, these graphic narratives present an imaginative or unreliable account of reality, which is in keeping with another traditional focus of speculative fiction. All in all, this article proposes that the process of decolonising the imagination should include a challenge to rigid classifications of speculative fiction, which seem to arise from a prior relationship between canonised texts. Instead, as Rosch (1988) argues, we should remain cognisant that texts and groupings of texts are always socially and culturally produced. Thus I argue that rigid classifications of canons and genres may themselves be part of the stubborn colonial heritage, both of speculative fiction and of literary studies more broadly; and that these may continue to perpetuate the devaluation of marginal voices that do not fit fixed, canonical categories for inclusion (both in terms of form and content). For this reason, the inclusion of narratives such as the *Oqaluttuaq* series in an exploration of speculative fiction demonstrates a decolonial approach in itself.

My approach also allows me to keep alive a central tension of critical importance to the genre of speculative fiction and its strategy of magic realism, namely the dynamic between fiction and non-fiction, which allows these stories to perturb the

very notion of what I regard as the boundaries of reality. Indeed, as Gill (2013:72-73) argues, speculative fiction is defined by 'presenting modes of being that contrast with their audiences' understanding of ordinary reality'. This central tension is expressed through a dynamic system of binary oppositions between concepts, such as spirit and body; supernatural and natural; real and magical; past and present; invisible and visible all of which inflect the stories throughout the selected graphic narratives. These inflections disrupt established and intransigent colonial assumptions that everything is knowable and that mental stability consists in maintaining strict boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds. This article will examine a moment in Godtfredsen's first narrative in the *Oqaluttuaq* series, *The First Steps* (2009). It will explore how this text employs aspects of speculative fiction and magic realism to bring these assumptions into sharper focus to contribute towards decolonising the genre. As Walter Benjamin (1968:76) puts it when he articulates the moral impetus of changing the past, this is to enable the connection of memories of what is no more with dreams of the political now.

In introducing my approach to include graphic narratives in the effort to decolonise speculative fiction further, it remains to make explicit that a crucial part of this decolonial strategy is the foregrounding of form. My analysis will show that this emphasis is crucial to the decolonisation process and to bridging the gap between what has been recorded in oral tradition and what may be captured in visual narratives. Anthony Bogues (2006) emphasises the crucial role of aesthetic form in the process of decolonising the imagination. He explains how it allows us to see the oppressive nature of categories (including the category of speculative fiction itself) bestowed by the coloniser that would otherwise be mistaken for an invisible norm, rather than an object of study (Bogues 2006:159). Jacques Rancière (2004) also directs our attention to the importance of explicitly taking account of form in our analysis of aesthetic processes so that we may study art for its fundamentally political nature. In a similar vein, Alain Badiou (2005) asserts that paying attention to form helps reveal a crucial role for art: that of performing truths that are otherwise 'invisible'. He explains that this exposes the strength of aesthetic approaches as interpretive methods of knowledge creation that are always simultaneously abstract in their attention to form and immersive in their attention to the embodied process of creating.

In this case, opening up speculative fiction to include graphic narratives as texts, by paying attention simultaneously to embodied and abstract processes also enables me to make visible the unique contributions of indigenous artists and authors within a growing field of visual storytelling (including comics, animated films and video games) and to do this in a way that makes these methods and

perspectives visible on their own terms. Goenpul Quandamooka indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) reminds us that in societies where legacies of colonialism still actively perpetuate the exclusion of indigenous people, there is a danger of only being able to decolonise knowledge by foregrounding binary narratives of migrancy and otherness. She warns that this actively precludes indigenous people from occupying a more multifaceted position of 'otherness' as one of many others (which also includes the colonists) while, at the same time, allowing that the indigenous position sometimes needs to be centralised, since indigenous people may not have left a dominant culture behind or arrived from anywhere in the same way as other migrants. This is another reason why it is important to include visual narratives in speculative fiction if we wish to decolonise the genre, so that indigenous voices are not perpetually constructed as marginal within it, but rather allowed to assume complex and central positions from which their stories of colonisation may be told in uniquely embodied and engaging ways, which wider audiences may not yet be accustomed to. In this regard Godtfredsen's graphic narratives perform a significantly decolonising role in that their use of indigenous storytelling traditions, both oral and visual, helps to frame the modern European presence in Greenland and the narrative of colonialism as one of several multiple realities in the Arctic, rather than its central axis.

The graphic narrative form

Badiou's approach to foregrounding form relies on highlighting the way graphic narratives combine abstraction and immersion, mind and body, in a way that is exceptional (even among visual narrative forms) and makes reading/viewing them a powerfully interactive experience. Graphic narratives may include in their ambit of representation some experiences that are both profoundly intangible and intensely embodied. Saige Walton (2009:101) explains that this is because

...the act of reading comics practically forces the intertwining of our senses. Because comics are structured around the simultaneous co-presence of multiple panels, their juxtaposition of images/texts/panels (not to mention their shifting configurations) forces the eye to scan and to kinaesthetically follow the narrative trajectory...Optical scanning in tandem with manual handling helps enact the flow of comics, as an intersensory experience that is physically performed by the reader, rather than technologically externalized...

The active participation of the reader/viewer that graphic narratives necessitate is further enhanced by the possibility of combining words and images is a non-

synthesised way. Hillary Chute (2008), perhaps the most well-known theorist of graphic narratives as fundamentally political texts, points out that the double code of these narratives in their use of non-synthesised text and images demands labour-intensive decoding by the reader/viewer. This way of making the reader/viewer both aware of the graphic narrative as artefact and immersed in an embodied reading/viewing experience mitigates against easy consumption and detains the reader/viewer in a concentrated process of re-imagination (Chute 2008:460). Indeed, a reader/viewer of graphic narratives not only fills in the gaps between panels but also ‘works with the often disjunctive back-and-forth of reading and looking for meaning’ (Chute 2008:452). While this complex coding may be seen as compounding the representational process and detracting from the immediacy of the reading/viewing experience, graphic narratives also house a rebellious energy (demonstrated in their drawing of hyperbolic emotion and the movement of bodies) which tends to restore immediacy (Bukatman 2012). Scott Bukatman (2011) also claims that graphic narratives achieve immediacy of the physical body navigating space in a way that would remain invisible in another form. This attention to both the embodied production and reception of graphic narratives enables some of the embodied aspects of the Inuit oral tradition to be captured in visual form.

Greenland, the *Oqaluttuaq* and its indigenous (oral and visual) storytelling traditions

The history of colonisation in Greenland consists of several layers of migration over thousands of years, many of which do not involve European colonists. Furthermore, the native Inuit population are understood not to be the first peoples of Greenland (as the Saqqaq of *The First Steps* are) but rather have become indigenous over time, via later waves of migration, as their legends attest. Greenland is at the axis of centuries’ long migration and settlement, in which Europe has not always been central. Furthermore, it is a territory that is still associated with and dependent on (Danish) European colonists and lingering remnants of a colonial thinking in which binary identities and event-based ways of structuring reality remain, despite its apparent independence. It is thus a territory where the terms ‘colonist’, ‘colonised’, ‘first people’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘settler’ remain strained.

In this context, the *Oqaluttuaq* books take a distinctly episodic, fragmentary, and non-chronological approach to storytelling: each book corresponds roughly to the lifespan of one generation and illuminates a selected moment in Greenland’s history. The series consists of four books. The first is *The First Steps* (2009), a narrative of

the first human migration to Greenland in 2500 BCE, undertaken by Paleo-Eskimo groups from what is the present-day Canadian territory of Nunavut (the Saqqaq). The second book is *The Ermine* (2012), a story set in the late Dorset culture (of the Tunit) in 1100 CE and the arrival of the Inuit. It narrates the story of female shaman-in-training who undertakes a journey into the High Arctic. This brings her into contact with early Inuit migrants (Harnow *et al.* 2012), whose memory has been preserved in the native Inuit oral tradition through thirty generations (McGhee 2001; Onciul 2015) and functions as a way of recording and preserving the presence of the Tunit after their disappearance. The third book is *The Gift* (2015), a narrative about the 18th-century colonial encounters between the Greenlandic Inuit (descendants of the Thule who have populated Greenland since the 14th century) and the European whalers, traders, colonialists and missionaries from Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Britain. The fourth and final book is *The Scar* (2018), a story about the 14th-century descendants of the Norse people, who settled in parts of southern Greenland four centuries earlier and interacted with the Thule. It articulates the way that daily life began to be governed by Christian strictures, including the proscription on storytelling about the past and the Viking ancestors.

The *Oqaluttuaq* series of narratives is a result of collaboration between multiple artists, scholars and institutions from Greenland and Denmark: the graphic artist Nuka K. Godtfredsen (illustrator of the series, sole author of books one and two, and co-author of books three and four); the writer Lisbeth Valgreen (co-author of books three and four); academic researchers at SILA, the Greenlandic Research Centre at the National Museum of Denmark (Bjarne Grønnow, Mikkel Sørensen, Hans Christian Gulløv, Jette Arneborg, and Martin Appelt); the Greenlandic publishing house Ilinniusiorfik; and the Nuuk-based national newspaper Sermitsiaq. Due to this multi-disciplinary, multi-discursive collaboration, the *Oqaluttuaq* books have been described as a ‘meeting between science and art’. Scott McCloud² (1993:20) identifies the distinguishing feature of comics as the juxtaposition of pictorial and other images arranged in a deliberate sequence in space, intended to convey information and/or evoke an aesthetic response in the reader/viewer. Aside from foregrounding the physical quality of space in the transmission of ideas, McCloud’s definition emphasises that the reader/viewer becomes active in the reading/viewing process. The researchers behind the *Oqaluttuaq* series allude to a similar focus in selecting the graphic narrative form to bridge the gap between the oral and visual storytelling traditions of the region and help them reach the objective of ‘explor[ing] new ways of telling this exciting story,’ to ‘make history come alive,’ given that ‘Inuit identity, experiences and knowledge have always been transmitted by one generation to the next through stories and myths’ (Grønnow & Sørensen in Godtfredsen 2014:52).

In deciding to depict these stories visually, the artists and researchers acknowledge that, when the stories were transmitted orally, the physicality of the author's voice and body language also constructs the meaning of the story and that this has to be taken into account when trying to make these stories live again. In so doing they use a common assumption that pictorial forms of representation are more closely linked to the body than writing is. This assumption includes that pictorial forms increase what may be represented, particularly in contexts of narratives of contestation or ambiguity, as is often the case in colonial societies such as Greenland. In Greenlandic fiction, magic realism is not an ongoing colonial strategy, but a way of telling stories of helping spirits and visions as a normal part of life. This resonates with the argument about contested narratives of war and conflict. It also evokes Nicoletta Vallorani's (2009:445) argument that words coupled with images 'are supposed to provide the public (readers and/or audience) with a more precise and reliable perception'. This 'more precise and reliable' form of representation that images may provide claimed to be an avenue for physiologically arousing a response in the reader/viewer. As Vallorani (2009:446) notes, the 'process of understanding images is basically seen as a physiological process'. The readers/viewers of Godfredtsen's narrative experience precisely this physiological process as we decode realistic, sequenced, images of events which may lie outside our everyday understanding. Building on this connection between images and the body, I posit that the physicality of the author's voice and body language within the Inuit oral storytelling tradition may, to some extent, be captured in visual narratives that are drawn by hand. Belgian comics scholar, Thierry Groensteen (2010), also informs my argument. He argues that in comics, the body of the artist links the reader/viewer to the world of the artist in an embodied way:

[T]he drawn image, as a manufactured creation, inevitably produces a signature of its creator. Drawing is per se an encoding and a stylization of reality, it is produced by a reading of the world. As such, drawing cannot be separated from the hand of a specific enunciator (Groensteen 2010:4).

This understanding also accords with Laura Marks's (2000) claims that certain visual media have a powerfully decolonising effect because they rely on a responsive, embodied relationship between reader/viewer and text, in which the body of the reader/viewer can be affected or aroused each time the story is retold in a way that exceeds simple visual or verbal records and becomes a multi-sensory experience.

In trying to find a new way to tell these stories, which captures the physicality of orally transmitted myths as a normal part of life, the artists and researchers behind this series of comics also draw on the tradition of indigenous Greenlandic visual

narratives, taking their cues from Aron of Kangeq (1822-1869, see Barkman 2012): another indigenous writer, artist and illustrator of Greenlandic legends. Kangeq's work demonstrates that the Inuit visual narrative tradition continued to be a widely accessible way of sharing archaeological knowledge in an embodied way, even as the oral tradition may have become less prominent. What is more, Godtfredsen's graphics not only draw from traditional themes in Greenlandic Inuit storytelling, but are also part of the Danish and Greenlandic watercolour tradition in visual art (which includes paintings by Kangeq, Jens Kreutzmann and contemporary sketches by Johan Markussen; see Barkman 2012). In keeping with this tradition, Godtfredsen uses watercolours to create mood and evoke emotions. In this way, drawing on an established indigenous tradition of expounding cultural legends in visual narratives, the collaborating authors of the *Oqaluttuaq* series exploit the capacity of visual narratives to articulate a formal connection between embodied identity and images. Thus, I argue that the *Oqaluttuaq* graphic narratives combine the abstract and embodied, past and present, reflective and immersive aspects of experience in ways that help illuminate indigenous perspectives.

Through a focus on form, and an acknowledgement of the use of magic realism as a driving force across the *Oqaluttuaq* narratives, I argue for a productive blurring of genre boundaries between speculative fiction, myths and legends, the embodied Inuit storytelling traditions and the graphic narrative medium in service of further decolonising the imagination. This allows me to treat what may otherwise be considered unreliable, marginal accounts as non-anomalous and integral to understanding an indigenous perspective that challenges whether everything is knowable and to what extent it is helpful to maintain strict boundaries between the natural and supernatural, and between spirit and body.

The First Steps: drawing in embodied aspects of Inuit storytelling to reveal invisible realities

In order to bring marginal accounts of colonial experience into the centre this article will examine three Figures in the first graphic narrative in the *Oqaluttuaq* series, *The First Steps* (Godtfredsen 2009) depicting how invisible facets of supernatural experience may be revealed through attention to embodied aspects of indigenous storytelling. Taken together, I argue that these figures, which represent moments in the narrative, operate on the level of form and content to give readers/viewers embodied insight into the preservation of the physical aspects of the Inuit oral tradition as it is translated into visual form. In addition, through magic realism, they

give readers/viewers reflective insight into the way that supernatural encounters may be included as part of ordinary life.

The First Steps, set in 2500 BCE, tells of Greenland's first people, the Saqqaq. These fragments of legends are carried over into the stories of subsequent migrants to the region and are all that remain of the Saqqaq. This graphic narrative foregrounds meetings and collective undertakings within the frame of journeys, which can occur while asleep or awake (Gronnøw 2016). In Figure 1, Uppik features prominently (he is the old man in the centre of panel 2). He is a wise old man and leader of the family, revered for both his extensive practical knowledge that ensures his family's physical survival and for his deep connection to the spirit world, into which his practical knowledge is integrated.



FIGURE N^o 1

Uppik introduces the helping spirit to the family (Godtfredsen 2009:12).

Uppik, having encountered Natseq's helping spirit on a journey to the spirit world, invites it back to the warmth of the family's fireside so that it may tell them the tale of Natseq's death. It transpires that Natseq has been murdered by Kalleq (Uppik's family's greatest hunter) when Natseq stole Kalleq's prey. Despite Kalleq dismembering Natseq's body to get its helping spirit to leave it, Figure 1 shows that through the collective experience of embodied storytelling Natseq's helping spirit moves to Kalleq, passing 'between life and death', connecting the family's past and future into one coherent narrative in the present, told in the warmth of the firelight. The second panel in this Figure captures the moment in which the embodied aspects of Inuit oral storytelling pass into the visual narrative form. It is bright and central and our eyes are immersed in it as it stretches across the whole page. The protagonists in it are shown in warm colours, close-up in textured detail, so that we are able to see their bodies huddled in sitting positions around the fire. Towards the right hand side of this panel and in the next one we are presented with dark shadows, which demand that we work harder to try to puzzle out what is being depicted and we become aware that we are reading/viewing a representation. It is at this very point that the narrative content introduces the image of an inexplicable spiritual entity for the first time, (Natseq's) helping spirit, as the colours begin to change to a more distant blue. The helping spirit is never fully explained in the narrative, but becomes an important motif that ties the story together in several places after this point.

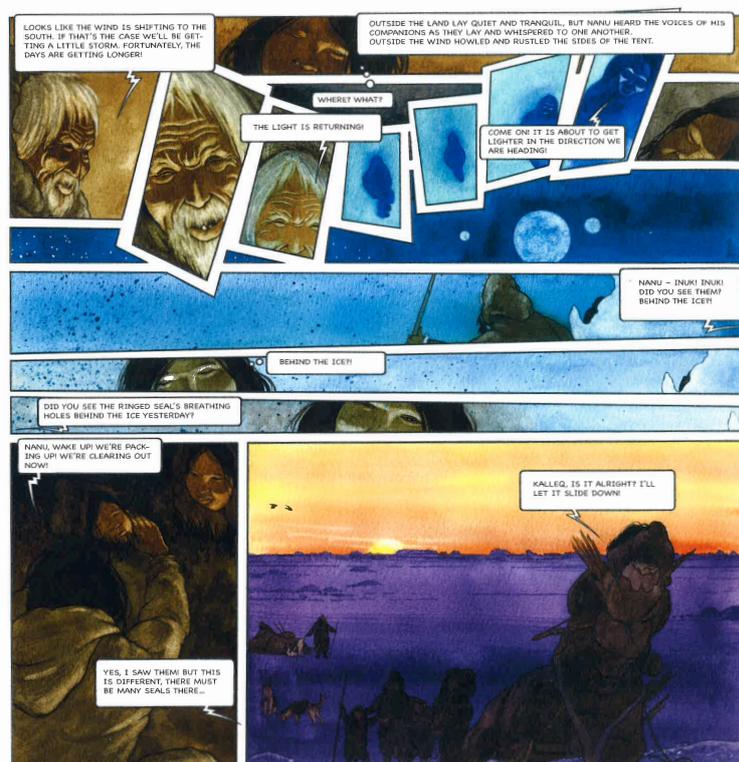


FIGURE N^o 2a



The visits of the helping spirit. Nanu dreams of the helping spirit (Godtfredsen 2009:20).

The helping spirit becomes visible again when Uppik is telling a story and Kalleq's nephew, Nanu, is drifting off to sleep as he listens (Figure 2a). We recognise this figure as the helping spirit only when we meet it again on pages 29 (Figure 2b) and page 46 (Figure 2c) later in the narrative. Arrestingly, the complex panel structure in Figure 2a-c occurs for the first time on page 20, as Uppik declares that 'the light is returning'. These words and the accompanying images go out of alignment at this point, suggesting that, just as we are presented with the ambiguous figure of the helping spirit, we are able to understand more, even though the helping spirit has not been fully explained. This strategy folds expanded layers of meaning into the text, actively preserving an unknowable part of the narrative, without explaining it away in words. Remarkably, this is the opposite of what Kalleq says when the spirit appears again later in the narrative. At that point Kalleq proclaims that 'it's getting dark' (Godtfredsen 2009:29) and it is as if the words and images go back into alignment, reducing the layers of meaning momentarily. On page 29 (Figure 2b), this now less smudgy figure is identified as Kalleq's helping spirit, which protected him when he was hunting a polar bear. It appears in a similarly curved sequence of diagonal panels. This time it seems as if in the swirling chaos of the panels - the words and dark blue images are once again aligning and the layers of meaning in the text are, ironically, converging on a clear understanding that we cannot fully know the helping spirit.

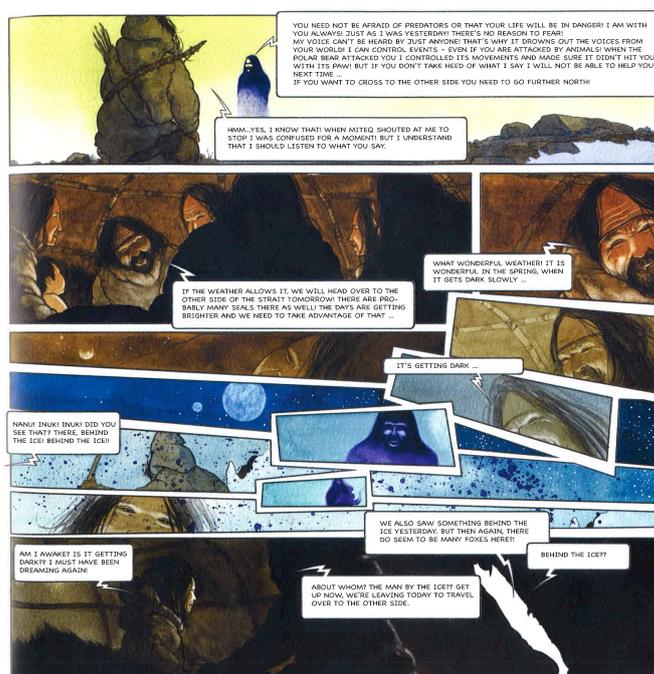


FIGURE N^o 2b



The visits of the helping spirit. The helping spirit has passed to Kalleq (on Naseq's death) (Godtfredsen 2009:29).

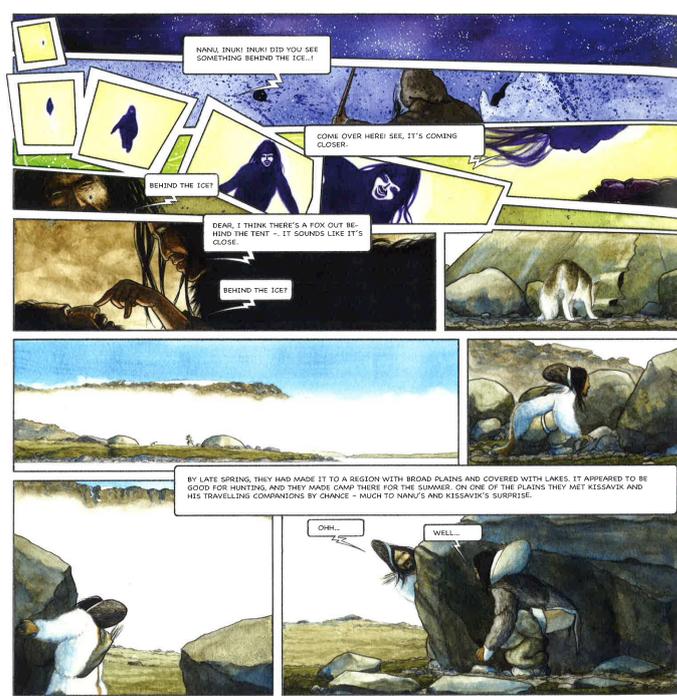


FIGURE N° 2c



The visits of the helping spirit. The helping spirit passes to Nanu (on Kalleq's death) (Godtfredsen 2009:46).

On page 20 (part of Figure 2a) the first panel, which includes several sub-panels of Uppik's face as he tells stories to the family around the fire, is striking. It draws us in by showing Uppik's eyes and wrinkled skin, in textured detail, close-up in the firelight (compare this to the second panel in Figure 3, a close-up of Kalleq's eyes, but in dark blue and thus far more difficult to make out). The sub-panels on page 20 in Figure 2a suddenly give way to four blue ones, all showing a mysterious figure. All the sub-panels in Figure 2a are framed by another at the top which shows just the eyes of Kalleq's nephew, Nanu. In it, Nanu's eyes are closing as he falls asleep and we see his head nodding over to one side, lulled by the sound of Uppik's voice. This suggests that one explanation for the sequence that we are about to see is that it comes from Nanu's dreams/thoughts. A thought balloon filled with questions also accompanies the image, further emphasizing that the subsequent panels we are about to see emanate from Nanu's inner world. The focus on embodied depictions of faces and eyes in Figures 1-3 suggests that eyes and vision are understood not merely as physical, but also as the windows to the soul throughout this narrative. The swirling motion of the howling wind outside the tent, the breathy whispers of the companions inside the shelter, and the nodding of Nanu's head are captured in the curved sequence of sub-panels that seems to blow across the page as Uppik's face (in yellow panels) gives way to the smudgy blue figure. Later in the narrative

we come to recognise that this same blurry figure that Nanu is dreaming about is the helping spirit that was first introduced to us on page 12 (Figure 1).

Aside from bringing embodiment into the frame while also preserving ineffability, the graphic narrative form also facilitates our awareness that what we are immersed in is a representation: one that specifically manages to accommodate what is difficult to describe or even see. McCloud (1993) reminds us that consequently, in reading/viewing comics, we are forced to become intimately involved in constructing and ordering the text. As McCloud (1993) puts it, the panels assist the comics' creator, who 'asks us to join in a silent dance of the seen and the unseen. The visible and the invisible' (McCloud 1993:9). McCloud (1993) elegantly sums up the link between comics and the 'invisible'. He explains that what is *between* the panels (the gutters) is the only element of comics that is not duplicated in any other medium. He suggests that 'the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics' (McCloud 1993:66). Thus, the comics form is visually configured, not only by what is represented, but also by what is absent. Put differently, all comics, may be said to visually depict the invisible and indescribable, also in their gutters, by including the reader/viewer in the participatory space of narrative representation (and in an embodied way). This is a powerful way to invite a reader/viewer to join the process of decolonising their own imagination as they, too, listen to Uppik's voice introducing them to the mysterious presence of the helping spirit, which will become a familiar part of reality, without explaining it away.

The complex narrative structure, which does not reveal what the helping spirit is or who it belongs to in a linear fashion, along with the panel structure and colour palette depicting it, is conspicuous on several counts. On page 20 (of which Figure 2a forms part), the panel structure and colour palette is strikingly similar to that on page 46 (Figure 2c), when we meet the helping spirit again. This, along with a less similar echo of this structure on page 29 (Figure 2b), are the only pages in the book in which it looks as if this swirling diagonal line of smaller panels is blowing across the main page. On page 46, as on page 20 and 29 (Figures 2a-c), the words accompanying the curved diagonal set of panels speak of something appearing half-visible, as if in a dream (to Nanu on pages 20 (Figure 2a) and 46 (Figure 2c), and to Kalleq on page 29 (Figure 2b)). From page 29 onwards, the figure of the helping spirit appears progressively less blurred as the family becomes more accustomed to its presence. When we see the helping spirit on page 46 (Figure 2c), the colour of the image itself (now yellow) tells us that the light has returned. This is remarkable, because now the spirit has passed to Nanu after Kalleq's death earlier in the narrative. This yellow spirit figure, which first appeared blue to Nanu in his boyhood dreams on page 20 (Figure 2a) now fades into the face of his wife

Arnaaluk, as he wakes to see her face close above him in the tent. The suggestion is that the helping spirit appears more and more real as the family becomes comfortable with its visits, and the distinction between it and the rest of reality begins to break down for Nanu as he matures. These repeated visual patterns (in Figure 2a-c) help us to identify the swirling in and out of experience of the helping spirit, which is never fully explained or resolved in the text, but accommodated in its partial unknowability, so that it becomes visible to us, without our being able to explain it away. This complex panel structure portrays some of its meaning through its form.

In this regard, Marks's (2000) techniques of haptic visuality help to facilitate the focus on visual form and its relationship to the embodied aspects of the Inuit oral storytelling tradition still further. For Marks (2000), haptic visuality implies viewing where eyes function like organs of touch, brushing against the skin of the image. In doing so, haptic images evoke senses other than sight, which they cannot represent directly. Specific visual techniques construct haptic images including over and under-exposed images, extreme close-ups, a series of close-ups where not all of the object of the gaze is shown at once, images highlighting texture and images foregrounding objects' contact with human skin. These techniques feature in *Oqaluttuaqq*, encouraging multisensory engagement with the stories. Marks (1998) further points out how haptic visuality is a strategy of decolonisation and she contrasts it to the voyeuristic viewing of spectacles. Marks explains that, for those who wish to decolonise knowledge, there is an ethical injunction towards haptic visions, because they are lingering, caressing gazes that suggest intimacy between the 'object' and the viewer. They are the opposite of colonialism's 'mastery vision', which is established through sight alone and which is comprehensive, clear and expects the object of the gaze to offer itself up to be entirely seen and known. She points out that the emphasis on sight alone gives rise to a specifically Western way of looking and creating knowledge that objectifies others and attempts to control them. She argues that Western ways of looking, which separate subject and object in representation (instead of facilitating a 'zone of contact' between them through emotional and embodied engagement), have come about in times of territorial domination and the subjection of vanquished peoples. Furthermore, Marks warns that many important aspects of decolonial stories remain invisible and thus trouble the privileged relationship between vision and knowledge in the West. This underlines the fact that we cannot know another's story through visual information alone and should include avenues for representing experience from our senses of smell, touch and taste, in our representations. Chute (2008) claims that the graphic narrative form can be an impactful medium for political intervention. She argues that the graphic narrative 'focuses attention on...reconfigured political formalism' that

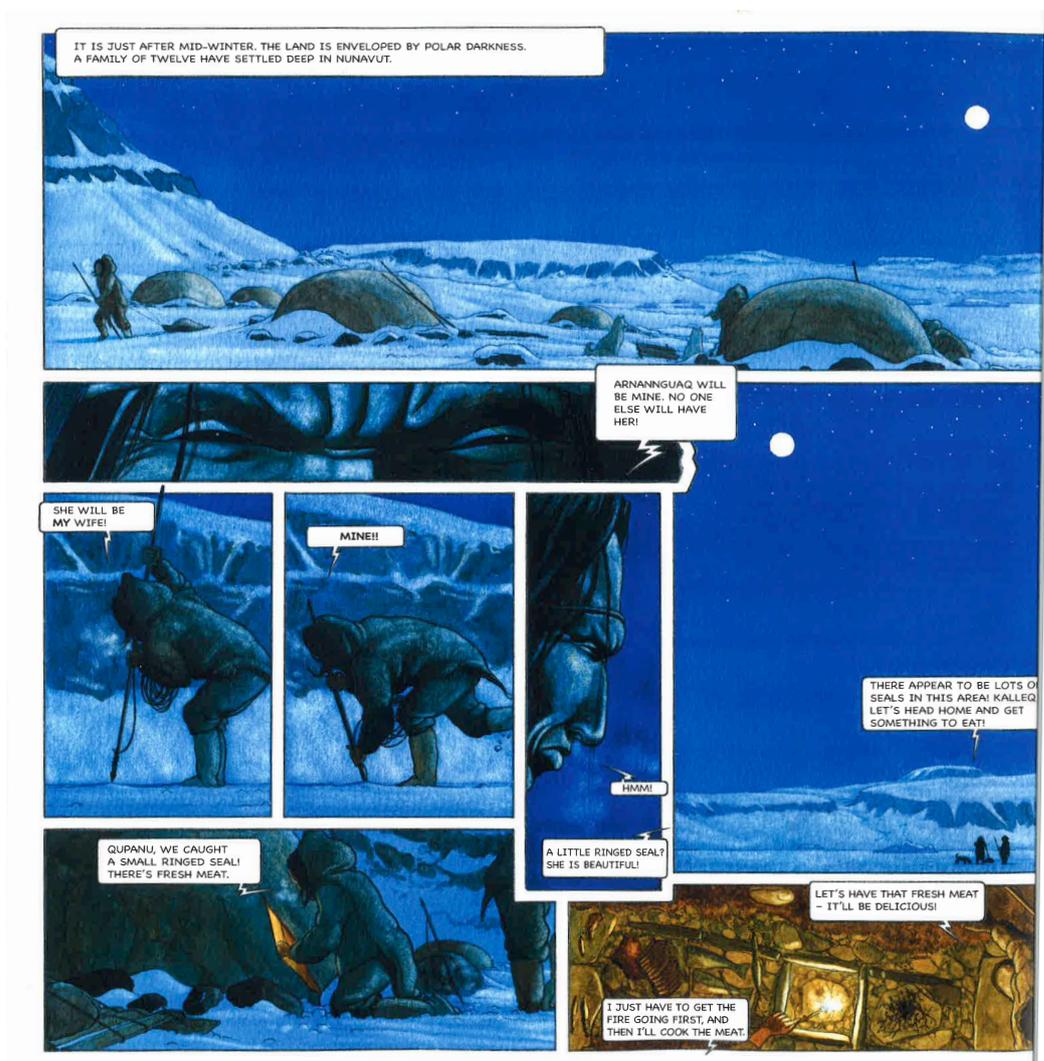


FIGURE N° 3



Representing Kalleq's resolve to survive (Godtfredsen 2009:8).

compels a reconsideration of 'the problem of [merely factual] historical representation' (Chute 2008:457). I argue that this reconsideration may be facilitated through the use of magic realism in the graphic narrative form; and that speculative fiction would do well to employ graphic narrative as part of its push towards decolonisation.

Finally, if we return to Kalleq's hunting prowess and his struggles for physical survival, haptic visuality assists us in understanding these on their own terms, and we are able to see Kalleq as more than simply Natseq's ill-fated murderer. Figure 3, which depicts Kalleq's struggles, is the start of a section from pages 8-12 (the last of which is shown in Figure 1) in which he is shown to be alone in most of the panels. In this section, Kalleq is shown going about the business of settling and travelling, procuring a wife, hunting and finding food. In the somewhat claustrophobic sequence depicted

in Figure 3, the only panel that shows the distance that he has travelled is also the only panel in which we see him accompanied by someone else, as if, when we get far enough away from Kalleg to get outside his mind, we see that he is not alone, but fundamentally connected to others, a state of being which dictates all his thoughts, feelings and actions. Just prior to Figure 3 the relative clarity of the preface of *The First Steps* gives way to dark images in shadowy blue watercolours, depicting the polar darkness of mid-winter that has fallen on a settlement. Having been easily able to consume the preface, we suddenly find that we must begin to work harder to make out what is happening in this darker sequence of images. Once we do so, we realise that Kalleg is shown to be struggling, trying to help his family survive in the dim and difficult terrain.

The reader's process of decoding the images at this point mirrors the struggles of the protagonist. In this section (and on pages 8 and 11 especially) there are also comparatively few words to help us out (unlike other parts in the narrative). The sparse words indicate that an extended family lives in the settlement and that Kalleg has just gone out hunting and is offering his sister-in-law a seal to cook. The only light depicted on this page is the light of the fire in the last two panels. This emphasises the experience of overwhelming darkness for both the protagonists and the reader/viewer, who has now been further drawn into the representational process as they pour over the unclear images and piece the panels together. As our eyes fumble in the darkness and move back and forth, puzzling over the panels as we begin to make out what is depicted, we become aware that six of these panels depict only Kalleg and that, in each panel, a different and often incomplete part of him is shown as he rages about the wife he desires and hunts in the ice near the settlement. If viewed according to the techniques of haptic visibility, these under-exposed images, some of which are extreme close-ups and show only part of a human figure, give a tactile quality that encourages us not to distinguish separate objects in a single image, but to view the texture of the image as a whole.

The second panel on page 8 (Figure 3) is particularly noteworthy. It is a narrow panel that stretches almost the horizontal length of the page, showing only Kalleg's wrinkled brow and eyes, as he squints at the winter sun. This striking close-up image of eyes foregrounds the theme of vision/envisioning in the narrative right from the outset. Its jagged edges mirror the wavy lines on Kalleg's forehead, strongly evoking the texture of skin and the emotion of brooding dissatisfaction on a bodily level. This panel is accompanied by a word balloon, stressing a strong desire for human encounter, in which Kalleg aggressively declares 'Arnannguaq will be mine, no one else will have her!' (Godtfredsen 2009:8). The predominance of extreme close-ups and close-ups on this page means that the distance Kalleg travels away

from the settlement to hunt is minimized and, in contrast to the light, clear image on the previous pages, we come into close contact with his inner perspectives. Moreover, we cannot see Kalleq's mouth in this panel and are solely focused on his eyes. We thus imagine that these words are being spoken in Kalleq's mind, to which we seem to have direct access. It is as if our eyes have brushed over the skin of Kalleq's furrowed brow and have begun to feel in our bodies what he is feeling. It is noticeable that these close-ups of textured skin on faces are repeated in the following pages (see Figure 1 and 2a), when Kalleq's family in the shelter are depicted listening to a story together around the fire, in the same embodied way. Here, although the images are clearer in the firelight, they are still close-ups from various angles, some only showing part of the faces, most showing detailed views of the texture of the skin around the eyes of the listeners and the expressive folds of skin around the mouths of the speakers. Again, this makes us feel that we are encountering the protagonists directly because of the embodied way the storytelling around the fire is represented to evoke the texture and the touch of human skin very strongly. Thus, we are forced to involve ourselves closely in both a reflective and an embodied way to interpret the partial images shown, even as we physically turn the pages and scan the images with our eyes. Furthermore, having this seemingly direct access to both the natural and supernatural realities of this narrative emphasises that these are all parts of ordinary life and affect us deeply.

Moreover, the apparent closeness between the reader/viewer, author and content of the text is enhanced because the images are drawn images which makes them robust vehicles of subjective knowledge. The drawn images carry the trace of Godtfredsen's hand and embodied understanding. In this way, Godtfredsen's body becomes a vehicle to channel these stories across time, not only into our imaginations, but also into our bodies. These drawn narratives trace what it would feel like if the past appeared to us in a material form. This enables the story of the first people in Greenland to be told in a way that involves the contemporary reader/viewer in a powerful political reconstruction of history.

The central image of Kalleq's eyes in Figure 3, as windows to his inner life, make this notion even more palpable. Godtfredsen brings Kalleq's brow to life. Our eyes brush against this vision from a story thousands of years ago and the tangibility of the story is further increased because it echoes and is incarnated by the hand of the graphic artist. The strokes of his brush make these stories more poignant because we are aware that Godtfredsen's drawings are based upon material artefacts that he has also touched (Gronnøw & Sørensen in Godtfredsen 2009:52), just as he has touched the page he has drawn these images on. This process of bringing to life exceeds the pervasive Western view of representation and approaches mimesis

in Marks's (2000) terms. In using drawn images that are closely based on material archeological finds in the graphic narrative form, Godfredsen is able to invoke the presence of Kalleq as he paints Kalleq's furrowed brow, rather than merely representing it in a distanced way.

Conclusions

This combination of the ability to capture the embodied aspects of storytelling and to engage the reader/viewer deeply in projecting the unknown into the graphic narrative form in a visible way makes these narratives a powerful tool of decolonisation. Speculative fiction would do well to draw on this impetus to buoy up the decolonisation process within this genre. It also makes sense to do this because much speculative fiction already shares the *Oqaluttuaqq* series' approach to a refined notion of magic realism and its concern to present extraordinary modes of reality (such as supernatural encounters) to wider audiences without having their being relegated to the margins of experience.

In addition, amplifying indigenous Greenlandic voices' access to visual narrative traditions by expanding the genres in which their work is made visible is becoming more and more crucial. Recently anthropogenic climate change has profoundly accelerated the melting of icecaps in Greenland. Coupled with the colonial reinstatement of mining rights and the mineral deposits that these melts are exposing, it is becoming more and more urgent to hear the voices of Greenlanders speaking on their own terms. A reconsidered notion of speculative fiction — through its use of magic realism — has a role to play in decolonisation. In his study of magic realism as decolonial strategy, Holgate outlines that in cases such as Australia (and I add, Greenland, where the native population ostensibly rules itself under Denmark's policy of Home Rule) where the indigenous populations remain colonised, even while they may live in officially decolonised nations, magic realism as decolonial strategy requires further evaluation so that it does not simply perpetuate a colonial framework and make indigenous perspectives seem anomalous and extraordinary. In addition to the usual distinctions that decolonial strategies pose in studying magic realism (between real/unreal, colonised/coloniser) the 'global economic forces that help perpetuate the ongoing colonization' should receive attention, now more than ever (Holgate 2015:634). The time is ripe for speculative fiction to expand its boundaries and hone its use of magic realism to bring indigenous voices into the conversation in the analysis of contemporary and ongoing colonisation on the global stage. One way of enabling speculative fiction to play this role is by including graphic

narratives such as the *Oqaluttuaqq* series into its ambit. This may help to draw in the voices from the rich tradition of Greenlandic visual art and visual narratives, which manage to capture some of the embodied aspects of the Inuit oral tradition, that may not otherwise be heard.

Notes

1. I see this as relating to the ongoing colonial project of the privileging of abstraction and the written word in Western epistemology, which in this case leads to the rigid commitment to comics being classified as a low-brow genre of contemporary literature in some parts of the Western academy, rather than an embodied visual medium of representation in their own right, already well-established and respected in some parts of the world outside the West (for example, Manga in Japan).
2. Nuka, K. Godtfredsen exhibition 2012.

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