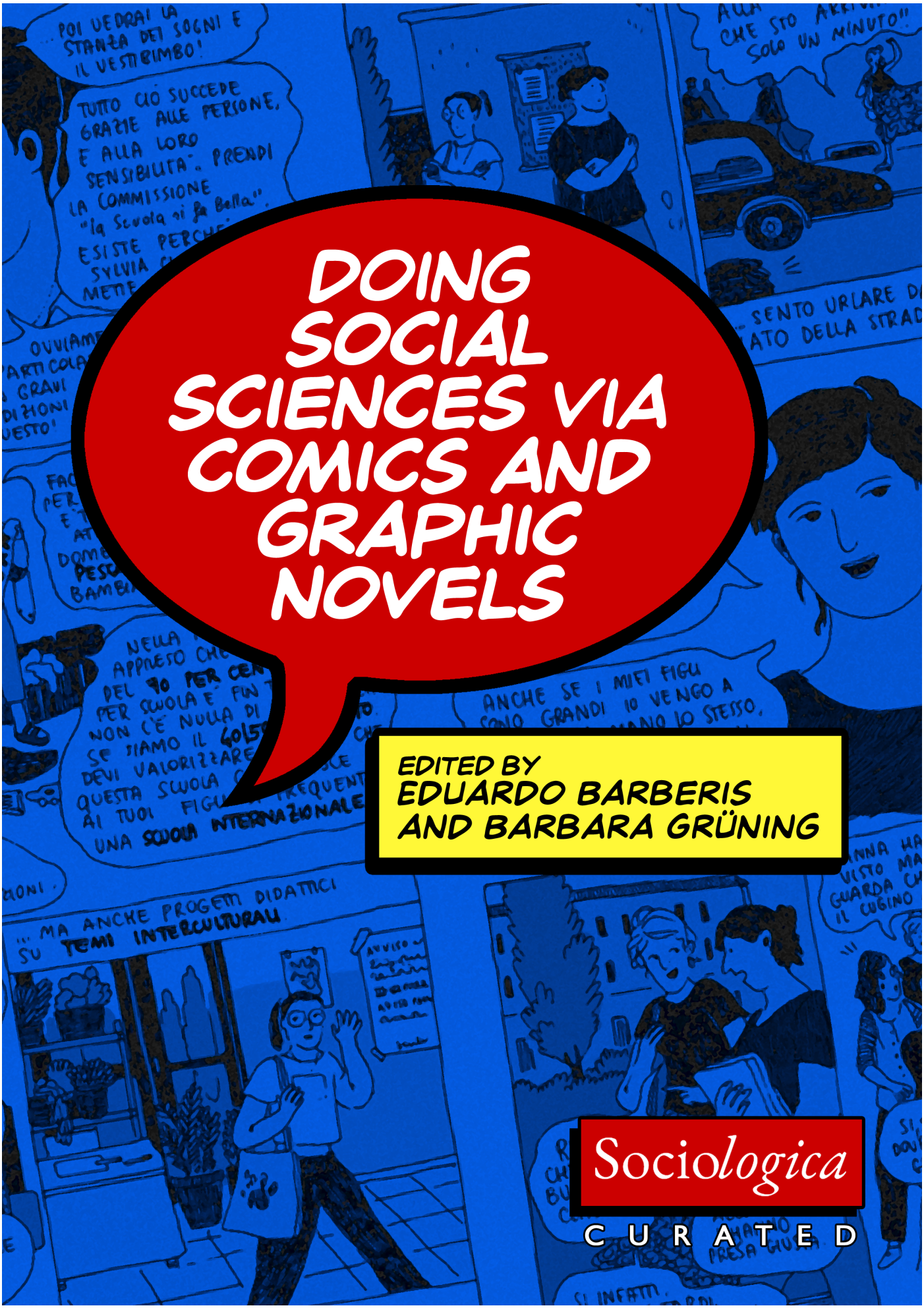
POI VEDRAI LA STANZA DEI SOGNI E IL VESTIBIMBO!
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SOLO UN MINUTO!"
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EDITED BY EDUARDO BARBERIS AND BARBARA GRÜNING
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Doing Social Science Via Comics and Graphic Novels

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Doing Social Sciences Via Comics and Graphic Novels. An Introduction

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Abstract

Visual communication is far from new and is almost as old as the social sciences. In the last decades, the interest in the visual dimension of society as well as towards the visual as expression of local and global cultures increased to the extent that specific disciplinary approaches took root — e.g. visual anthropology and visual sociology. Nevertheless, it seems to us that whereas they are mostly engaged in collecting visual data and analyzing visual cultural products, little attention is paid to one of the original uses of visual material in ethnographic and social research, that is communicating social sciences. Departing from some general questions, such as how visualizing sociological concepts, what role non-textual stimuli play in sociology, how they differentiate according to the kind of public, and how we can critically and reflexively assess the social and disciplinary implications of visualizations of empirical research, we collect in the special issues contributions from social scientists and comics artists who materially engaged in the production of social sciences via comics and graphic narratives. The article is divided into three parts. Firstly, we briefly address the rollercoaster history of encounters between sociology and the sequential art. Secondly, we reconstruct the dynamics and processes which lead to the institutionalization of a transnational field of comics studies. Finally, we introduce the contributions collected in the special issue, based on the persona experiences of social scientists, sometimes in collaboration with illustrators.

Keywords: Graphic Narrative; Comics; Visualization; Social Research; Communicating Social Sciences.

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1 Introduction

This is the first issue of a new section of *Sociologica*, "Re-formats: Envisioning Sociology", devoted to doing and communicating social sciences in non-conventional ways — i.e. in ways different from written texts.

The idea of returning research results in forms other than text seems particularly important in recent decades because of a renewed interest in iconic and transmedial communication as a field of study and as a daily practice. This interest was boosted by the international success of social media (based on visual communication) and of graphic novels (Baetens & Frey, 2014).

Visual communication is far from new and is almost as old as the social sciences. Anthropology, in its early connection with biology and colonial dehumanization, probably showed an earlier interest in visually representing its research subjects (here the problem is more about problematizing representations; see MacDougall, 1997), but visual apparatuses appear in sociology before the twentieth century.

For example, DuBois's effort to creatively visualize data about racism and discrimination received recent hype in the sociological community after a 2018 publication (Battle-Baptist & Rusert, 2018) and some popular articles (e.g. Mansky, 2018; Hsu, 2019). At the same time, the Chicago School is likely responsible for exploring visual representations in different ways. First, for mapping data, a specific line of visual representations can be traced back to Booth's poverty maps and to epidemiological mapping (including John Smith's famous 1854 work on the communication of cholera) (Kimball, 2006; Friendly, 2008). Second, the Chicago School used visual content in their works, such as pictures of people and neighborhoods, in early editions of *The Hobo* by Anderson (1923) and *The Gold Coast and the Slum* by Zorbaugh (1929). The Chicago School also offered one of the earliest visual representations of concepts, the concentric zone model of the city developed by Burgess, in Park, Burgess and McKenzie (1925). Such milestones of representation do not come out of the blue — and are often based on different influences (Owens, 2012).

At the same time, the characteristics, effects and consequences of data visualization faced scientific and public debate, as addressed by the early and renowned *How to Lie with Statistics* by the cultural educator Darrell Huff (1954). Not by chance, it included drawings by one of the most famous American scientific illustrators of the time, Irving Geis.

Thus, this non-textual endeavor as old as science deserves special attention in contemporary sociology: how do we visualize concepts? How do we communicate with various audiences using different dissemination strategies? What role do non-textual stimuli play in social sciences? How can we critically and reflexively assess the social and disciplinary implications of visualizations? We will debate these kinds of questions in this section.

In particular, we are less interested here in more consolidated disciplines and approaches, like visual anthropology and visual sociology (i.e., in the collection of visual data, or in the analysis of visual cultural products). Instead, we focus on communicating via images and non-textual media. Nevertheless, from a reflexive perspective, we also consider visual analyses of sociological visual products. In this respect — as comics are key to this first collection — we want to briefly address the rollercoaster history of encounters between sociology and the sequential art (§ 2) and of the institutionalization of comics studies (§ 3), before introducing contributions we collected for this issue (§ 4).

2 Sociologists Meet Comics: A Long and Discontinuous History

Sociologists' interest in comics is older than one may suspect.[1] In 1944, the *American Journal of Education* published a special issue devoted to comics. It was edited by an American sociologist and student of Robert E. Park, Harvey Warren Zorbaugh, whom we just mentioned above.[2] All the contributions in the special issue stressed comics' potential in the education field, especially for children with learning difficulties. Thus, because comic books had reached a large number of readers in a few years, especially among children and teenagers, the authors positively defined comics as a *social force*, as their language and characters might be exploited for purposes beyond entertainment (cf. Gruenberg, 1944). In his introduction to the special issue, Zorbaugh also highlighted how comics had already been successfully introduced on campuses and in classrooms and had "played an active role in the war" (Zorbaugh, 1944, p. 202) mainly for propaganda purposes. Mostly, he recognized comics' ability to stimulate what Wright Mills (1959) identified fifteen years later as one main feature of sociological imagination: comics' ability as an "outgrowth of the social unconscious" to illuminate the link between individuals' problems and the social world (Zorbaugh, 1944, p. 203).

Five years later a new special issue on comics appeared in the *American Journal of Education*, again edited by Zorbaugh. Compared to the first special issue, the tone and style of the contributions appear different. In the beginning of his piece, Zorbaugh underlines how "the past two years have witnessed a violent controversy over the suitability of comics as reading for children" (1949, p. 225). Thus, all the articles stem from this evidence of a growing campaign against comics supported by numerous civic associations, politicians and intellectuals that strongly influenced the social climate and the perception of comics. The authors' defense of comics' potential communicative and educative force interlaced three arguments. First, they distinguished comics strips published in newspapers, comic books with superheroes, comics explicitly for children (mimetic comics representing children's histories or family settings) and

1. For a chronology, see also Giner-Monfort (2019).

2. A short article titled "A Sociology of Comic Strips" appeared in a non-academic journal already in 1936. The author Aaron Berkman, a social realist painter, looked at the Sunday strips as "catering to neurosis" and "offering escape to a morbid imagery and brutal sadism" (pp. 51–54). Thus, the text provides some meaningful insights. Firstly, it makes evident how a general negative perception of comics was present even before the boom of comic books and the anti-comics crusade in the late 1940s. As Beaty observes (2011), negative emotions and opinions towards the new "mass medium" had already characterized for example cinema. The point, as Beaty stresses, is that comics were even older than cinema, even if they became a mass cultural product only in the 1930s. A second aspect to note is that this opinion was expressed by an artist, who at the time was also in the directorship of the Federal Art Project commissioned by Roosevelt as part of the New Deal. As various scholars later noted (cf. Grieve, 2009), the project produced a *middlebrow culture*. The FAP, "embraced both liberal and conservative impulses," as an outcome of negotiations between democratic and traditional national values (*ibidem*, p. 85). Thus, being representative of a middlebrow culture at the edge between high and popular culture also produced evaluation criteria that reflected on the one hand the tastes of the middle-class, and on the other hand the need of strong symbolic and social boundaries respectively towards cultural objects and artists involved in producing popular art. Finally, the use of a "presumed" sociological perspective by a non-sociologist caused questions to arise concerning the status of sociology at that time, and consequently the public functions attributed to it. Certainly, this general perception was due to the dominance of a functionalist understanding of the discipline in the American sociology and the fact many scholars (see the Chicago School) were involved in solving social urban problems that, according to Berkman, comics with its language factually contributed to legitimize. Thus, as we will argue in this section, the fact that the positions of sociologists towards comics (also of those grew up in the Chicago School) differed from the opinion of moral entrepreneurs acting in the public space sheds light on the potentiality of sociology for both working with comics and legitimating them scientifically, even if these opportunities have been little exploited until a few years ago.

comics with violent or sexual scenes that may offend "sexual mores" (*ibidem*, p. 228). Nevertheless, this rough classification from Zorbaugh and the other authors also stressed that comics' cultural form and content over time does not preclude the fact that comics' language may address other content and other goals (cf. Schultz, 1949). The more striking passage, however, concerns the appeal to social research to construct empirically based counterarguments against the more powerful discourses from *moral entrepreneurs* — particularly from psychiatrist Frederic Wertham — about comics' perverse effects on children, especially in enhancing juvenile delinquency. In particular, Zorbaugh presented a survey comparing the opinions of about 3,000 American adults on whether comics might be appropriate reading for children. Beyond the survey's detailed results, Zorbaugh claimed that it provided a differentiated framework of adults' opinions on comics, but it could not help to deduce the concrete influence of comics on children. Another article (Frank, 1949) compared the opinions and experiences of parents and teachers regarding the features, uses and effects of comics and came to similar conclusions. Thus, adults' various stances on comics' usefulness for learning to read, on the value of their artistic form and, above all, on their possible influence via cultural content merely highlighted the error of blaming comics without conducting empirical investigations on their reception by children. In the same year, Wolf and Fisk (1949) interviewed a hundred youths about their consumptions of comics and remarkably found no evidence of perverting effects.

In the 1950s in the USA, the "anti-comic crusade" that eventually "led to a self-imposed industry codes for comic books in 1954" (cf. Lopes, 2006, p. 400) became stronger. The attack against comics and television's increasing influence as competitive mass media (cf. Beaty, 2011) negatively affected the sale of comic books. Three interrelated points are here to note, which found some correspondences also in other western countries, such as Germany, Great Britain and Italy (cf. Jovanovich & Koch, 1999; Chapman, 2011; Brancato, 2008). First, beyond the fact that the supporters and censors of comics presented different stances on comics' reception, both parties framed comics within the field of education. Whereas supporters attributed primarily educational functions to comics, the censors focused on comics' negative effects on children's socialization. Secondly, the introduction of censorship codes strengthened the idea that comics were for children and teenagers (cf. Sabin, 1993), preventing the comics market, at least in the USA, from developing in new ways (cf. Beaty, 2011). If alternative forms of comics truly developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the underground milieu (cf. Hatfield, 2005), they had little influence on the overall comics market (cf. Roeder, 2008). Thirdly, the infantilization of comics reinforced their position as popular art and their low status in the market of symbolic goods. Thus, this association helped maintain a stigma towards comics as instigators of juvenile delinquency (cf. Lopes, 2006). These three points raise questions about how education and culture were understood at that time, especially in relation to a specific target. These points also make one think about the interdependence between educational goals and a specific framing of culture. More precisely, the negative perceptions of comics rested on two ideas of culture: an elitist conception that separated high from low cultural products (Roader, 2008; cf. Di Maggio, 1987) and another, functionalist, conception that assumed culture should primarily fulfill educational and moral tasks, especially for minors.

Departing from these considerations, two further contextual aspects make one reflect upon the delayed interest of scholars and of social scientists specifically toward comics. Focusing on the US case, we can assume the negative moral and artistic value attributed to comics and the belief that they mainly targeted children deterred scholars from focusing on comics and, consequently, from looking at them as a research field and a communicative tool (cf. Beaty, 2011). On the other hand, this disinterest of scholars and social scientists also reveals the main orienta-

tions of the sociology of culture, the sociology of communication and the media and cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s. The question concerns less which theories suited comics, and more which sociological perspective on culture and cultural production was hegemonic. In the USA and in other western countries, the dominant public opinion toward mass products, including comics, was shared by many intellectuals and schools of thought. Notably, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies held a similar and widespread understanding of comics. The first generation of cultural studies scholars had developed an extensive concept of culture, so, to include all human activities and behaviors, however they maintained a conservative criticism towards comics (cf. Magnussen & Christiansen, 2000; Chapman, 2011). This is especially evident in Hoggart's work *The Uses of Literacy* (1957, p. 201), where the author complained about the Americanization of the British culture, particularly through comics:

> at the lowest level is illustrated in the sales here of the American or American-type serial books of comics, where for page after page big-thighed and big-bosomed girls from Mars step out of their space-machines [...] The process continues, for a substantial number of adults especially; a passive taking on of bad mass art geared to a very low mental age.

Despite Hoggart's seeming focus on adulthood, this statement echoes Wertham's perspective that comics stimulated passive consumption. More broadly, it reflects the critical perspective on comics of Marxist intellectuals, among the US intellectuals of the New Left (cf. Murray, 2000) with conceptual and ideological roots in the Frankfurt School.

In light of this cultural climate, the few sociologists and social scientists in this phase, who viewed comics favorably or neutrally, represent paradigmatic examples of how a scientific and sociological interest on comics might develop after overcoming both an "apocalyptic approach" (cf. Eco, 1964) based on moral-esthetic classifications of cultural goods and an "integrated approach" that lacks objective distance from its own research (*ibidem*, 1972).

The first example comes from Howard Becker (1982), who, in a short passage from his introduction to *Art Worlds*, refers to comic strips: "Because my focus has been on forms of social organization, I have frequently compared art forms and works which have different reputation as art. I have spoken of Titian and comic strips in the same breath." As Beaty emphasizes (2012, p. 37), Becker's understanding of art as the result of collective activities that produce and circulate art objects allows the definition of comics as a world art, among other definitions independent from the mass cultural critique that tends to classify comics as non-art. Once we accept and clarify that art objects may possess different reputations, the obvious question is not merely how sociologists (and more generally scholars of SSH-disciplines) deal with comics. Instead, from a historical and epistemological perspective, the question is how much scholars absorb the common criteria of the doxa when evaluating symbolic forms and goods. In other words, the crucial point is how defining comics as art, as non-art, as a mass cultural product or as an avant-garde cultural product influences the scientific interest in comics and how scholars engage with them. Eco, for instance, criticized both the apocalyptic and integrated approaches towards comics. However, in the Italian magazine *Linus*[3], he selected comics according to the traditional division of low and high culture. Thus, *Linus* should host foreign, intellectually stimulating comic strips such as the *Peanuts* and the works of emergent comic artists such as Magnus, Crepax and Manara, who bore avant-garde artistic values (see Boltanski, 1975).

3. *Linus* was co-founded by Eco in 1965.

This last topic brings us to our second example. In 1975, following Bourdieu's field theory, Boltanski published an article in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* depicting the comics field's social and symbolic transformation in the 1960s with the emergence of "comic artists." This transformation took root broadly in Europe, but it only became meaningful in the 1990s for the USA (cf. Willams & Lyons, 2010). Similarly remarkable is the attempt to sketch the process of legitimizing comics by considering the influence of intellectuals and academics on the process itself. Boltanski proposed only a scheme, but his idea may constitute a valid starting point for further considerations about how scholars' changing stances towards comics influenced its institutionalization in various fields of cultural production, consequently leading to a research field in comics studies (cf. Gabilliet, 2013).

The last, and perhaps more meaningful paradigmatic example, concerns the 1975 *La lecture de Marx* text Bourdieu published in *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences sociales*, a publication that later included in the French version of *Language et pouvoir symbolique* (1991).[4] The article juxtaposes texts and comics pictures, a strategy Bourdieu adopted to compare "three forms of discourses": the comments of Marx (extrapolated from his work with Engels, *German Ideology*), the excerpts of Balizar's article *Quelques remarques critiques à propos de "Lire le capital"*[5] (reproduced in the article as a facsimile) and Bourdieu's analysis of Balizar's text and of Marx's thoughts (cf. footnote 2, in *Language et pouvoir symbolique*).

From an outside perspective, we can identify three pivotal questions for our special issue. The first concerns a critical comparison of three theoretical and epistemological perspectives via a graphic and pictorial language and comics' spatialization layout techniques (to avoid an aprioristic hierarchic order among the perspectives). Additionally, this graphical strategy could emphasize the dialectical (fictional) interactions among the three scholars, making their different positions more visually vivid than a traditional argumentative text could. Thus, the visualization and spatialization of their thoughts in the page layout can better contrast Balizar's argumentation on historical materialism with Bourdieu's meta-criticism on Balizar's ways of reading Marx and, more broadly, with a widespread "prophetic" interpretation of Marx's work in the intellectual field of the time. The second important question concerns Bourdieu's cooperation with the comic author Jean-Claude Mézières, who was well-known for his science-fiction series *Valérian et Laureline*, which was published in the juvenile journal *Pilote* (directed by René Goscinny). The cooperation between Bourdieu and Mézières also concerned Mézières's broad involvement in the graphic work carried out within *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, which Bourdieu had founded the same year he and Boltanski published these two articles. Finally, the third and last question concerns the legitimization of this experimental sociological text with graphical content at that time, which entails considering the position of the journal and its founders in the sociological field.

In a recent article on the use of images in *Actes*, Chadoin (2017) provides deeper and broader insight into the meaning of comics and other visual materials for *Actes*. The visual materials in the journal aimed to subvert "the customs and traditions of the academic field and make visible what generally is hidden behind the censorship, the tricks, and perversions which characterized it" (*ibidem*, p. 14). In other words, *Actes* proposed a new way of using visual materials in scientific works, giving them a desacralizing function regarding established paradigms. Nevertheless, beyond this *pars destruens*, Chadoin also claimed that embedding visual materials in the journal aimed to discover new effective ways to deploy concepts, stressing the idea of social research

4. In the French text it is included as a chapter in the fourth section, which is not present in the English version.

5. The article was published in 1973 in the journal *La Pensée*, *170*, 27–47.

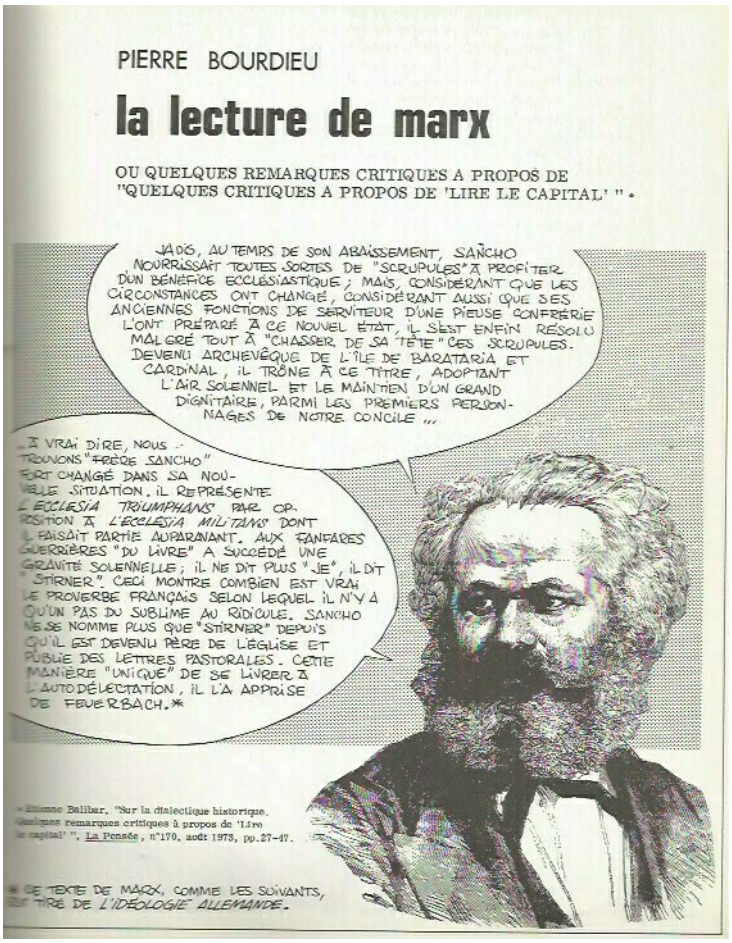

Fig. 1: Bourdieu; P. & Mézières, J.P. (1975), La Lecture de Marx, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, *1*(5–6), p. 37
Source: Chadoin, O. (2017). Le visuel et le conceptuel. Sur l'usage des images dans la revue Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. *Revue française des méthodes visuelles*, *1*.

as *work in progress*. Thus, as Boltanski (2008, p. 20) claimed years later, the journal conceived comics as graphic tools for communicating scientific ideas because, as Boltanski suggested to Bourdieu, it should be a sort of "fanzine of sociology."

Summing up, the origin of *Actes* elucidates two points. The first concerns the *social conditions* that allowed two French sociologists to focus on comics in the 1970s. On the one hand, comics were developing differently in France than in the USA. Comic artists in France were closer to the intellectual field than were comic authors overseas; therefore, their cultural legitimacy was higher in Europe. On the other hand, Bourdieu and his scholars were developing a specific perspective on how to produce and disseminate knowledge, which disrupted the traditional classification of symbolic goods and scholars' discourses and stances. The second point considers that their specific interest in comics embodied a specific anti-conventional academic and intellectual habitus, a fact that probably contributed to the scarce spread of similar legitimate experiments in the sociological field.

These latter observations raise questions about the different approaches scholars of SSH-disciplines and intellectuals developed toward comics in this first phase after WW2 and, consequently, about whether these approaches remain meaningful for reflecting on the status and development of the social sciences and humanities. This reflection assumes two interrelated levels. Of course, conducting and communicating social research via comics entails engaging with a specific field of knowledge with rules and languages distinct from those within one's own disciplinary field. Nevertheless, developing this awareness at the edge between two fields of knowledge might help highlight the constructive character of each disciplinary knowledge.

In the 2000s, the development of a scientific field of knowledge on comics seems to have partially overcome the original challenge of recognizing comics as a legitimate cultural and research object. Apparently, their ongoing academic legitimization appears due to the graphic novel phenomenon, at least in literary studies. Nevertheless, this dynamic should not be understood deterministically; rather, it extends the range of questions to firstly regard the institutionalization path of a research field in comic studies. As various scholars have observed (Beaty, 2011; Hatfield, 2010), outlining a clear path is difficult at the moment. This field's actual development culminated from public initiatives, public interventions and publications stemming from various disciplinary fields. In this regard, the field of comic studies currently has no organic structure, so understanding whether it is multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary remains difficult. In this regard, we can finally consider how sociology and social sciences intercept this field and how the latter may help develop new sociological ways of scientifically dealing with comics.

3 The Institutionalization of Comic Studies in the SSH-Disciplines. A Place for Sociology?

To better explore these questions, pinpointing crucial steps in the institutionalization of comic studies may be helpful. The accumulation of knowledge on comics shows the degree of their legitimization, but the ways scientific knowledge on comics has been organized and legitimized better highlights the possibilities for individual scientific uses of comics and paths for developing social sciences through comics. Thus, as some of the contributions to the special issues highlight, the establishment of comic book series (*Sociorama*, *Ethnographic* and *ERCcomics* — see below) on social research represents a crucial step.

To analyze the institutionalization process for comics studies, we consider a set of indicators

that inform us of its whole development curve over time and its specialization trends. These indicators concern the establishment of scientific journals, academic/scientific book series, academic research committees and associations, degree courses and the production of research and theoretical works, handbooks and textbooks on comics by scholars from various disciplines.

Thus, combining these indicators provides indications about the inception of comics as legitimate scientific objects. The first journal specializing in comics, *Inks*, was founded in 1994 by Ohio State university press. It received a more solid formalization only in 2016. It preceded *The International Journal of Comic Art*, founded in 1999, and the interdisciplinary journal of comics studies, *ImageText*, founded five years later. More recently, *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, the *Journal of Sequential Art in Narrative Education* (hosted by the University of Nebraska Lincoln) and the journal *Studies in Comics* were all founded in 2010, and the journal *The Comic Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* was founded in 2013.

Book series began to appear later, including two book series from the University Press of Mississippi: *Conversations with Comic Artists* (2000) and the *Great Comics Artists* series (2006). In 2015, the University Press of Mississippi founded the book series *Critical Approaches to Comics Artists*, mainly focused on research topics. On the other hand, this publisher's interest in comics was evident in the 1990s after publishing several works on comics, included in the book series *Studies in Popular Culture*[6]. The other book series all started in the last decade. In 2014, the Leuven University Press established the book series *Studies in European Comics and Graphic Novels*, and in 2015 Routledge published the book series *Routledge Advances in Comics Studies*, explicitly included in the broader field of communication and media studies. In 2016, two new books series were established: the *Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels* (at the intersection of literature, media and cultural studies) and the book series *Comics Culture* from Rutgers University Press. In 2018, the publisher Bloomsbury inaugurated the book series *Bloomsbury Comics Studies*, and a year later the Ohio State University Press began the book series *Studies in Comic and Cartoons*.

Regarding publishers, comic studies appear well arranged, but little progress has been made in formal research groups/centers and degree courses. Regarding the research groups, we can first mention the Oxford Comics Network from the Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (since 2013) and the *Comic Studies and Graphic Narratives* research committee founded in 2015 (formally in 2018) within the International Comparative Literature Association. The list also includes the Comics Studies Society, founded in 2016 and publisher of the journal *Inks*, and the Comics Research Hub, founded in 2018 at the University of Arts London. We can also include the *Graphic Medicine International Collective* established in 2007 and the Graphic Justice Research Alliance established in 2017. Thus, an overview of these research networks organized around an established discipline (medicine, law, comparative literature) or around the field of comics studies highlights a fragmented field. On the other hand, social sciences appear underrepresented, except for the blogs "Émile on Bande" and the "Graphic Social Science Network" (initially sponsored by the *Sociological Review*), which have sporadic output.[7]

Even considering degree courses in comics and graphic narratives (e.g., a BA in Comics and Graphic Novels from Teesside University; a BA in Cartoon and Comic Arts at Stafford-

6. In 1958 UPM had published psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's *The Circle of Guilt* (1958). As in his previous texts, especially his bestseller *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954), Wertham theorized a strong interdependence between juvenile delinquency and (a passive) exposure to mass media, especially comics (cf. Beaty, 2005; Eckhoff-Heindl & Sina, 2020).

7. See, respectively: http://socio-bd.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html and https://markcarrigan.net/2017/06/21/what-is-graphic-social-science/ (last visit on 7 March 2021).

shire University; a Master's in Comics and Graphic Novels at Dundee University, a Centre for Cartoon Studies in Vermont, USA and a School of Comics Studies at the University of Oregon), comics still appear little in many curricula, a fact that reflects the increasing gap between research and teaching activities in academia.

Finally, the scientific/academic productions on comics and graphic narratives better highlight the different institutionalization phases of comics studies both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, we conducted research via Worldcat.org and the British library using the following keywords: comics studies, comic art, comics strips, comics book, graphic novels, comic artists and comics. We searched for both in the "title" and "subject" fields.[8] The database was then re-examined in light of the titles included in the main scientific/academic book series devoted to comics studies. Starting from the second postwar period, the sample contains 474 titles.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, most works were produced by local and national governments and associations. With few exceptions, they mainly regard comics' effects on minors (e.g., Elmhurst Board of Education, 1954; Board of Education, 1960). This framing has changed only since the late 1980s, parallel to an increasing internal differentiation of comics in the international market and the graphic novel's growing consecration as a literary genre.

Nevertheless, recognition of graphic novels in the literary field does not immediately correspond to an academic interest. As Figure 2 shows, scientific interest in comics has been more evident since the 2010s (twenty years after *Maus* received the Pulitzer Prize), aligning with the establishment of book series and the growth of academic research networks.

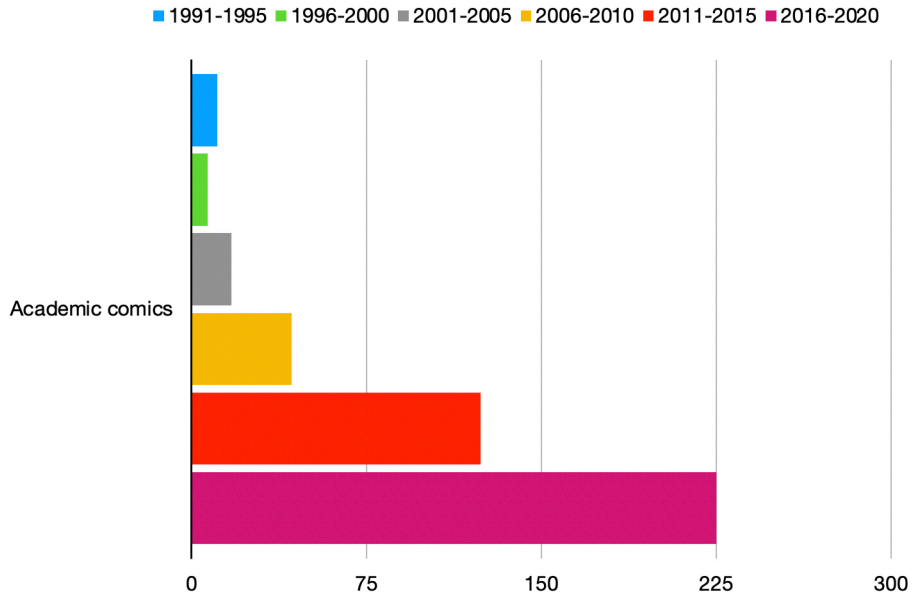

Fig. 2: Trend of Academic Production on Comics (1945-2021)
Source: Worldcat.org and the British Library. Author's elaboration.

Graphic novels seem then to play a limited role in developing comics as a research field. The concept of "graphic novels" appeared only after 2001, and comparing various timespans shows

8. We limited our research to publications in English. We do not consider our database exhaustive, but it is still indicative of the main trends in the field of comics studies.

its weight remains constant over time (from 2001 to 2005, it is used alone only in 8% of publications on comics; from 2016 to early 2021, the percentage remains similar, reaching 10.3% of all publications). This aspect may indicate that comics as scientific objects elicits interest independently from its classification.

Since 2016, the titling changes slightly due to the increasing use of the labels, "comics studies" and "comic art," even if they remain infrequent (respectively, 3.6% and 2.4% of publications from 2016–2021). Comics still have a broad definition (more than 40% of all the titles), whereas the weight of comic books slightly declined after 2001. Since this date, the number of publications that do not directly refer to comic books, comics, comics strips or graphic novels conversely increased. This sample of titles either alludes to specific genres and national traditions (e.g., manga and superheroes) or directly refers to comic works, artists, characters or publishers. Overall, these data provide a twofold reading. First, the development of an (inter)disciplinary interest in comics is not directly due to the boom of graphic novels and their legitimacy in the literary field, even if graphic novels' contribution is significant. Second, the increasing interest in the specific features of comic worlds is also meaningful for comics' ongoing legitimization (Fig. 3).

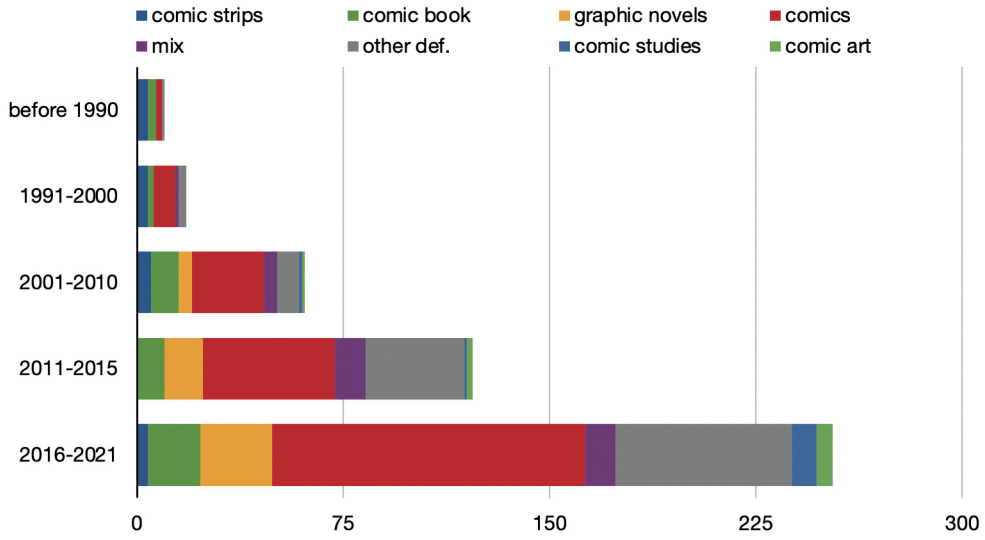

Fig. 3: Scientific Interest in Comics According to Their Format (1990–2021)
Source: Worldcat.org and the British Library. Author's elaboration.

A further meaningful indicator for testing the development of comic studies is the distribution among the following: 1. handbooks on comics, which also include introductions to its history in various countries; 2. diegetic and extradiegetic research that refers either to specific features of comics or comics genres or to social phenomena;[9] 3. theoretical works aiming to pinpoint and define comics' features and/or properties; and 4. educational works that stress the educational goals and eventual uses of comics in schools and in higher education. Regarding percentage, the number of handbooks and educational works significantly decreased in the last five years, even if it is to specify that the number of educational works were limited over

9. For this purpose, we also read the synopses of the works.

time. Conversely, the weight of theoretical works oscillated over time between 35% and 23%, while the percentage of research works increased considerably after 2016 (Fig. 4).

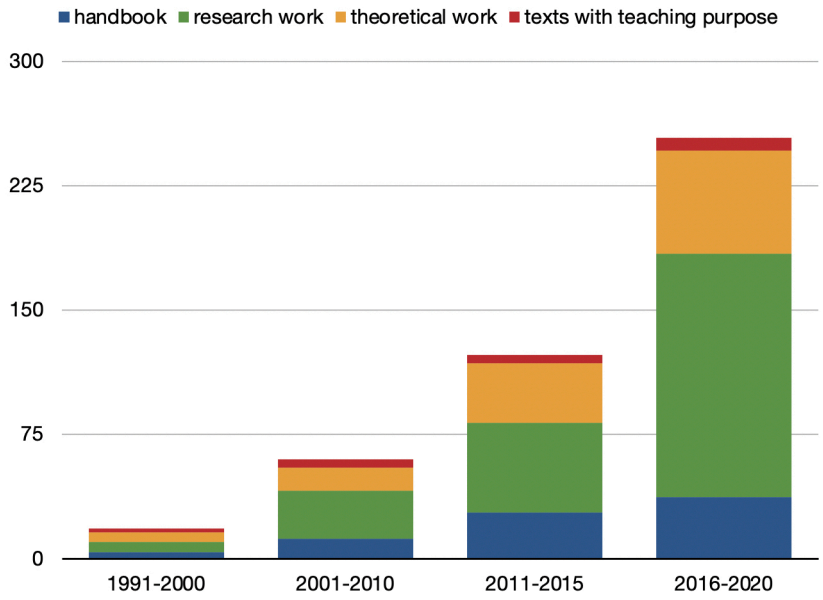

Fig. 4: The Distribution of Academic Works on Comics by Type of Publication (1990–2021)
Source: Worldcat.org and the British Library. Author's elaboration.

The latter data concerning the increasing amount of research works on comics indicate the aforementioned gap between research and teaching activities (even in the new field of comic studies) and the increasing interest toward issues relevant for the social sciences. Broadly, the analysis of topics highlights four main trends. First, categories such as "popular culture," "popular fiction," "popular art" and "mass culture" are seldom used (especially in the last five years). More usually, comics are associated with the broad and neutral category of culture. Secondly, in the last decade, comics were often understood either as media or as transmedia and hypermedia, and they were often compared with films and movies. If this trend stems from the growing phenomenon of movies inspired by comics (superhero films and films drawn from graphic novels), it also indicates how comics studies partially overlapped with media studies. A third aspect concerns the little relevance given to comics' visual dimension and the greater attention devoted to its literary features, such as the language, narrative and storytelling (even when enriched by a visual analysis). Finally, the number of extra-diegetic topics through which comics are analyzed has increased in the last five years to include gender, race/multiculturalism, colonialism/postcolonialism, identity, power/politics, memory and trauma.

Summing up, recent developments in academic works devoted to comics highlight three main fields where comics is a legitimate research tool: media studies, literary studies and in other studies (gender studies, postcolonial studies, etc.). It seems, therefore, that comics' interdisciplinarity is more due to their position in existing interdisciplinary fields than due to the engagement and interactions of scholars from various disciplines. On the other hand, several issues investigated in comics have sociological interest. Sociological theories are also increasingly used to analyze comics' issues and to explain the development of comics, especially its processes

of production, circulation and reception in various social contexts. Thus, if sociological issues, sociological theories and sociological methods are not excluded, sociologists show little engagement, with few exceptions (e.g., Snyders, 1997; Hall & Lucal, 1999; Brienza, 2010; Phillips & Strobl, 2013).[10] Nevertheless, in the previous section we have seen that in the history of sociology various scholars have seen comics as a cultural product, and as a medium in a manner innovative for their time and the discipline itself.

4 Presentation of the Special Issue

In our special issue, we will continue reflecting upon new ways of doing and communicating social research through comics. In particular, we are interested in comic productions in various fields in the social sciences and humanities — obviously within our journal's scope and with an eye for its impact on sociology and on sociological production in the future.

A caveat that narrows our focus: relevant experience and literature exists on using comics to teach sociology (e.g., Snyder, 1997; Hall & Lucal, 1999; for a review see also Giner-Monfort, 2019). Still, the experience of using comic strips to communicate social sciences seems scarcely explored and subject to critical reflections — with the possible partial exception of visual anthropology. For example, medical anthropologists have actively participated in graphic medicine. We will give hints on promising developments with an interview with Sherine Hamdy and colleagues about their project *Lissa* and the books series *ethnoGRAPHIC* (published by the University of Toronto Press), most likely the first of its kind.

Thus, this special issue collects the personal experiences of social scientists — sometimes in collaboration with illustrators — who share how their conceptual concerns and fieldwork experience were shaped by graphic novels. In more detail, in their contributions they stress what dilemmas they experienced in putting their research into images[11], specifically regarding their conceptual understanding of the role of images and the interaction between social scientists and the professional expertise of cartoonists. The issue will also discuss what market, destination and uses were considered for comic products and which publishing outlets and strategies were considered.

The selection of contributions aims to mirror various approaches: dedicated book series (*Sociorama*, as discussed by Berthaut, Bidet and Thura in this issue [2021]; *ethnoGRAPHIC*; and — in some respects — *ERCcOMICS*, as discussed by Kuipers and Ghedini in this issue [2021]) vs. publications in non-specific outlets (e.g. *Quartieri*, from a comics publisher specializing in biographical strips and graphic journalism); publications whose visual dimensions were considered in early research programmes (as for *Lissa*, Schiemer and Duffner in this issue [2021a]) vs. publications that offered popularized comics of research already published in written form (Evans, 2021; Berthaut, Bidet & Thura in this issue [2021]) or a new reflection based on previous research (Cancellieri and Peterle in this issue [2021]); publications with various audiences and purposes, such as students for educational purposes (e.g. *Lissa*), the general public for popularization goals (*Sociorama*, *ERCComics*) or (at least partly) the academic community (*ethnoGRAPHIC*). Thus, we included an article/comic that follows the whole process of theorizing, analyzing and "cartoonizing." The contribution by Schiemer and Duffner (2021a;

10. We can here mention also the sociologist Eve Ewing, who is at the same time writer of the Marvel series *Ironheart*.

11. Without reading the final comments, we probably would have used the term "translating", which entails conceptual limitations on how comics are intended.

2021b) in this issue is not based on a previous experience but instead recounts the production of a brand-new comic. It is a lab experiment of the creative process in itself.

Due to space and availability limitations and due to difficulties in mapping the actual experiences of using comics in sociology, we could not fully account for such a rich field. Certainly, other interesting cases exist that we could not include: the book series *Philosophie für Einsteiger* [Philosophy for Beginners] issued by German scientific publisher Wilhelm Fink with volumes on Luhmann (Muller & Lorenz, 2016), Bourdieu (Lorenz *et al.*, 2014), Marx, Butler, Foucault, Arendt and more; graphic-dense introductory books to sociology, like *The Sociology Book* (Tomley *et al.*, 2015) or *Introducing Sociology: A Graphic Guide* (Nagle, 2016); the rich repository of visual resources for sociologists and sociology-curious people on the website *Sociological Images* (started in 2007 and very active on social media); social sciences-informed media outlets like *PositiveNegative* that "produce comics, animations and podcasts about contemporary social and humanitarian issues, including conflict, racism, migration and asylum" by combining "ethnographic research with illustration."

We maintain that this selection of contributions of topics helps the debate on how to do social science via comics and how to use comics in a sound, conscious way. We hope this first collection of cases — in which Beaty (2021), Hague (2021) and Sassatelli (2021) found strong and weak points and emerging trends — will contribute to a debate and further research on how non-textual ways of doing and communicating social sciences play a role in our discipline's development.

In particular, Kuipers and Ghedini, who started a webcomic that presents outcomes from a research project on the social shaping of beauty standards in the transnational modelling industry, reflect on visual communication as a way of triggering sociological imagination. Berthaut *et al.* recap the trailblazing French experience of *Sociorama* and the challenges to taken-for-granted assumptions in academic sociological writing. Evans discusses the theoretical and practical implications and risks of debating violence via comics, starting from his experience with the publication *Portraits of Violence* (Evans & Wilson, 2016). Based on their experience as coeditors and coauthors of *Quartieri*, Cancellieri and Peterle (see also 2019) go beyond using comics for dissemination purposes to discuss comics as a potential tool for analysis. Schiemer and Duffner, with graphic artwork by Ayers, reflect on creativity, in which graphic representations provide feedback to their conceptual framework.

Finally, anthropologist Sherine Hamdy and her colleagues (coauthor Coleman Nye and filmmaker Francesco Dragone [Barberis et al., 2021]) join the conversation via an interview with reflections on their multimedia project *Lissa*, which kicked off the previously mentioned book series *ethnoGRAPHIC*.

The section concludes with three comments from Bart Beaty, Ian Hague (both as experts of comics studies) and Monica Sassatelli, who reflect on sociology's discovery of comics and remark upon emerging trends and critical concerns.

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Beauty: Triggering the Sociological Imagination with a Webcomic

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Abstract

The standard academic publication is often not an effective way to trigger the sociological imagination. This essay discusses an alternative means to invite people to think sociologically: a webcomic. In a collaboration between a sociologist and a team of comic artists, we created a webcomic (https://www.erccomics.com) to highlight insights from a research project on the social shaping of beauty standards in the transnational modelling industry. In the making of this *Beauty* comic, three "translations" had to be done: from analytical to narrative, from verbal to visual and from conceptual to concrete. We discuss how these translations were done and what we learned from this, including broader implications of these translations for (social) science communication, the public relevance of sociological research, the usefulness of thinking in different modalities and the fraught relationship between standard academic modes of communication and the sociological imagination.

Keywords: Beauty; Sociology; Comics; Science Communication; Visuality.

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> *It is the political task of the social scientist — as of any liberal educator — continually to translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals. It is his [sic] task to display in his work — and, as an educator, in his life as well — this kind of sociological imagination. And it is his purpose to cultivate such habits of mind among the men and women who are publicly exposed to him.*
>
> C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, p. 188

1 Introduction: Making a Sociological Comic

Every day, we see dozens, even hundreds of images of beautiful people — in advertisements, on billboards, in clips, TV series and on social media. For us, humans of the early twenty-first century, this visual culture with its constant barrage of beauty is so mundane that we tend to forget how new this phenomenon is. The fashion and modelling industry is the first institution devoted exclusively to the production of images of beautiful people, and it dates back less than a century. Since its rise to global prominence, many have argued that this fashion and modelling industry has affected not only our beauty standards, but also our perception of social worth. As Heather Widdows (2018) has argued, beauty has become a "moral imperative". As the opportunities for improving one's appearance increased, and the images presented by the fashion industries became ever more idealized and perfect, beauty standards became more demanding. For women and men, young and old, it has become more important to look good — if not beautiful, at least slim, fit and well-groomed. Thus, "good looks" have become an increasingly important form of capital — and thus an increasingly important source of inequality. The beauty and fashion industries have emerged as a central institution for the diffusion and legitimation of this "aesthetic capital" (Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Anderson et al., 2010; Mears, 2014).

In 2010, the first author embarked on a study of the social shaping of beauty standards in the European fashion and modelling field. In 2015, toward the end of the project, the "beauty team" received an invitation to join ERCcOMICS, an ERC project that made webcomics based on ERC-funded research. The second author was part of this team. The creation of the Beauty webcomic was an exciting opportunity to experiment with the dissemination of scholarly insights to wider audiences. The topic of beauty is close to many people's hearts — but maybe not to the heart of most academics. Traditional forms of academic publishing — papers, articles, books, talks — are ill-suited for sharing research insights with the people who care most about the topic. As human beauty is primarily a visual experience, and contemporary beauty culture is a visual culture, our findings were difficult to translate into the main vehicle of academic communication: words. Thus, a comic seemed like the perfect way to share our research with the world.

In this article we reflect on the experience of converting a sociological study into a visual, narrative form. For us, this was a collaborative learning experience, guided by a double question. First, the webcomic aimed to answer the original research question: How are beauty standards socially shaped in the transnational fashion and modelling industry; and how does this impact everyday beauty standards? To answer this question via a webcomic required us to think through both form and content: how can we convey the answers to this question in a narrative, visual form with real people, a beginning and an ending, images rather than words, and concrete situations rather than abstract insights?

However, this collaboration sparked a second question. This question started out as the traditional question of science communication: how can we share our findings and insights about beauty standards with non-academics? Along the way, it became more like the meta-question of science communication: how can we make people think about our research questions? How can we invite people along in this process of discovery? How can we spark people's sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), making them reflect on personal experiences of beauty as embedded in larger social realities, related these "personal troubles" with beauty into "public issues".

2 The Beauty Project: Towards a Comparative Sociology of Beauty

Despite much critique and speculation about the role of the beauty, fashion and modelling industries, there has been remarkably little research on the social shaping of beauty standards in, and by, these industries. The BEAUTY project aimed to develop a comparative sociology of beauty: a theory of the social creation of aesthetic standards, as they are applied to the bodies and faces of women and men. By comparing these standards within and across nations the project aimed to identify central mechanisms and institutions through which such standards are developed and disseminated. With a team of researchers, we studied this in six European countries: France, Italy and the UK — each country home to a global fashion capital — and three peripheral countries: the Netherlands, Poland and Turkey. In this project, we "followed" the process by which these standards were produced and disseminated from the producers who create (images of) beauty, to the fashion models who embody beauty, to the fashion magazines that represent beauty, and finally to the "average people" who consume beauty.

The project developed a sociological perspective on human beauty — and, consequently, also on human ugliness (the latter became an important theme in the webcomic). Most scholars of human beauty have looked for universal characteristics of beauty. Researchers in human biology and evolutionary psychology, the fields in which the study of human beauty is most developed, have identified commonalities across cultures (Etcoff, 2011; Foo, Simmons & Rhodes, 2017). These studies generally show that beauty is related to signs of health and fertility: facial and bodily symmetry, a healthy look with clear skin and shiny hair, a youthful appearance, and well-developed secondary gender characteristics like strong jaws and wide shoulders for men and a narrower face, narrow waist and wide hips for women. From this perspective, beauty and ugliness are opposite categories. Ugliness is the absence of beauty: old, asymmetrical, unhealthy, unfeminine or unmasculine.

The sociological approach to beauty developed in this project does not negate the importance of such biological or psychological factors. Our research highlights show universals in the preference for beautiful faces and bodies. Most importantly, the power of beauty itself: people's strong desire to seek out beauty, and the strong effect it has on all of us. But also: the preference for youth, for forms of beauty that radiate health, sexual attraction, and (in some cases) strong femininity and masculinity. However, such universal theories do not help us understand the dominant social position of the fashion and modelling industry, or the quickly changing, sometimes unusual and near-ugly beauty styles that this field produces and promotes.

Our project draws attention to three other important social mechanisms in the shaping of our beauty standards. First, the universal human ambition to show one's allegiance to a specific group (tribe, class, community) through aesthetics, including adapting one's appearance to culturally specific standards that may seem outlandish to others (Hebdige, 1979; Wohl, 2015). The flip side of this mechanism is distinction: through these standards, we show who we belong with, and who we are not (Bourdieu, 1984). Second, the central human tendency to

adopt (aesthetic) standards and practices from people and institutions with more status (Simmel, 1957; Aspers & Godart, 2013). Consequently, beauty and appearance is also deeply entangled with social inequality. First, beauty itself functions as a form of "capital" (Anderson et al., 2010; Hakim, 2010). But as people imitate high status styles, status also comes with the power to define what counts as beautiful. Thus, beauty standards are not only biology, a simple reflection of our inner mammal. They fall fully in the domain of sociology: they reflect the group we belong to, the group we do not belong to, and the high status group we want to belong to.

The third social mechanism is institutionalization. In today's complex, globalized and mediated societies, standards are shaped both by face-to-face interactions and by institutions like education, media, or the fashion field. However, such institutions come with inbuilt social variations. People develop social allegiances not to "education" or "fashion" but to positions within institutional fields: people identify with a certain magazine, brand or style that they look up to or identify with (Bourdieu, 1983). Institutions like the media, fashion and modelling industries produce, spread and legitimate aesthetic standards that reflect wide-spread cultural repertoires of evaluation (Lamont, 1992), and existence senses of "groupness" (Wohl, 2015). Because of the durability of institutions, aesthetic standards are preserved and diffused as people come and go. Institutional standards thus acquire a persistence that makes them as influential and "real in their consequences" as biological mechanisms.

The beauty standards of the fashion industry, and of their publics, cannot be explained only from biology or psychology. Just a brief glance at a recent issue of high fashion magazines such as *Vogue* (or *Vague* as it became known in the comic) shows that the women and incidental men portrayed in these magazines are nothing like the evolutionary prototypes (van der Laan & Kuipers, 2016). Admittedly, they are young. But often they are so thin that their secondary gender characteristics are hardly noticeable. Although the 1990s fad "heroin chic" is over, contemporary high fashion models, with their pale skin and sunken cheeks, don't look particularly healthy. Their androgynous looks make them anything but clear specimens of fertile masculinity and femininity: female top models often have strong jaws and square faces, male high fashion models look frail and skinny. Thus, the fashion and modelling industries shape beauty standards that are specific to a certain time and place. Yet, they are experienced as true; this is what many people perceive as beauty, and try to emulate.

Our research project followed this social shaping of these aesthetic standards, from industry to everyday life. We started with an analysis of fashion field and the standards and practices of the people working in this fields, such as editors of fashion magazines, photographers, or bookers at modelling agencies (Kuipers, Chow & Van der Laan, 2014). A key insight of this phase was that fashion/modelling functions as an autonomous "art world" (Becker, 2008; Bourdieu, 1984), with its own standards, roles, rules and hierarchies. In this art world, the ambition to create "beauty" is mixed with the need to create novelty. Everybody in modelling is constantly on the lookout for "new faces" (Aspers, 2006; Mears, 2011). This is particularly true for high fashion, the more prestigious and autonomous pole of this fashion/modelling field, which sharply distinguishes itself from the less prestigious, more profitable commercial field. Because of the search for rarefied, unconventional forms of beauty, the standards of the (high) fashion field often differ considerable from everyday understandings of beauty. Moreover, the search for novelty make beauty standards time-specific: what was beautiful last year, has lost its luster today.

In a second step, PhD candidate Sylvia Holla (2016; 2020) examined how models "embody" these beauty standards. In her dissertation *Beauty, Work, Self* (2018) she analyzed the

"aesthetic labor" models perform to maintain the unrealistic (and often unhealthy) beauty standards. Holla's work shows a stark contrast between the high status of fashion models as "emblems of beauty" in society at large, and the lack of power and agency of these models within the fashion field. Despite all the changes in aesthetic standards, modelling reproduces an underlying beauty ideal of young, white, slim, middle-class femininity, thus upholding wider societal inequalities.

In a third step, PhD candidate Elise van der Laan looked at representations of beauty in fashion images in our six countries. In her dissertation *Why Fashion Models Don't Smile* (2015) she traces the crystallization of high fashion aesthetic from the 1980s until the 2010s. She shows that the trajectory of high fashion resembles the trajectory of art in the twentieth century: away from beauty that is directly understandable to everyone, pleasing to the senses and continuous with everyday life, towards avant-garde styles that negate everyday beauty, or even negates the idea of beauty itself. Thus, in the beauty industry, especially in high fashion, beauty is not the opposite of ugliness. Instead, the beauty standards of high fashion play a complicated game with everyday beauty standards and the more conventional standards of mainstream fashion. They negate the "pretty" aesthetics of mainstream magazines and advertising, where models look more like the evolutionary ideal: young, health, smiling, radiant. They also negate the "sexy" aesthetics of commercial magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Men's Health*: provocative, sexualized, exaggeratedly feminine or masculine.

In a final step, we looked at the evaluation of these representations by "average people", or the consumers of these images. To what extent do they share the beauty standards of the modelling industry? For this, we developed a new research method, the visual Q-sort (Kuipers, 2015). In all countries of our study, a stratified sample of "average" people were asked to sort four sets of 25 images of male and female faces and bodies, from most to least beautiful. These images were sorted on a pre-defined grid, which means that people (often without realizing) assigned scores to each picture, from -4 (least beautiful) to +4 (most beautiful). Simultaneously, people were asked to think out loud while sorting, and to explain their reasons for their ranking. These interviews thus yielded both quantitative mappings of beauty tastes, and qualitative information on people's repertoires of evaluation of beauty.

This Q-study showed that although there are people whose beauty tastes are very similar to the standards of (segments of) the modelling and beauty industry, many people do not accept or share the beauty ideals of the fashion field. What we did find, instead, was that beauty standards are strongly associated with social background characteristics, notably education, age and urbanity. Consequently, beauty standards function as cultural capital, separating those with discerning highbrow standards from those with less prestigious tastes. However, we also found that almost all informants are embedded in an "beauty regime" that tells them beauty is important and worth pursuing, and that a failure to care for one's looks or to look bad is stigmatized and penalized (Holla & Kuipers, 2015; Mears, 2014; Vandebroeck, 2016). The vast majority of informants were comfortable and practiced evaluators of beauty, with a wide array of repertoires of evaluation of beauty to praise those who looked good, and to (harshly) judge and stigmatize women and men who did not conform to their beauty standards. So, while beauty standards were not universal, what is (near) universal is the belief that people have to look good. In the production of this "beauty regime", the beauty, fashion, and modelling industries play a central — though not uniquely defining — role.

3 ERcCOMICS: Drawing Inspiration from Science to Tell Stories and Create Images

The ERCcOMICS project was a joint project of La Bande Destinée, a Paris-based communication agency, and the Sorbonne University. Funded by the European Research Council, it ran from 2015 until 2019. During this period, 18 webcomics were produced, each based on a project of a European scholar funded in the framework of the Horizon2020 program. The comics covered topics from pregnancy among refugee women and the roots of hatha yoga to cosmic dust and computer security. ERCcOMICS describes itself as "a creative and ambitious project that exploits the power of webcomics to innovate the way European science is communicated."[1]

The idea behind ERCcOMICS was to explore visual narrative as tool for science education and communication. It aimed to make scientific subjects more accessible and more engaging for a wider audience through the use of metaphors and character-driven narratives. The potential of comics as an educational tool has been traditionally recognized (Sones, 1944). In the past decade, comics have been more systematically studied as a tool for classroom education (Aleixo & Norris, 2010; Hosler & Boomer, 2011). Recent studies have explored their application to science communication. For instance, in a review, Farinella (2018) summarizes the various cognitive mechanisms by which visual, narrative and metaphoric communication characteristic of comics can aid science communication. Friesen, Van Stan & Elleuche (2018) even present a methodology for creating scientific comics.

ERCcOMICS started with four projects including the Beauty project. These four original projects were nominated by the ERCcCOMICS team, on the basis of their visual potential and their different research domains. The other initial projects included a biological project about lianas, a physics project about invisibility, and a computer science project about music and Artificial Intelligence — the latter particularly challenging and abstract topics.

The principal investigators were paired with writers, visual artists and specialists in science communication. The second author of this article was part of the ERCcOMICS team. Beside the making of comics, the ERCcOMICS team organized a series of outreach events, including lectures and TEDtalks with live drawing, roundtables and presentations at various universities, and presentations at comic fairs and meetings. Thus, the making of the comics came with a range of activities targeting different publics.

A central feature of the ERCcOMICS project was the foregrounding of artistic freedom. As the website announces: "We do not want to do traditional popularisation. We want to draw inspiration from science, tell stories and create images." After a first Skype meeting, Giselinde Kuipers (first author/PI) shared all materials related to the project with the team. These materials were scrutinized by the two people in charge of making the story, Fiammetta Ghedini (coordinator of the project, script writer, second author of this article, with a PhD in cognitive science) and Massimo Colella (art director, script writer, who wrote the script). These materials included scientific texts, like the proposal, publications and working papers, and the visual materials that we used in developing the project, including research instruments (such as the Q-sort images), data analysis figures, codebooks with examples and other "raw materials". In the comic, many of these visual materials make an appearance. For instance, the images shown in the lecture in Episode 1 are used in the Q-sort, and the editorial staff at *Vague* magazine look at scatterplots of the analysis of fashion photographs.

1. https://erccomics.com/about Consulted 6 December 2020.

Fiammetta Ghedini and Massimo Colella used these materials and the first conversation to create the concept and the story. This occurred largely outside of the influence sphere of Giselinde. Only after the main concept was formulated, Giselinde was invited to comment and think along. Thus, artistic freedom was at the heart of the project. After this, there were regular conversations about the storyline and the sociological ramifications of the story. This included a visit to Amsterdam, and a tour of the University buildings and its environment to ensure the setting of the comic was as realistic as possible.

The script of the "Beauty" webcomic was created by inventing characters corresponding and incarnating the sociological concepts of the research; in particular, the fashion industry is personified by the editorial team of a fashion magazine, *Vague*. A group of young students become aware of the sociological dynamics behind the sociology of beauty as they follow a university course with "Professor Kuipers". The cameo of Giselinde Kuipers in the webcomic during a lesson allows to convey some of the most abstract research concepts and gives the readers a knowledge base to follow the development of the story. The students decide to call themselves "anti-beautysts", and decide to stand up against the "moral imperative" of beauty, taking to the extreme consequences the sociological findings behind our research. Their storyline is intertwined with the editorial choices by the *Vague* editorialists who are, on the other hand, trying to artificially impose a new beauty standard on society.

The visuals were drawn by two artists who each took care of a different "world". Francesca Protopapa drew the Beautyst world of fashion magazines (Figure 1); Eleonora Antonioni drew the storyline of the Anti-Beautyst students (Figure 2). Thus, the form of the comic echoes the dual research question: how are beauty standards shaped in the beauty industry, and how does this affect everyday beauty standards? The contrast between the two worlds is signaled by distinct styles: a bold style with strong lines and cold blues for the fashion world, a more intimate style with finer lines and warmer, softer colors for the student world. In some images, both styles are combined, to show the meeting of these worlds (See Figure 2). At the end the worlds converge.

Figure 1: Protagonists and Drawing Style of the Fashion World

The webcomic consists of ten episodes that were released over the course of a year. For each episode, Giselinde was asked to comment before it was published, and to supply scientific commentary that was published along with the webcomic as "the science behind the comic".

Figure 2: Protagonists and Drawing Style of the "Student World" Juxtaposed with the Fashion World (Billboard)

Throughout the process, there was an intensive back-and-forth to think through the storylines, the characters and the real-world implications. Thus, the translation process from sociology to webcomic became a true collaboration as well as a joint learning process.

4 Making Sociology into a Comic: Three Moments of Translation

In making this comic, three "translations" had to be done: from analytical to narrative, from verbal to visual, and from conceptual to concrete.

4.1 Tell Stories: From Analytical to Narrative

The beauty webcomic is a fictional story with characters, a beginning and an end, and a conflict to drive the story. This insistence on narrative form is a defining feature of the ERCcOMICS project. All webcomics are stories, with genres varying from Sci-fi to travel story to realistic narrative. This translation from analytical to narrative was done by the ERCcOMICS team, who "dramatized" the research project, pitting against each other the Beautysts of the fashion industry, and a group of Amsterdam sociology students who after a lecture by a comic "Prof Kuipers" become "Antibeautysts".

The comic starts in a university classroom, where a drawn version of Giselinde is explaining "aesthetic capital": good looks as a resource that people can exploit and convert to other social advantages. She explains how the importance of looks has increased in today's media-saturated service economies, how beauty industries contribute to this, and how this reinforces social inequalities. In this lecture, as in the research project, issues of inequality and social justice are

presented in a rather dispassionate academic way. However, this distanced and value-free "academic habitus" is challenged in the webcomic — as it often was when we presented our research outside academia.

After the lecture, the focus shifts to four students who are visible struck by the injustice of the beauty regime. As they leave the lecture hall, one of them vandalizes a large billboard image, showing a familiar-looking advertisement for a brand called *Gior*. Their newly acquired sociological insight becomes a driver of action: the narrative has been set in motion. Each of the students personifies a different strategy in the quest to critique, transform, attack or undermine the beauty regime — with one of them, Daniel, choosing the most radical option.

In the second episode, we move from everyday beauty standards to the fashion industry, from cultural consumption to production and from one drawing style to another. We see the editors of fashion magazine *Vague* consulting the findings of the Beauty project and planning a competition for a new, non-beautiful, form of beauty: "the beauty of the future". This sets in motion the second storyline, based on sociological analyses of the highbrow art world. The quest for novel, anti-mainstream beauty standards becomes personified in the character of editor-in-chief Cecile Swernink, who is the embodiment of what sociologists call a "style entrepreneur" (Aspers, 2006).

Over the next episodes, these storylines unfold and eventually converge. Both the "beautysts" and the "antibeautysts" discover that changing society's understanding of beauty is not as easy as they hoped it would be. The beautysts discover that if they want to do something really new, they will have to make it themselves. The antibeautysts discover that earlier attempts to make beauty standards more just and less unequal have mostly strengthened the beauty regime; and that to change the beauty regime, they may need to give up their own belief in beauty. Both groups find that rethinking beauty requires radical thinking: a turn to ugliness. A series of dramatic twists and turns, including the appearance of a plastic surgeon with a nasty sense of humor, an escalating conflict in the group of friends and rising tensions in the editorial team at *Vague* leads to the meeting of both storylines. In the end Daniel undergoes plastic surgery in order to become "a man of intolerable ugliness". He ends up on the cover of *Vague*, which proudly announces that "BEAUTY days are numbered".

The translation from sociological analysis to (sociological-imbued) narrative was a three-step operation. First, the narrative personifies what sociologists call "field positions": beauty consumer; sociology student; fashion editor. Second, it dramatizes the central quests or aims related to these positions: to consume and embody beauty; to think through social mechanisms; to find new forms of beauty. The meeting of field positions and field logics creates the conflicts that drive the story.

The story shows a world where beauty is both an asset that is extremely valuable to those who have it (or who control it, which is not the same thing, cf. Mears, 2015), and something that is increasingly manageable and malleable. A magazine like *Vague* has first pick of the most beautiful and eager people, and while they cannot completely change what people think is beautiful, they exert significant influence on beauty standards and on public attention. Yet, they are trapped in a field logic that pushes them to increasingly radical, possibly unsustainable beauty ideals in their quest for novelty and attention. The students attempt to undermine the beauty regime, but they, too, find they are trapped: while critical of the system, they find they cannot give up on beauty. Daniel's friends refuse to follow his radical choice to withdraw from the beauty logic altogether. In the end, the extremes meet: Daniel's choice to give up on beauty takes him to the heart of the beauty industry and makes him a celebrity.

In the representation of the high-fashion world, we opted for exaggeration: taking real-life

mechanisms to the extreme. The dynamic to seek out increasingly strange forms of beauty not only leads to questionable ethics (as we did indeed observe in our research), but also renders the notion of beauty void: at some point, beauty becomes ugly and the other way around. The student storyline was more realistic in style and content. It revolves around a question that preoccupies many (social science) students: what can we do to change a system that creates inequality and oppression? Is it even possible to escape the system? The students even consult comic Giselinde — one of the moments where she was most directly involved in co-authoring the script. Embodying C. Wright Mills' formulation of the task of the educator to "translate personal troubles into public issues, and public issues into the terms of their human meaning for a variety of individuals", she offers sociological reflections, Socratic questions and an admonition with dramatic consequences: "But before thinking about other people's vision of beauty you should start changing your own. I mean, just look at yourselves. You all look very affected by that 'beautysm' you intend to fight. You can't have people embrace your idea of antibeautysm if you don't set an example to follow".

This admonition is where fictional logic takes over: the real-world Giselinde would try to avoid such direct suggestions. Here, the goals of sociology and fiction diverge. The admonition marks the dramatic turning point of the story in episode 4 (Figure 3 and Figure 4), in which the beautysts turn to a plastic surgeon and the students prepare to discard their own beauty standards.

The tension between narrative and social science also manifested itself in writing the ending. Social life never ends. At the strong request of the sociologist, the ending remains open. Are "BEAUTY days numbered" as the cover of *Vague* triumphantly (and paradoxically) announces? Has Daniel sold out, or has he successfully infiltrated the system? Can this system be changed? However, narratives need closure. Thus, on a personal level, the story ends in tears: the surgically adapted Daniel is now famous, and breaks up with his girlfriend Layla.

4.2 Create Images: From Verbal to Visual

The second translation was from words to images. Academia is world of words. Since beauty is experienced primarily as visual (at least in contemporary culture), the research project had given much thought to the relation between the verbal and visual modalities (cf. Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). We developed new visual methods (Kuipers, 2015) and a (partly) visual codebook and coding form (Van der Laan, 2015), and had experimented with data visualization (Kuipers, 2015; Van der Laan & Kuipers, 2016).

Yet, the collaboration with comic artists put this translation into stark relief. The visual form allowed us to convey some insights more directly: the contrast of highbrow versus more everyday beauty standards, the aesthetics of international fashion people which makes them into a rather recognizable "tribe". Three aspects of the visual modality stood out: compared with words (as used by academics), images are specific, redundant and aesthetic.

First, images are specific. Words make it easy to speak of generalities ("beauty standards"; "consumers"; "industry"; "field") but in visual representation, details have to be filled in. We struggled with this specificity in our analysis of fashion images, leading to a whopping 200+ codes for each picture. In the comics, specifics had to be added. The comic is full of evocative details: the weird outfits in a fashion show, the lobster on the *Vague* lunch table, the smug bald face of the evil plastic surgeon, an explosion of photographers when Daniel announces his plans, a cat to match Daniel's new face. This specificity includes specificity of place. Verbal products of academia often decontextualize, or only draw out only theoretically relevant as-

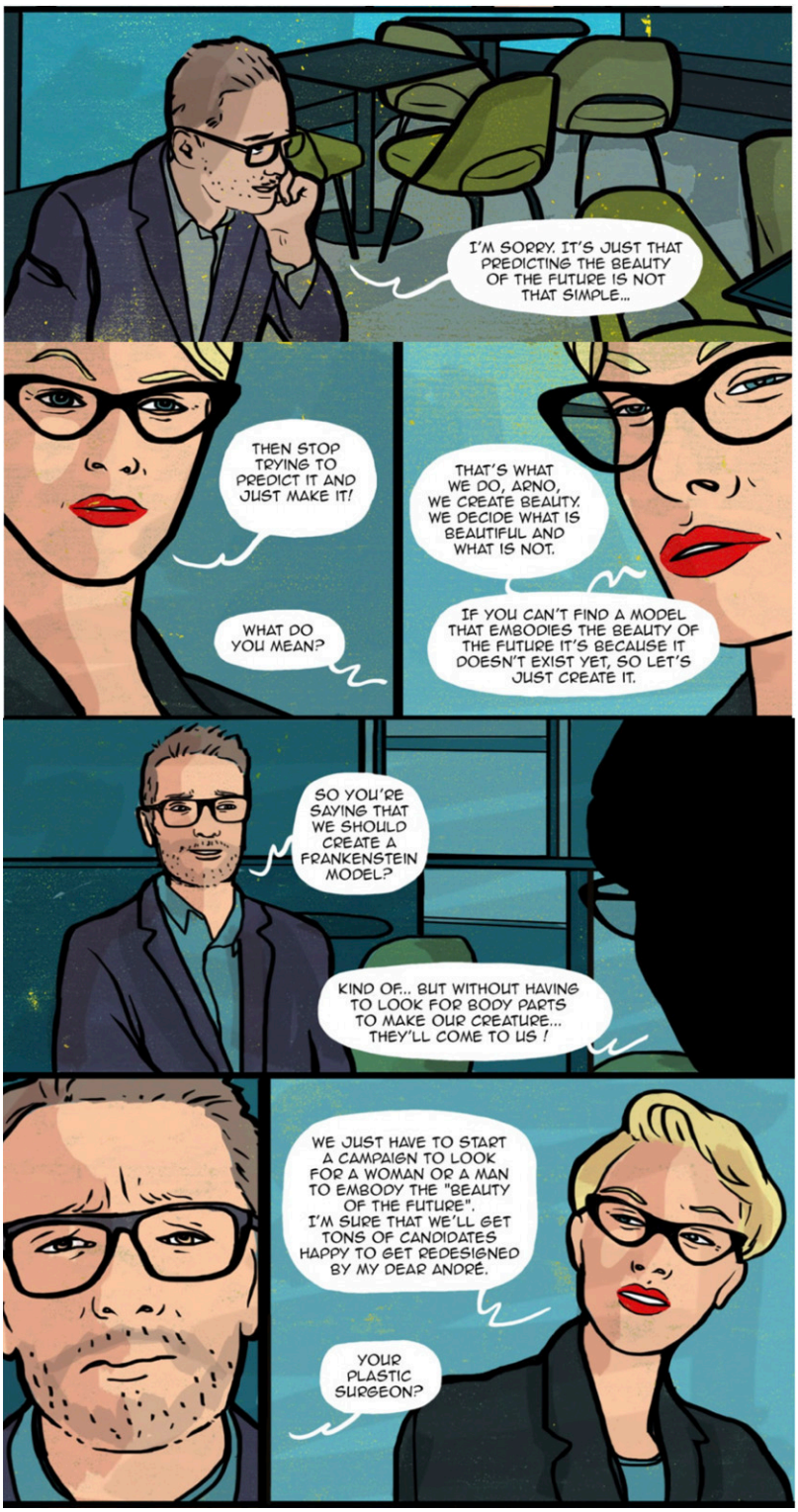

Figure 3: Episode 4: "Let's just create it."

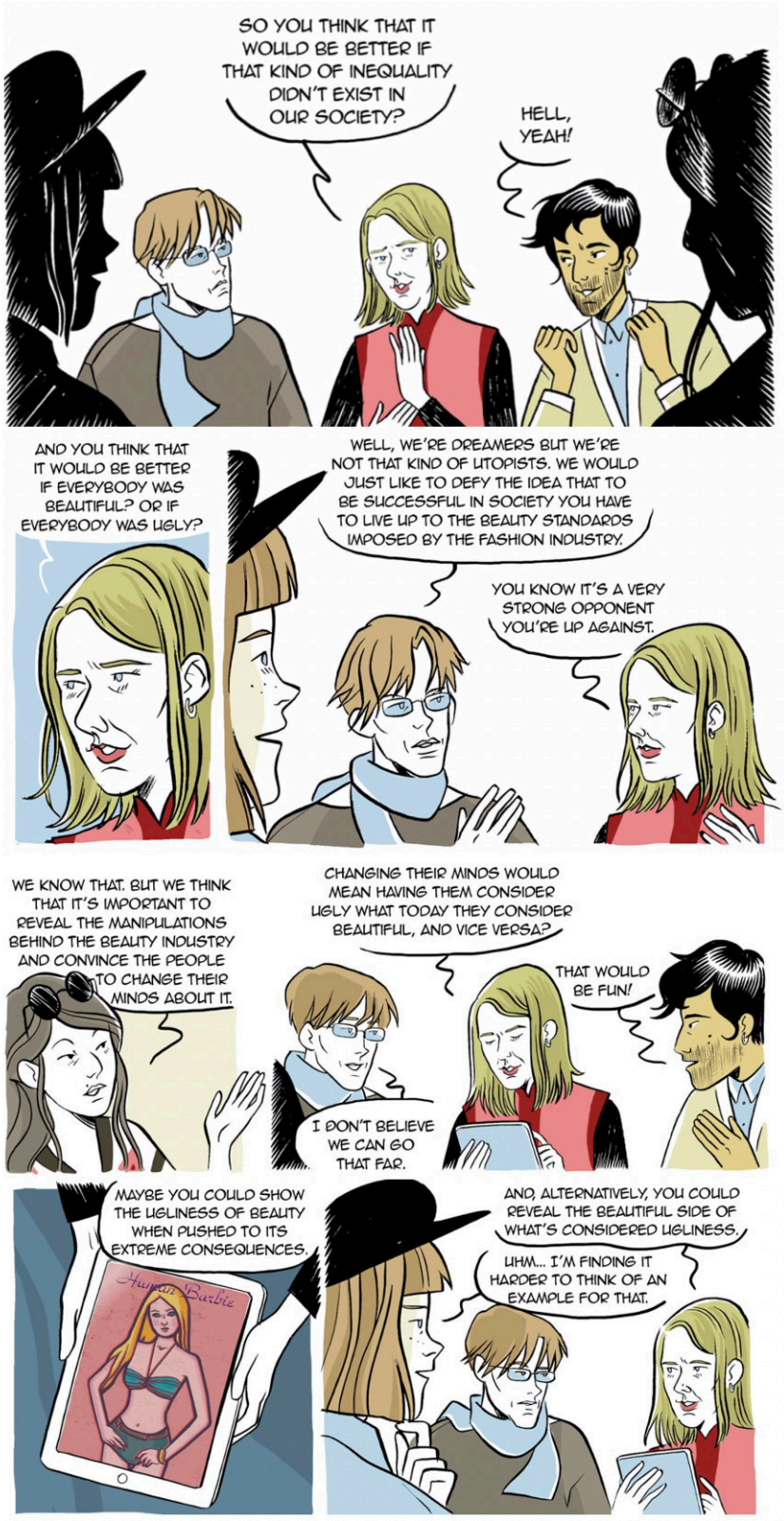

Figure 4: A Sociological Consultation

pects of place ("the Netherlands is relatively egalitarian, prosperous and peripheral to the fashion world"). The webcomic, in contrast, is full of scenic Amsterdam bridges, bikes and bus stops, and detailed reconstruction of the University of Amsterdam lecture halls and cafeteria. In visual representation, specifics have to be filled in, so choices have to be made.

Consequently, visual information is redundant. Where academic writing is often about cutting out all unnecessary information, images are full of "extra" information. This offered enjoyable new opportunities, for instance to add clues to the research project, and nods to some of the themes without making them explicit. A favorite example are the punks at the end of Episode 4 (Figure 5). Without making it explicit, this shows how aesthetics of group allegiance trumps conventional beauty standards based on health, symmetry and gender-specificity. It also highlights the moment where beauty and ugly meet.

Figure 5: Blurring Lines between Beauty and Ugliness

Finally, images are aesthetic. While words, certainly academic words, offer relatively neutral representations, images inevitably appeal to the aesthetic sense. The characters in the comic have their own personal looks, which make them more or less beautiful and contain aesthetic identity markers. For instance, the beautysts wear stylish jackets and designer glasses in cold blues and blacks, while the anti-beautysts are good-looking youngsters with hipsterish, colorful outfits. Daniel has a signature "hipster scarf" that he keeps even when transformed. Both the beautysts and the anti-beautyists are attractive-looking and well-groomed, which make for a striking contrast with some other characters, such as the overweight, balding plastic surgeon, and his first creation for the *Vague* contest: a copy of the face of fashion designer Donatella Versace as she looked after multiple surgeries.

All three elements of visual communication came to the fore as the story drew to an end. Daniel tries to become the new face of "ugly". But what is ugly? A more difficult question than one may expect. People who want to become (more) beautiful travel a well-worn path. While

they may have different tastes or preferences, they will usually do something that has been done before. Generally, they want to look younger, more polished and symmetrical, smoother and with more even features, and with their secondary sex characteristics more exaggerated. So, people who try to become more beautiful tend to conform to certain, rather specific standards.

But for becoming ugly, the choices are endless, and most of them have never been explored. This was reflected in discussions between the artists and the researcher. Should Daniel's body be changed, his face, or both? What would be the most radical statement? For instance, what about making Daniel very overweight? Our own research, and many other studies show that fatness is strongly stigmatized across western countries. So one of the options was to make Daniel very fat. Another option was to do something very drastic to his facial features, like a very big nose or bad skin. But in the end, we chose something truly unnatural: a multi-color patchwork "Frankenstein" look that could never exist in real life (see Figure 6). But with this, the reflection didn't end. Because is this really ugly? Given that we know that people disagree so much about faces, isn't it possible that some people find Daniel's new patchwork face the most beautiful they've ever seen?

Figure 6: A Picture of Ugliness

4.3 From Conceptual to Concrete

The third move we had to make: from conceptual to concrete. Academic analysis is about extracting patterns from the messy empirical world, and capturing them in general concepts. The challenge of making a webcomic was to bring out these general insights and concepts through concrete narratives, situations and characters. The comic revolves around three sociological

themes of a rather different nature: beauty as social construct and sociological topic; field autonomy and cultural production; and inequality (and what to do about it?).

The webcomic first and foremost presents a sociological perspective on beauty: not universal, unchangeable or biologically given, but instead socially variable and produced in institutions, including (but not limited to) the beauty industry. However, that it is socially constructed does not mean it is not real. The main sociological lesson of the comic lies in the protagonists experiencing how difficult it is to change such "constructed" beauty standards, and how difficult it is to give up on them. Even when they decide to "fight beauty", they cannot bring themselves to join Daniel in relinquishing beauty. Daniel's decision to embrace ugliness even leads to the end of their friendship.

Thus, the webcomics shows how socially learned standards become deeply ingrained — a second nature. They feel not only natural, but also are experienced as central to the self: what you think is beautiful defines who you are. Denaturalizing such learned standards by seeing them as socially constructed is a central lesson of sociology — but denaturalization is only a first step towards recognizing, and maybe changing their social consequences. Moreover, such standards often reinforce social inequalities, for instance based in gender. Throughout the story, the two men are more radical in their rejection of beauty, and more willing to give up on it, than the women in the small circle of friends. This is a translation of insights in the gendered nature of beauty: women are more likely to be judged on their appearance than men, so giving up on beauty would incur much higher social costs.

The second sociological theme made concrete in the webcomic is the logics of cultural production, and particular the notion of field autonomy. The logic of high fashion is like the logic of (post)modern art: rejecting beauty that is directly understandable to everyone, continuous with everyday life, towards a form of beauty that negates everyday beauty, or even negates the idea of beauty itself. The webcomic takes this autonomous logics to its extreme: Daniel's transformation into the ugliest man alive, who then becomes the poster boy of high fashion. In contemporary high fashion, the dividing line between ugly and beautiful is fluid and, well: vague. High fashion's idea of beauty is a constant exploration for something that is different: different from conventional ideas of beauty, different from other magazines, different even from what they themselves hailed as the new beauty standard only a year ago. In this search for aesthetic distinction, high fashion beauty has become increasingly distinct from what our inner ape desires. But for those in the know, the effect is aesthetically pleasing, in highly specific ways. It is the beauty of the unexpected. Of something that is so interesting that it makes us want to look again and again. The pleasing juxtaposition of a lopsided, strange face with a perfectly symmetrical, beautifully stylized photograph. In the visual echo of a patched, disjointed human face in a patched, disjointed fur of a cat.

Finally, the webcomic revolves around the core question (if not *the* core theme) of sociology as a discipline: inequality — and what to do about it? This theme is introduced at the very beginning of the comic. Daniel, Layla, Rodrigo and Amber learn that physical beauty is a resource: a form of aesthetic capital. People benefit from their beauty when they have it, and suffer from their ugliness. Like other forms of social inequality, physical beauty is socially constructed and influenced by wider societal inequalities based in class, gender, age or race (Hakim, 2010; Mears, 2014 & 2015). Powerful social institutions such as the beauty industry thus contribute to the reproduction of these inequalities.

The comic focuses not on the causes and consequences of beauty as inequality, but instead on the question of individual agency in the light of such systemic injustice. Academic sociologists do not agree whether people should oppose inequality, and if so, if and how this can be

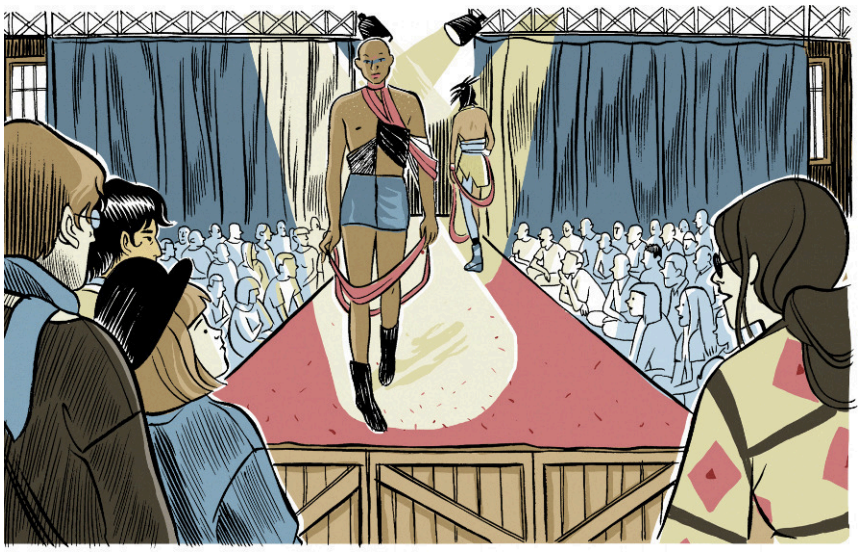

Figure 7: Blurring Lines between Beauty and Ugliness in High Fashion

done. In the original BEAUTY project, we tried to keep questions of justice somewhat to the background — aiming for more a Weberian "value free" approach that would allow readers to make up their own minds. However, there were rather heated debates about this within the research team.

However, most sociologists have found that in teaching sociology, research on inequality often leads seamlessly to questions of social in/justice. The comic foregrounds the ethical and normative questions, as the students go looking for ways to redress the social inequality produced or intensified by beauty standards. They research tried and tested ways of fighting inequalities such as raising awareness, supporting the underdogs or increasing diversity within the system. Three of them stop short when they are confronted with their own allegiance to beauty — and thus their allegiance to the system. Only one of them, Daniel, decides on a radical option: withdraw from the system, align with the excluded and become ugly. This is somewhat reminiscent of the actions of the communist and Maoist students of the 1970s, who went to work in factories in support of the proletariat (to the puzzlement of the proletariat). If beauty is privilege, then we should turn the tables. Power to the ugly!

In his press conference (figure 8), Daniel announces that becoming ugly is a way to expose the "trick" of the fashion industry. Implicitly, Daniel suggests that it is the beauty industry that is responsible for this particular form of inequality. In doing so, Daniel falls into a common trap: he looks for one particular organization to blame for all social ills, and if he can only transform this industry, the world will be better. However, while the beauty industry is very powerful, beauty has been a source of inequality for much longer, especially for women but also for men. Throughout history, royalty, saints, and other important people have been depicted in a flattering manner: they have to look good to convince the people of their special status.

The story ends with the age-old sociological question of structure versus agency. As Daniel's new look has brought him wealth and fame, it remains unclear whether he has managed to escape from the beauty regime, break the power of the beauty industry, or put an end to beauty-based inequalities. Layla, his ex-girlfriend, accuses him of working for "them" now, and he retorts "No, they are the ones who are going to work for me." Thus, the final frame leaves us wondering: will Daniel, the individual, managed to successfully change the

Figure 8: Exposing Beauty Inequalities

system from within? And will this lead to the end of this particular form of inequality?

5 Conclusion: Triggering the Sociological Imagination with a Webcomic

The making of the BEAUTY webcomic started out with the traditional question of science communication: how can we share research findings and insights with non-academics? Along the way, it became more like the meta-question of science communication: how can we make people think about our research questions? How can we invite people along in this process of discovery? How can we make people reflect on the importance of beauty in contemporary culture and in everyday experience, and even start their own investigations? In other words: how can we trigger people's sociological imagination?

The concept of the sociological imagination was coined by C. Wright Mills in 1959. In a scathing critique of standard sociological practice, Mills makes a plea for a sociology that makes "personal troubles" into "public issues". He writes: "the sociological imagination is not merely a fashion. It is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities." (Mills, 1959, p. 14). The notion of the sociological imagination has made it into virtually all sociology textbooks and intro to sociology courses, but not so much into the practice of academic research. The standard manners of academic publication and evaluation are not very well suited to triggering this "quality of mind". Making this webcomic showed us how alternative forms of science communication can stimulate new modes of thinking about the relation between "intimate realities" and "larger social realities", for academics, artists and for wider publics.

While making this webcomic, several things were gained in the translation into a narrative, visual and concrete form. Of the three translations, making the research into a narrative was the most dramatic intervention. It requires most creativity and invention from the artists, and also produced some things that seemed at odds with sociological reasoning. Notably, turning individuals into personifications of "field positions" and quests produced a logic of "the individual versus the system" which sociologists might interpret more as the expression of a certain domi-

nant thought flawed understanding of the social world, rather than an accurate representation of how the world works. Stories foreground agency, with tragic heroes (Daniel) and bad guys (Cecile Swernink of *Vague*) in which individuals are pitted against systems: "structure" comes to look like a large something outside of the individual. Moreover, stories like endings with closure and often a moral undertone, whereas social life is a continuous flow with no particular morality or end point.

The second translation, from textual to visual, was most productive: it led to hard, analytic thinking and debate, for instance in the discussion of how ugly would look, or what sort of visual elements should be foregrounded in characters. It involved thinking on a different plane — with more redundancy and polysemy, and new insights on aesthetics. Partially, this may have to do with the visual nature of the research topic. But it probably is a wider lesson. Thinking in a different sensory modality forces you to think through new things. Thus, the visual form is simultaneously a way to reach different publics and convey different kind of information, and to cast thought processes in a new light.

The third translation, from abstract to concrete, was most similar to other experiences of science communication: speaking to students, journalist or general audiences. It also comes closest to the suggestions of Mills to activate the sociological imagination. It is not a coincidence that in this comic, the sociologist is shown as a teacher, rather than a researcher. This sets the Beauty comic apart from the other ERCcOMICS, with academics in white lab coats, or setting off to faraway countries to make discoveries. Most of the ERCcOMICS were hard sciences or history: disciplines that offer truly new bit of information, and theories and concepts that are hard to grasp. Social science rarely can offer this type of novelty. Science communication for the social sciences is maybe more like pedagogy: to show how actual, concrete events and experiences are couched in larger, abstract, realities. And in doing so, make people recognize how personal troubles — such as concerns about beauty — are really "public issues".

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Theories of Creativity: The Significance of the Insignificant. A Graphic Novel

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Abstract

This graphic novel offers an insight into various theoretical approaches in creativity theory. In their search for approaches that provide the best possible explanation for how ideas come about, the main actors (scientists) of our story encounter a wide variety of allegories (in the form of superheroes) representing creativity theories on a fictitious distant planet. They end up in remote areas and finally encounter theories that, at first glance, cannot make a significant contribution to creativity. These theories are our contributions to the topics of incompleteness, temporal structuring, and trivial objects that we have developed in recent years as part of ethnographic research on creativity in music. The initial assumption that these theories have less explanatory value for the emergence of ideas turns out to be a fallacy in our story.

Keywords: Graphic Novel; Creativity Theories; Temporal Affordance; Trivial Object; Incompleteness.

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Theories of Creativity: The Significance of the Insignificant

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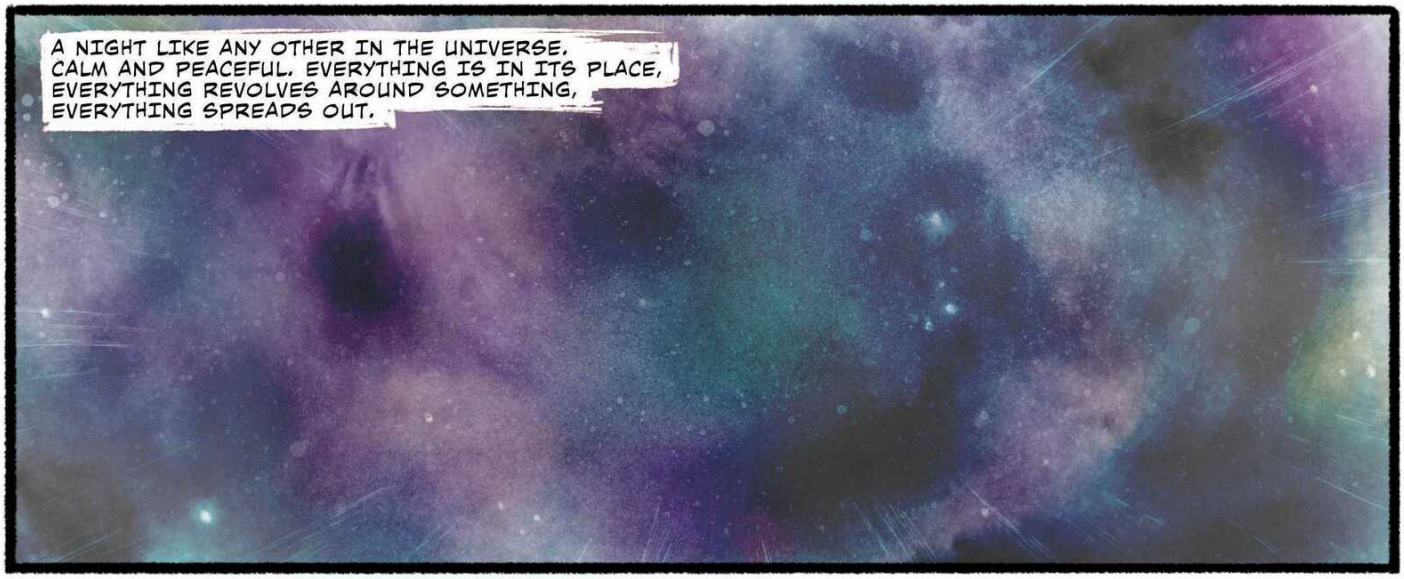
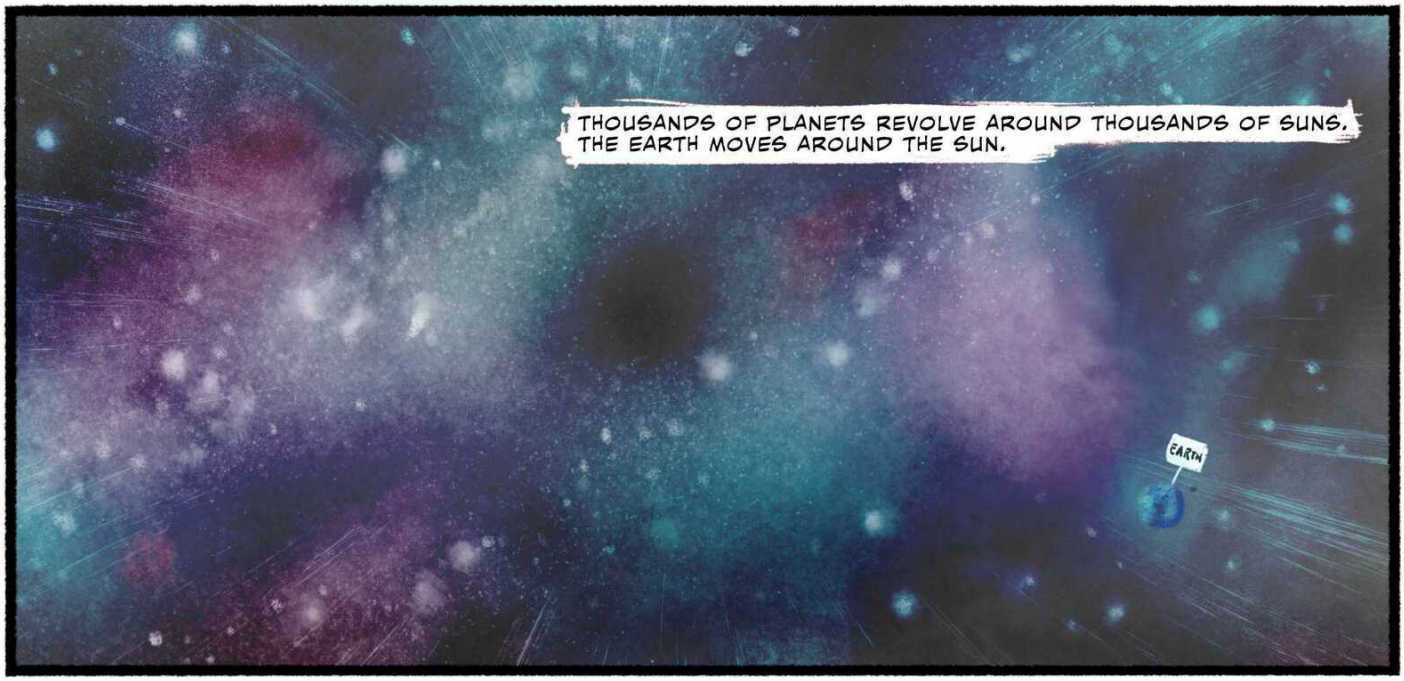
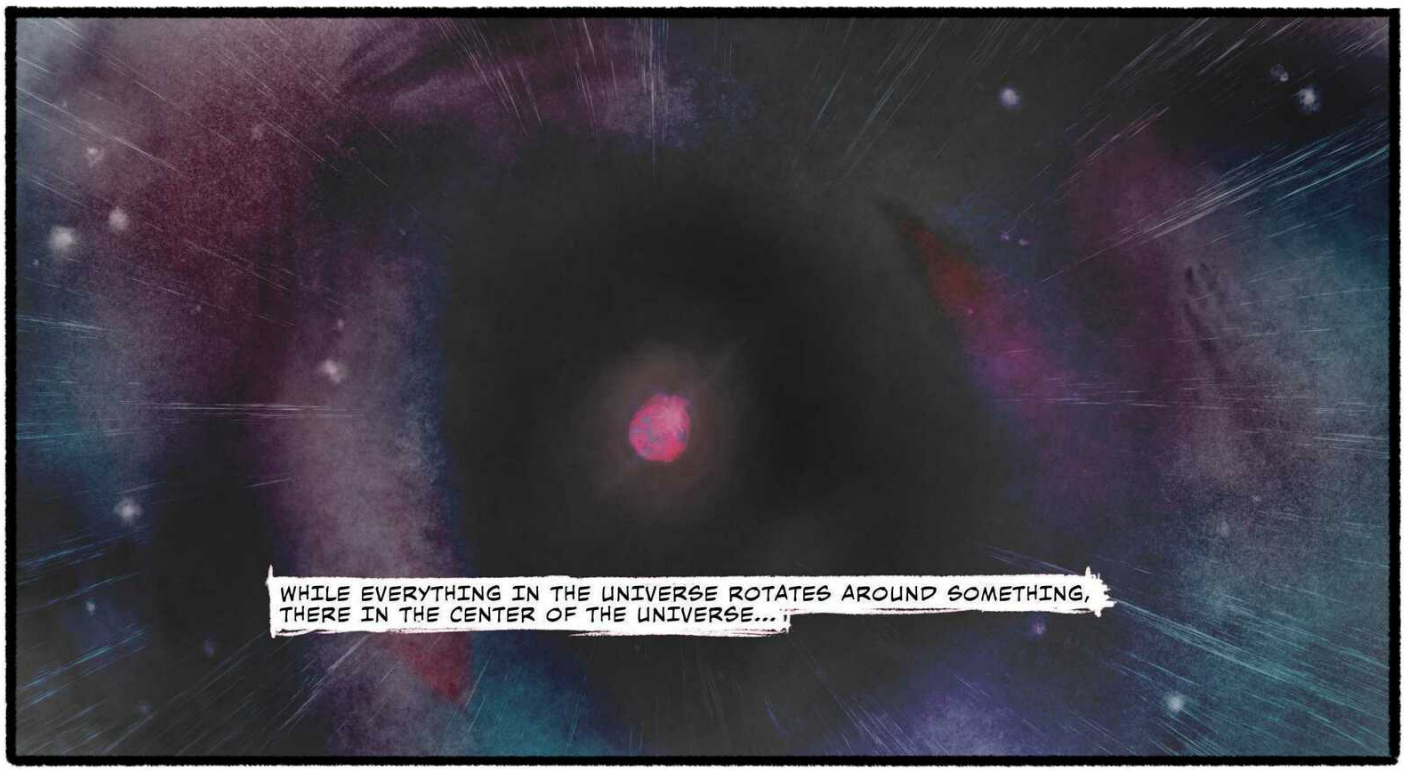
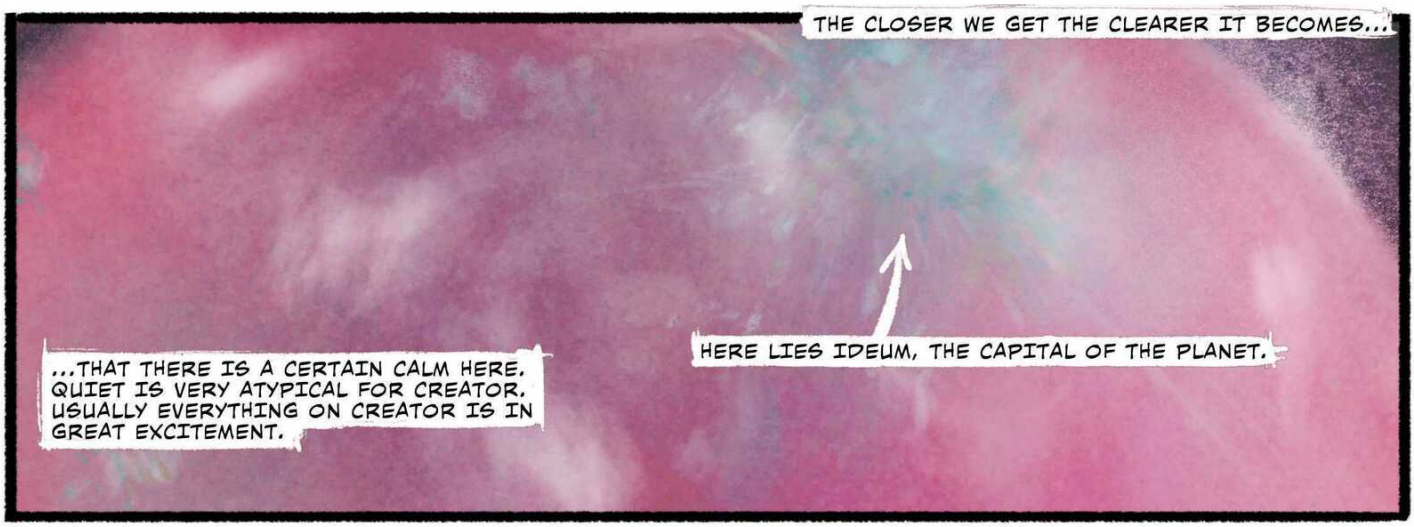
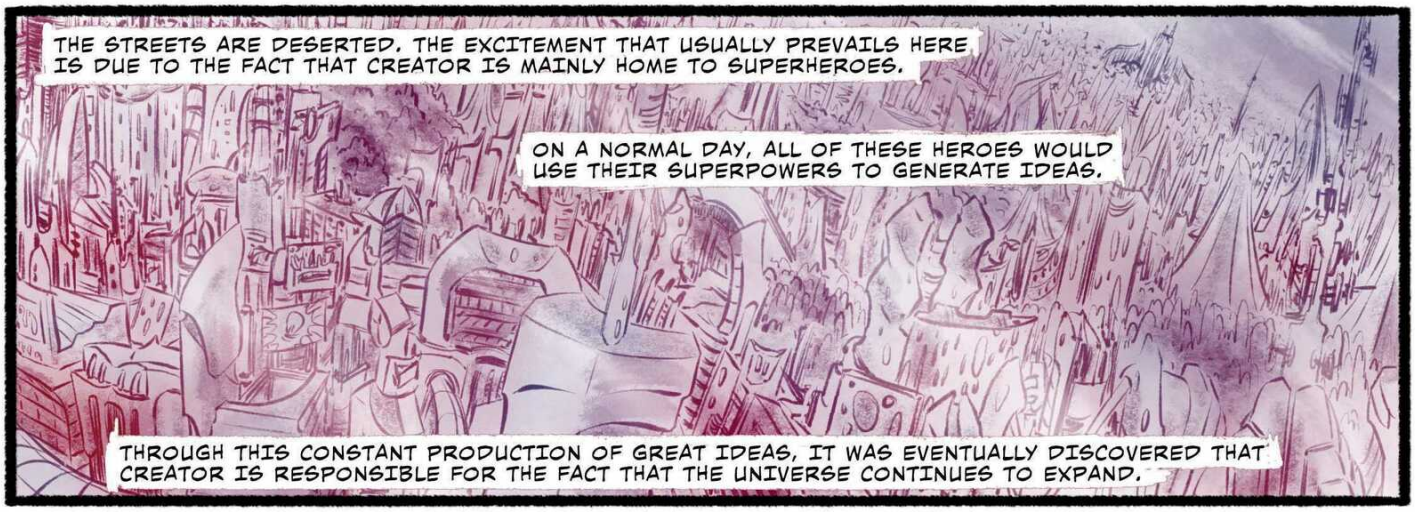

A NIGHT LIKE ANY OTHER IN THE UNIVERSE.
CALM AND PEACEFUL. EVERYTHING IS IN ITS PLACE,
EVERYTHING REVOLVES AROUND SOMETHING,
EVERYTHING SPREADS OUT.


THOUSANDS OF PLANETS REVOLVE AROUND THOUSANDS OF SUNS.
THE EARTH MOVES AROUND THE SUN.
EARTH


WHILE EVERYTHING IN THE UNIVERSE ROTATES AROUND SOMETHING,
THERE IN THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE...

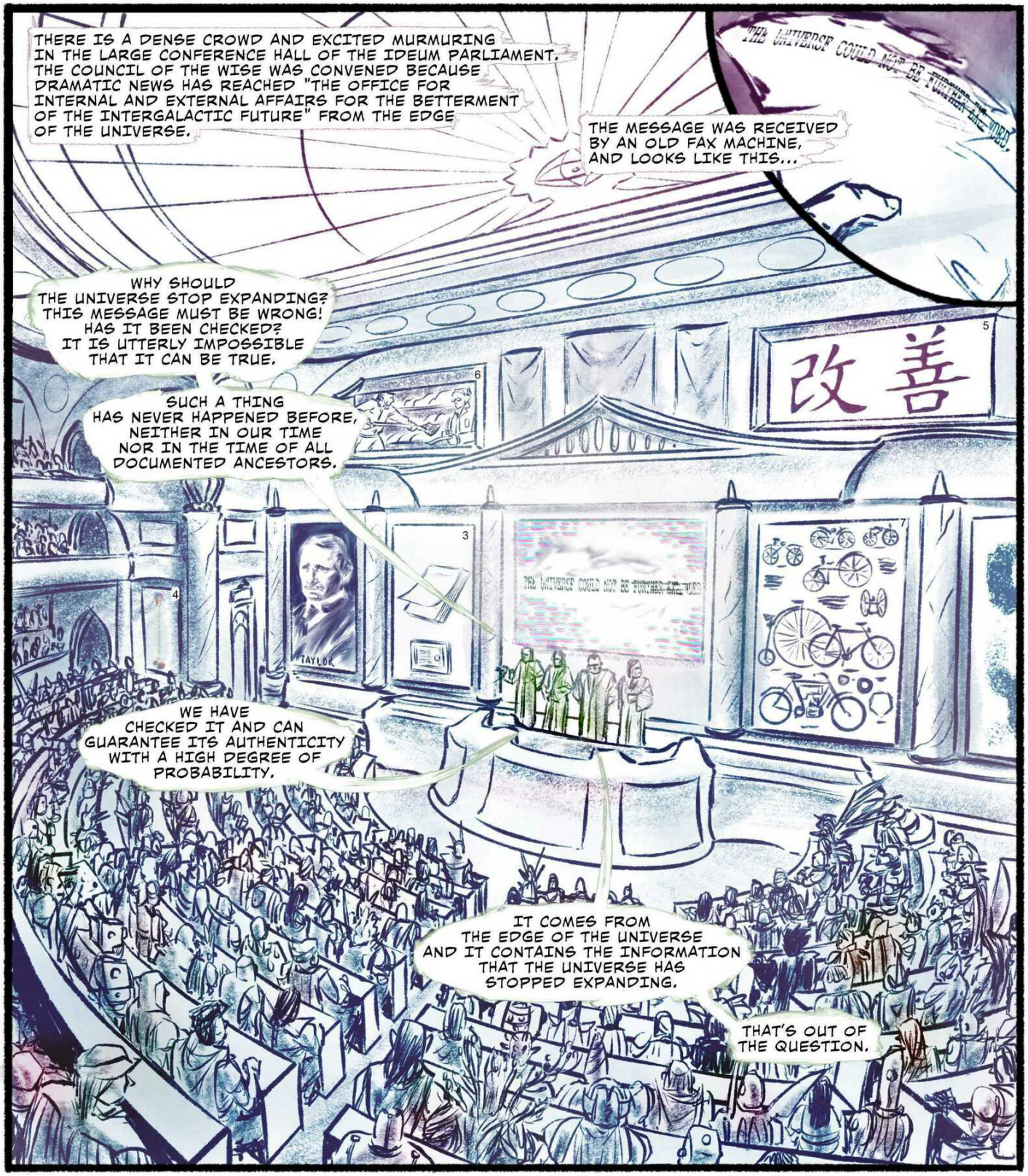

...THE PLANET CREATOR ROTATES ONLY AROUND ITSELF.

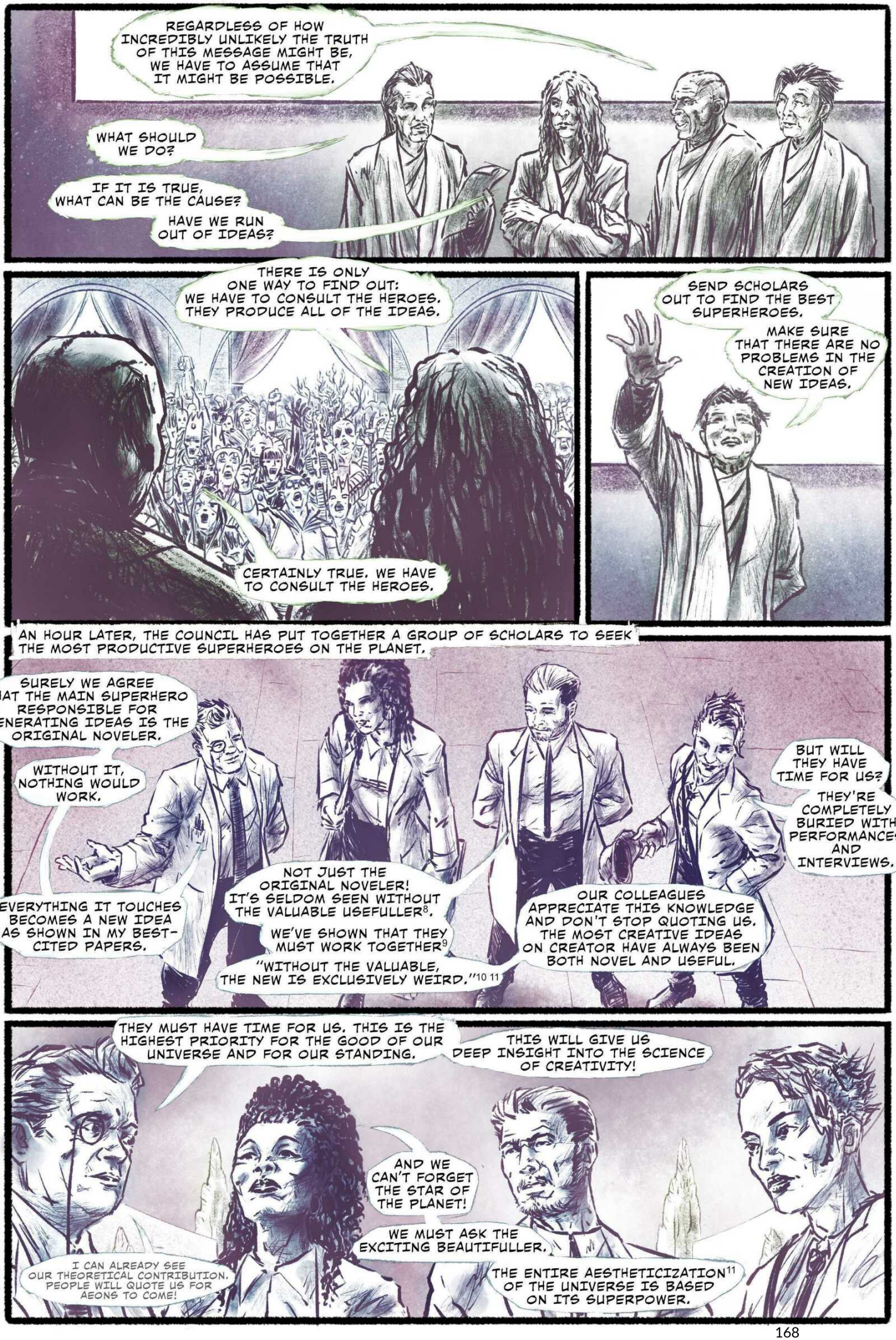

THE CLOSER WE GET THE CLEARER IT BECOMES...
...THAT THERE IS A CERTAIN CALM HERE. QUIET IS VERY ATYPICAL FOR CREATOR. USUALLY EVERYTHING ON CREATOR IS IN GREAT EXCITEMENT.
HERE LIES IDEUM, THE CAPITAL OF THE PLANET.

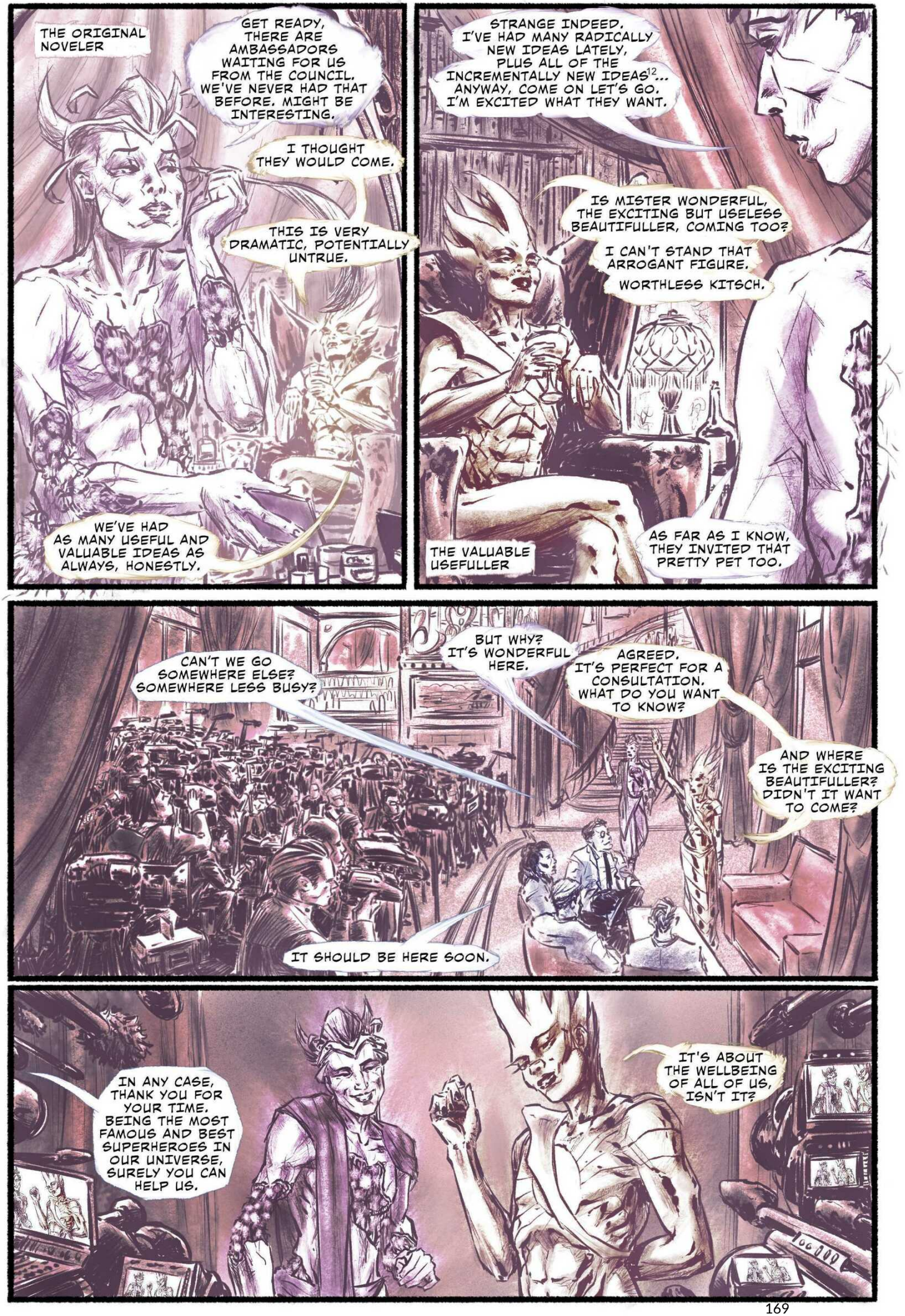

THE STREETS ARE DESERTED. THE EXCITEMENT THAT USUALLY PREVAILS HERE IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT CREATOR IS MAINLY HOME TO SUPERHEROES.
ON A NORMAL DAY, ALL OF THESE HEROES WOULD USE THEIR SUPERPOWERS TO GENERATE IDEAS.
THROUGH THIS CONSTANT PRODUCTION OF GREAT IDEAS, IT WAS EVENTUALLY DISCOVERED THAT CREATOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FACT THAT THE UNIVERSE CONTINUES TO EXPAND.

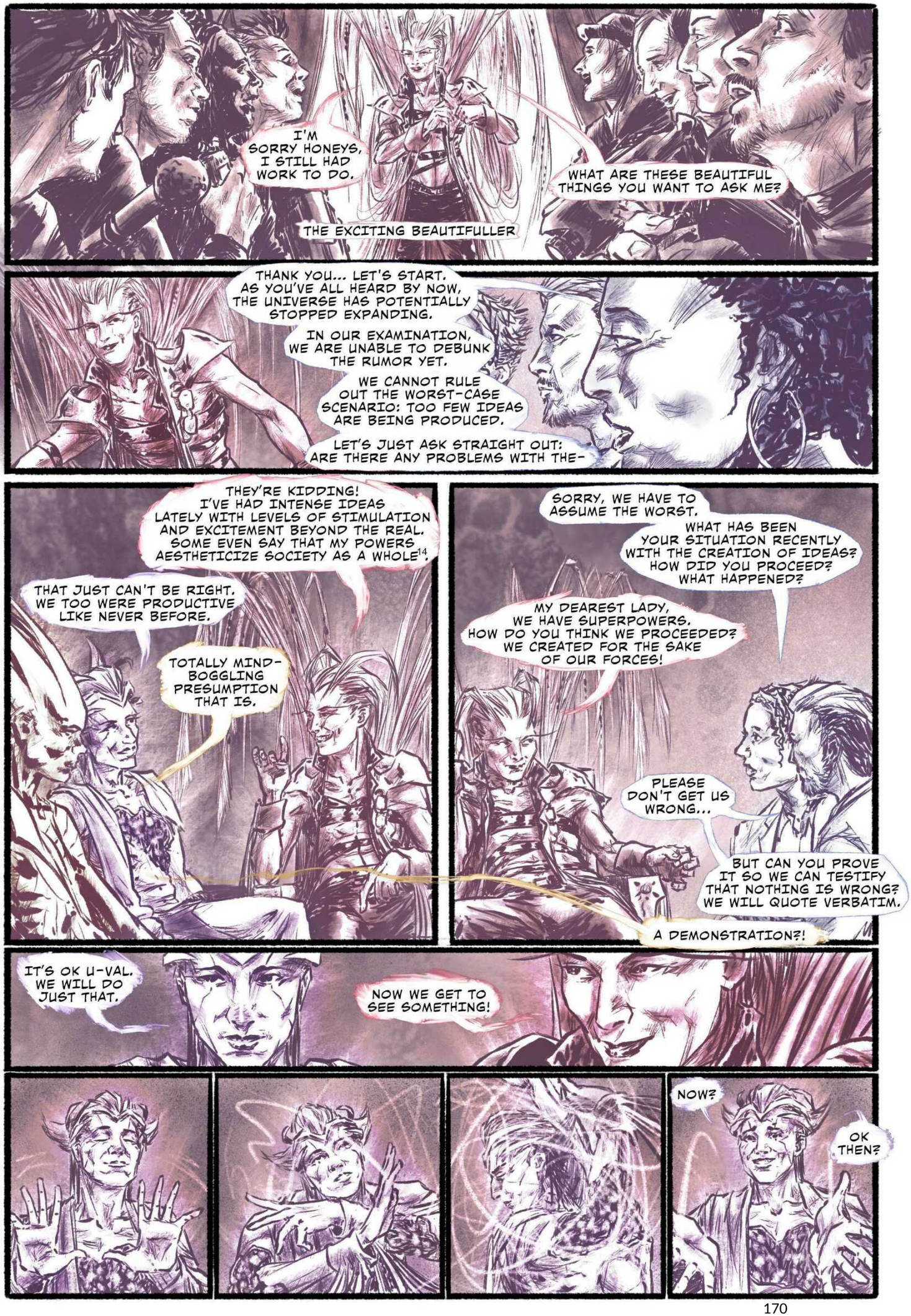

ACCORDING TO POPULAR BELIEF, THE CONSTANT GROWTH OF NEW IDEAS IS NOT ONLY A MATTER OF COURSE, BUT ALSO AN IMPERATIVE[1].
ONLY CONSTANT EXPANSION GUARANTEES THE WELL-BEING AND FREEDOM FROM WORRY OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.
SO THEY SAY[2].

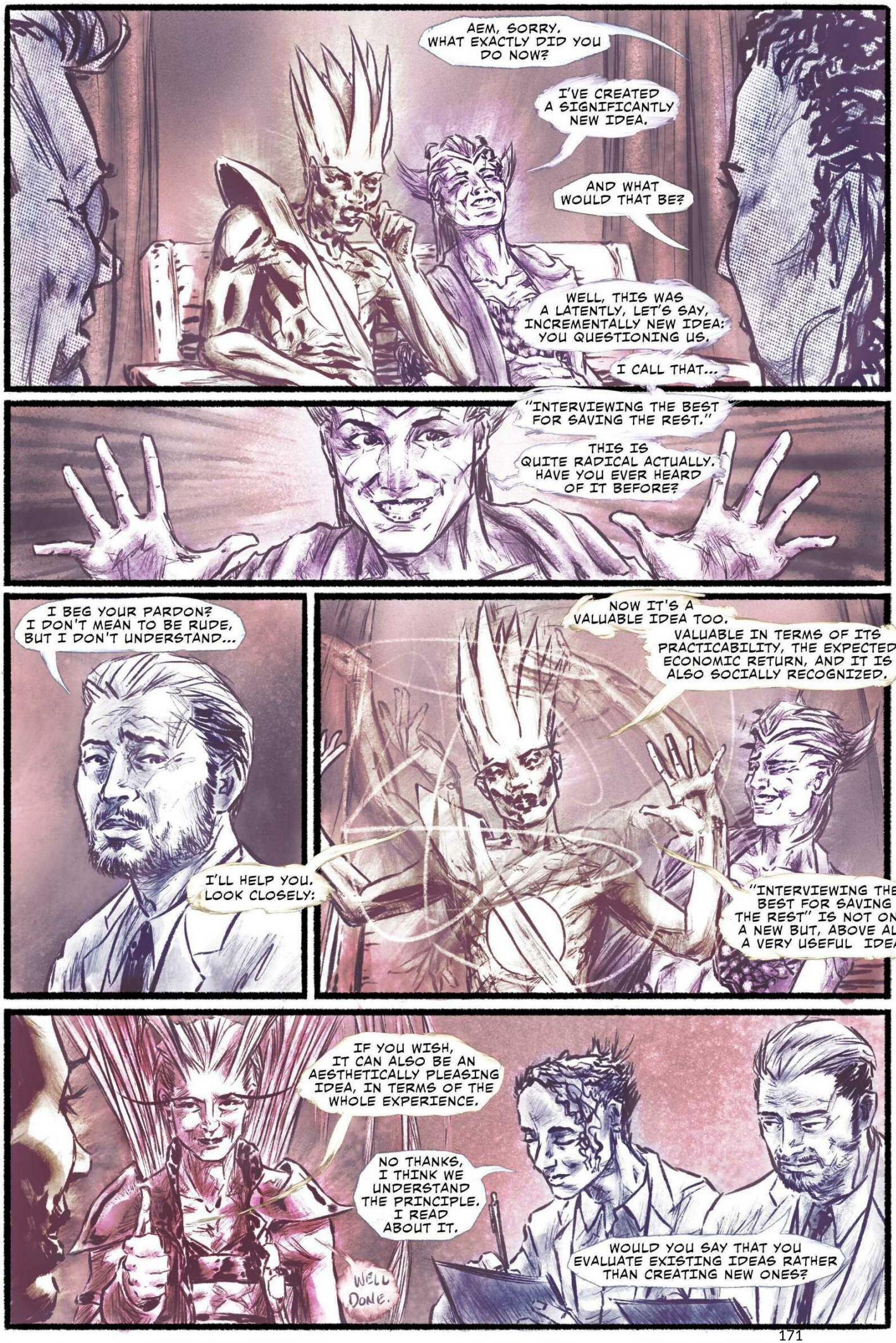

TODAY, SOMETHING DISRUPTED THE NATURAL COURSE OF THINGS ON CREATOR.
EITHER THAT HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE, OR IT HAS BEEN SO LONG THAT NO ONE ON CREATOR CAN REMEMBER IT.

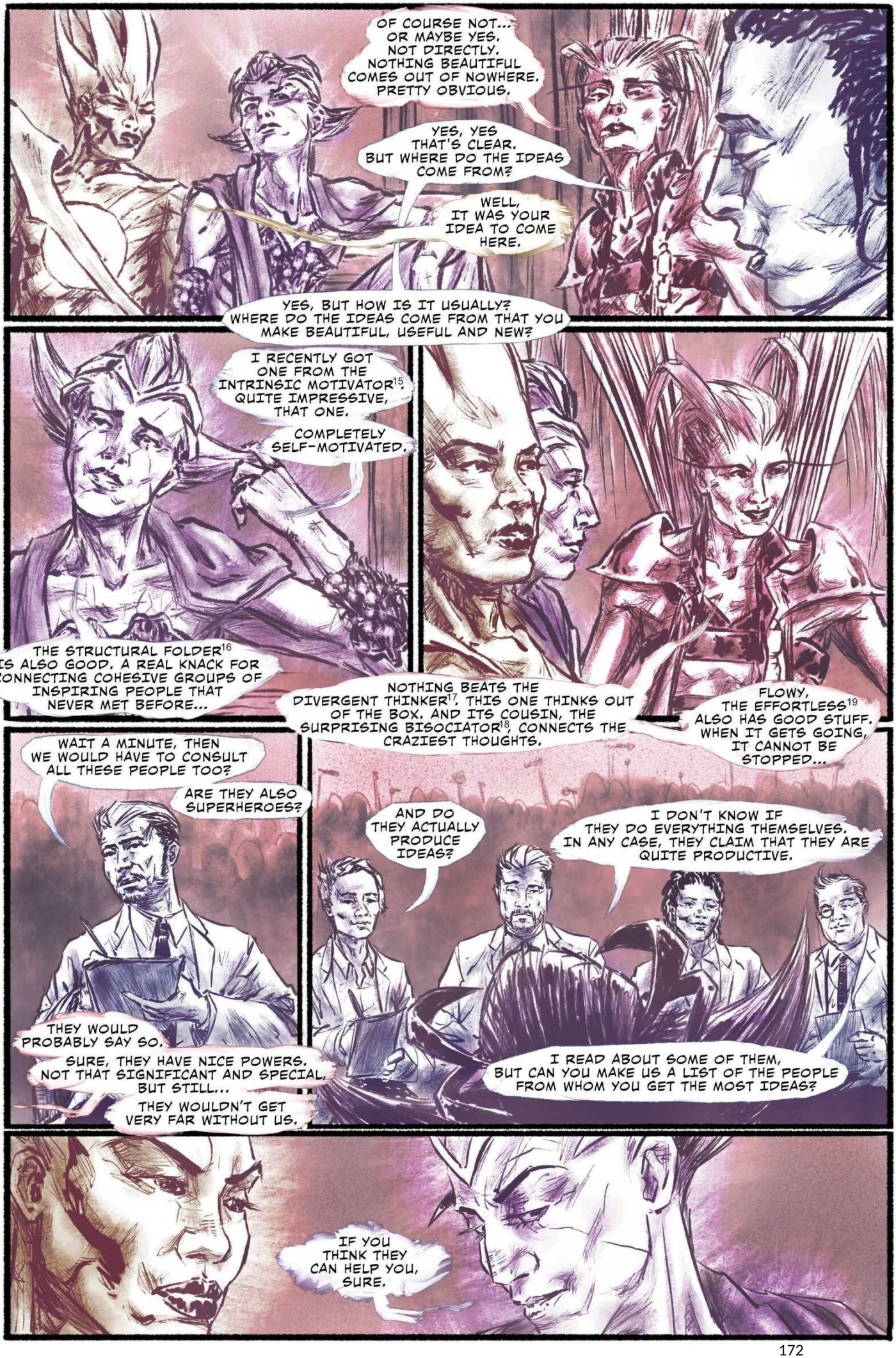

THERE IS A DENSE CROWD AND EXCITED MURMURING IN THE LARGE CONFERENCE HALL OF THE IDEUM PARLIAMENT. THE COUNCIL OF THE WISE WAS CONVENED BECAUSE DRAMATIC NEWS HAS REACHED "THE OFFICE FOR INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE INTERGALACTIC FUTURE" FROM THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE.
THE MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED BY AN OLD FAX MACHINE, AND LOOKS LIKE THIS...
WHY SHOULD THE UNIVERSE STOP EXPANDING? THIS MESSAGE MUST BE WRONG! HAS IT BEEN CHECKED? IT IS UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE THAT IT CAN BE TRUE.
SUCH A THING HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE, NEITHER IN OUR TIME NOR IN THE TIME OF ALL DOCUMENTED ANCESTORS.
WE HAVE CHECKED IT AND CAN GUARANTEE ITS AUTHENTICITY WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF PROBABILITY.
IT COMES FROM THE EDGE OF THE UNIVERSE AND IT CONTAINS THE INFORMATION THAT THE UNIVERSE HAS STOPPED EXPANDING.
THAT'S OUT OF THE QUESTION.
TAYLOR
改善

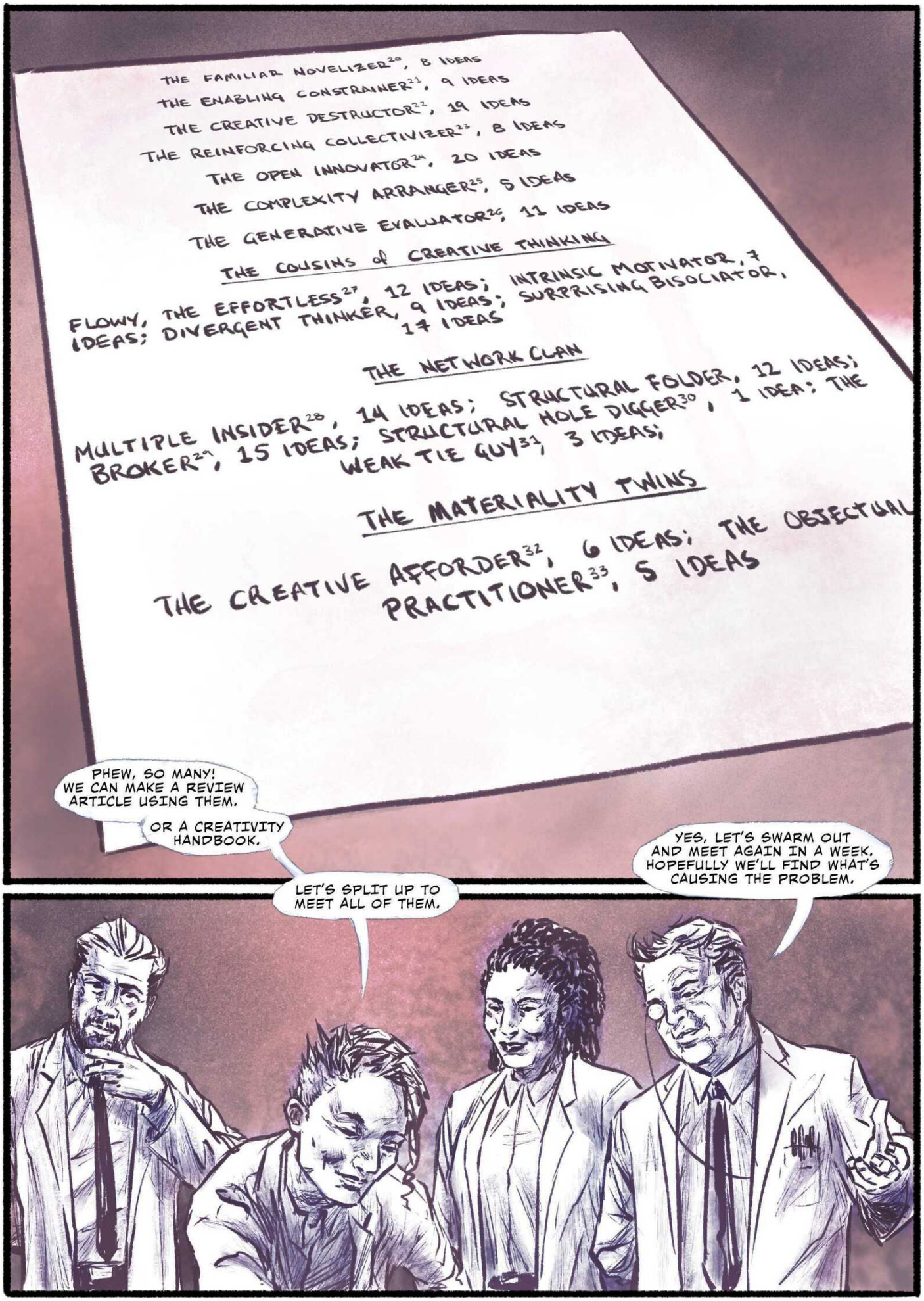

REGARDLESS OF HOW INCREDIBLY UNLIKELY THE TRUTH OF THIS MESSAGE MIGHT BE, WE HAVE TO ASSUME THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE.
WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
IF IT IS TRUE, WHAT CAN BE THE CAUSE?
HAVE WE RUN OUT OF IDEAS?
THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT: WE HAVE TO CONSULT THE HEROES. THEY PRODUCE ALL OF THE IDEAS.
CERTAINLY TRUE. WE HAVE TO CONSULT THE HEROES.
SEND SCHOLARS OUT TO FIND THE BEST SUPERHEROES.
MAKE SURE THAT THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS IN THE CREATION OF NEW IDEAS.
AN HOUR LATER, THE COUNCIL HAS PUT TOGETHER A GROUP OF SCHOLARS TO SEEK THE MOST PRODUCTIVE SUPERHEROES ON THE PLANET.
SURELY WE AGREE THAT THE MAIN SUPERHERO RESPONSIBLE FOR GENERATING IDEAS IS THE ORIGINAL NOVELER.
WITHOUT IT, NOTHING WOULD WORK.
EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES BECOMES A NEW IDEA AS SHOWN IN MY BEST-CITED PAPERS.
NOT JUST THE ORIGINAL NOVELER! IT'S SELDOM SEEN WITHOUT THE VALUABLE USEFULLER[8].
WE'VE SHOWN THAT THEY MUST WORK TOGETHER[9]
"WITHOUT THE VALUABLE, THE NEW IS EXCLUSIVELY WEIRD."[10] [11]
OUR COLLEAGUES APPRECIATE THIS KNOWLEDGE AND DON'T STOP QUOTING US. THE MOST CREATIVE IDEAS ON CREATOR HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BOTH NOVEL AND USEFUL.
BUT WILL THEY HAVE TIME FOR US?
THEY'RE COMPLETELY BURIED WITH PERFORMANCES AND INTERVIEWS.
THEY MUST HAVE TIME FOR US. THIS IS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR THE GOOD OF OUR UNIVERSE AND FOR OUR STANDING.
THIS WILL GIVE US DEEP INSIGHT INTO THE SCIENCE OF CREATIVITY!
I CAN ALREADY SEE OUR THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION. PEOPLE WILL QUOTE US FOR AEONS TO COME!
AND WE CAN'T FORGET THE STAR OF THE PLANET!
WE MUST ASK THE EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER.
THE ENTIRE AESTHETICIZATION[11] OF THE UNIVERSE IS BASED ON ITS SUPERPOWER.


THE ORIGINAL NOVELER
GET READY, THERE ARE AMBASSADORS WAITING FOR US FROM THE COUNCIL. WE'VE NEVER HAD THAT BEFORE. MIGHT BE INTERESTING.
I THOUGHT THEY WOULD COME.
THIS IS VERY DRAMATIC, POTENTIALLY UNTRUE.
WE'VE HAD AS MANY USEFUL AND VALUABLE IDEAS AS ALWAYS, HONESTLY.
STRANGE INDEED. I'VE HAD MANY RADICALLY NEW IDEAS LATELY, PLUS ALL OF THE INCREMENTALLY NEW IDEAS[12]... ANYWAY, COME ON LET'S GO. I'M EXCITED WHAT THEY WANT.
IS MISTER WONDERFUL, THE EXCITING BUT USELESS BEAUTIFULLER, COMING TOO?
I CAN'T STAND THAT ARROGANT FIGURE.
WORTHLESS KITSCH.
THE VALUABLE USEFULLER
AS FAR AS I KNOW, THEY INVITED THAT PRETTY PET TOO.
CAN'T WE GO SOMEWHERE ELSE? SOMEWHERE LESS BUSY?
BUT WHY? IT'S WONDERFUL HERE.
AGREED. IT'S PERFECT FOR A CONSULTATION. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?
AND WHERE IS THE EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER? DIDN'T IT WANT TO COME?
IT SHOULD BE HERE SOON.
IN ANY CASE, THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. BEING THE MOST FAMOUS AND BEST SUPERHEROES IN OUR UNIVERSE, SURELY YOU CAN HELP US.
IT'S ABOUT THE WELLBEING OF ALL OF US, ISN'T IT?

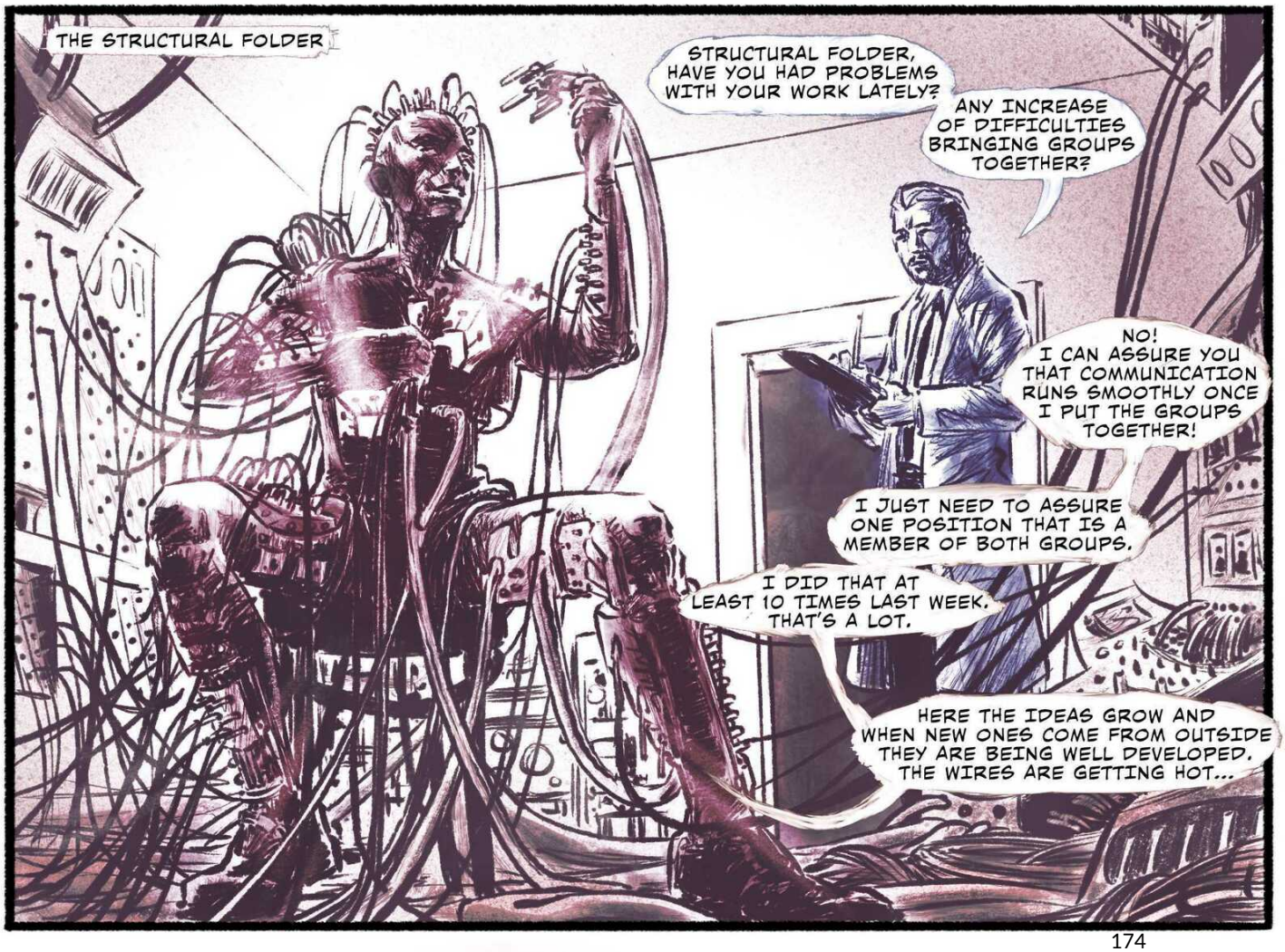

I'M SORRY HONEYS, I STILL HAD WORK TO DO.
THE EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER
WHAT ARE THESE BEAUTIFUL THINGS YOU WANT TO ASK ME?
THANK YOU... LET'S START. AS YOU'VE ALL HEARD BY NOW, THE UNIVERSE HAS POTENTIALLY STOPPED EXPANDING.
IN OUR EXAMINATION, WE ARE UNABLE TO DEBUNK THE RUMOR YET.
WE CANNOT RULE OUT THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO: TOO FEW IDEAS ARE BEING PRODUCED.
LET'S JUST ASK STRAIGHT OUT: ARE THERE ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE-
THEY'RE KIDDING! I'VE HAD INTENSE IDEAS LATELY WITH LEVELS OF STIMULATION AND EXCITEMENT BEYOND THE REAL. SOME EVEN SAY THAT MY POWERS AESTHETICIZE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE[14].
THAT JUST CAN'T BE RIGHT. WE TOO WERE PRODUCTIVE LIKE NEVER BEFORE.
TOTALLY MIND-BOGGLING PRESUMPTION THAT IS.
SORRY, WE HAVE TO ASSUME THE WORST.
WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR SITUATION RECENTLY WITH THE CREATION OF IDEAS? HOW DID YOU PROCEED? WHAT HAPPENED?
MY DEAREST LADY, WE HAVE SUPERPOWERS. HOW DO YOU THINK WE PROCEEDED? WE CREATED FOR THE SAKE OF OUR FORCES!
PLEASE DON'T GET US WRONG...
BUT CAN YOU PROVE IT SO WE CAN TESTIFY THAT NOTHING IS WRONG? WE WILL QUOTE VERBATIM.
A DEMONSTRATION?!
IT'S OK U-VAL. WE WILL DO JUST THAT.
NOW WE GET TO SEE SOMETHING!
NOW?
OK THEN?

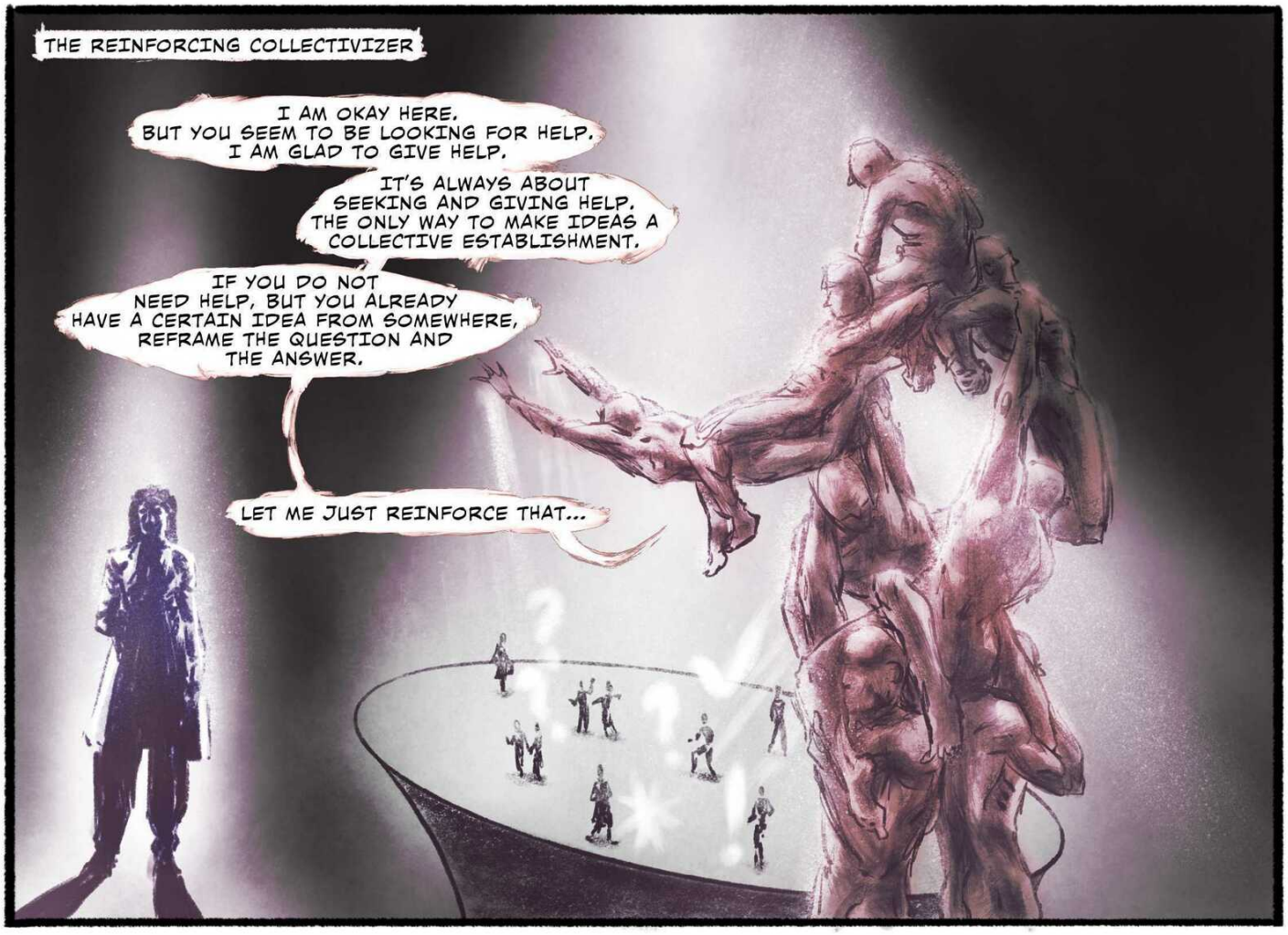

AEM, SORRY. WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU DO NOW?
I'VE CREATED A SIGNIFICANTLY NEW IDEA.
AND WHAT WOULD THAT BE?
WELL, THIS WAS A LATENTLY, LET'S SAY, INCREMENTALLY NEW IDEA: YOU QUESTIONING US.
I CALL THAT...
"INTERVIEWING THE BEST FOR SAVING THE REST."
THIS IS QUITE RADICAL ACTUALLY. HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF IT BEFORE?
I BEG YOUR PARDON? I DON'T MEAN TO BE RUDE, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND...
I'LL HELP YOU. LOOK CLOSELY:
NOW IT'S A VALUABLE IDEA TOO.
VALUABLE IN TERMS OF ITS PRACTICABILITY, THE EXPECTED ECONOMIC RETURN, AND IT IS ALSO SOCIALLY RECOGNIZED.
"INTERVIEWING THE BEST FOR SAVING THE REST" IS NOT ONLY A NEW BUT, ABOVE ALL, A VERY USEFUL IDEA.
IF YOU WISH, IT CAN ALSO BE AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING IDEA, IN TERMS OF THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE.
NO THANKS, I THINK WE UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLE. I READ ABOUT IT.
WELL DONE.
WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU EVALUATE EXISTING IDEAS RATHER THAN CREATING NEW ONES?


OF COURSE NOT... OR MAYBE YES. NOT DIRECTLY. NOTHING BEAUTIFUL COMES OUT OF NOWHERE. PRETTY OBVIOUS.
YES, YES THAT'S CLEAR. BUT WHERE DO THE IDEAS COME FROM?
WELL, IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO COME HERE.
YES, BUT HOW IS IT USUALLY? WHERE DO THE IDEAS COME FROM THAT YOU MAKE BEAUTIFUL, USEFUL AND NEW?
I RECENTLY GOT ONE FROM THE INTRINSIC MOTIVATOR[15]. QUITE IMPRESSIVE, THAT ONE.
COMPLETELY SELF-MOTIVATED.
THE STRUCTURAL FOLDER[16] IS ALSO GOOD. A REAL KNACK FOR CONNECTING COHESIVE GROUPS OF INSPIRING PEOPLE THAT NEVER MET BEFORE...
NOTHING BEATS THE DIVERGENT THINKER[17]. THIS ONE THINKS OUT OF THE BOX. AND ITS COUSIN, THE SURPRISING BISOCIATOR[18], CONNECTS THE CRAZIEST THOUGHTS.
FLOWY, THE EFFORTLESS[19] ALSO HAS GOOD STUFF. WHEN IT GETS GOING, IT CANNOT BE STOPPED...
WAIT A MINUTE, THEN WE WOULD HAVE TO CONSULT ALL THESE PEOPLE TOO?
ARE THEY ALSO SUPERHEROES?
AND DO THEY ACTUALLY PRODUCE IDEAS?
I DON'T KNOW IF THEY DO EVERYTHING THEMSELVES. IN ANY CASE, THEY CLAIM THAT THEY ARE QUITE PRODUCTIVE.
THEY WOULD PROBABLY SAY SO.
SURE, THEY HAVE NICE POWERS. NOT THAT SIGNIFICANT AND SPECIAL, BUT STILL...
THEY WOULDN'T GET VERY FAR WITHOUT US.
I READ ABOUT SOME OF THEM, BUT CAN YOU MAKE US A LIST OF THE PEOPLE FROM WHOM YOU GET THE MOST IDEAS?
IF YOU THINK THEY CAN HELP YOU, SURE.

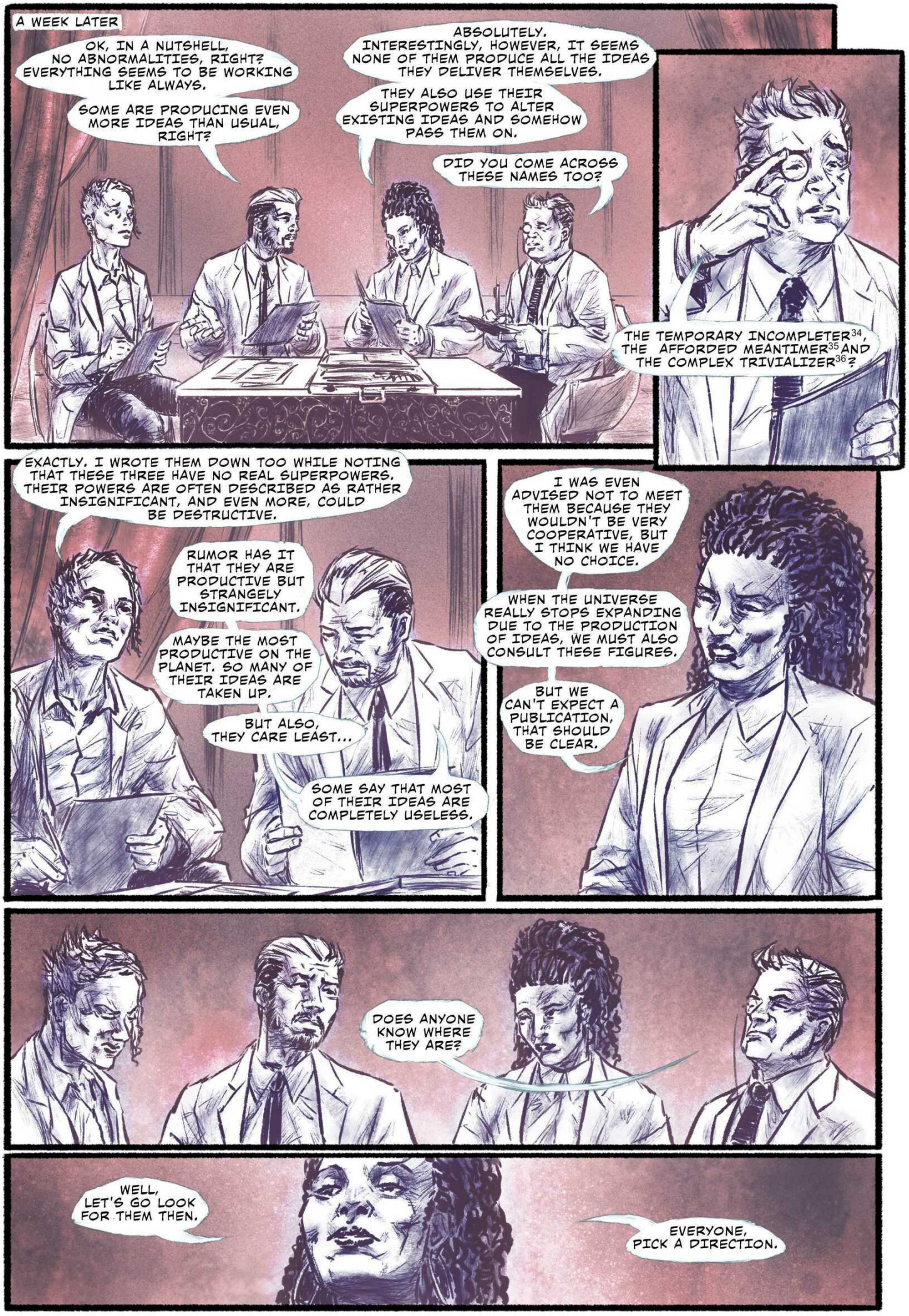

THE FAMILIAR NOVELIZER[20], 8 IDEAS
THE ENABLING CONSTRAINER[21], 9 IDEAS
THE CREATIVE DESTRUCTOR[22], 19 IDEAS
THE REINFORCING COLLECTIVIZER[23], 8 IDEAS
THE OPEN INNOVATOR[24], 20 IDEAS
THE COMPLEXITY ARRANGER[25], 5 IDEAS
THE GENERATIVE EVALUATOR[26], 11 IDEAS
THE COUSINS of CREATIVE THINKING
FLOWY, THE EFFORTLESS[27], 12 IDEAS; INTRINSIC MOTIVATOR, 7 IDEAS; DIVERGENT THINKER, 9 IDEAS; SURPRISING BISOCIATOR, 14 IDEAS
THE NETWORK CLAN
MULTIPLE INSIDER[28], 14 IDEAS; STRUCTURAL FOLDER, 12 IDEAS; BROKER[29], 15 IDEAS; STRUCTURAL HOLE DIGGER[30], 1 IDEA; THE WEAK TIE GUY[31], 3 IDEAS;
THE MATERIALITY TWINS
THE CREATIVE AFFORDER[32], 6 IDEAS; THE OBJECTUAL PRACTITIONER[33], 5 IDEAS
PHEW, SO MANY! WE CAN MAKE A REVIEW ARTICLE USING THEM.
OR A CREATIVITY HANDBOOK.
LET'S SPLIT UP TO MEET ALL OF THEM.
YES, LET'S SWARM OUT AND MEET AGAIN IN A WEEK. HOPEFULLY WE'LL FIND WHAT'S CAUSING THE PROBLEM.

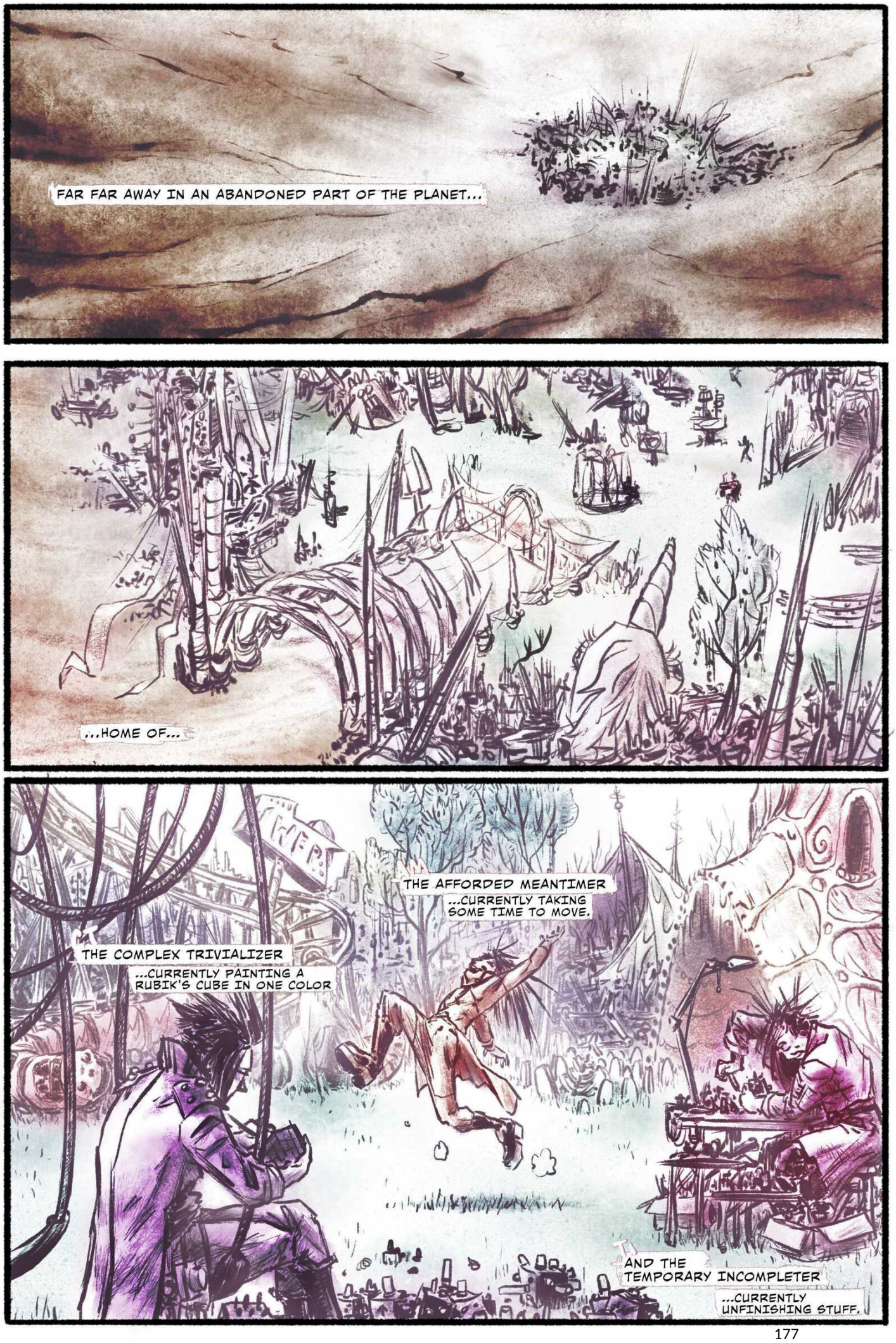

FLOWY, THE EFFORTLESS
FLOWY, HAVE YOU NOTICED ANYTHING UNUSUAL WITH THE PRODUCTION OF NEW IDEAS LATELY?
NOT REALLY. EVERYTHING AS ALWAYS, I KEEP IT EXACTLY BETWEEN VERY BORING AND SUPER OVERWHELMING.
MY IDEAS KEEP COMING FROM INSIDE AND OUT.
THAT'S THE FLOW MY FRIEND. KEEP IT GOING...

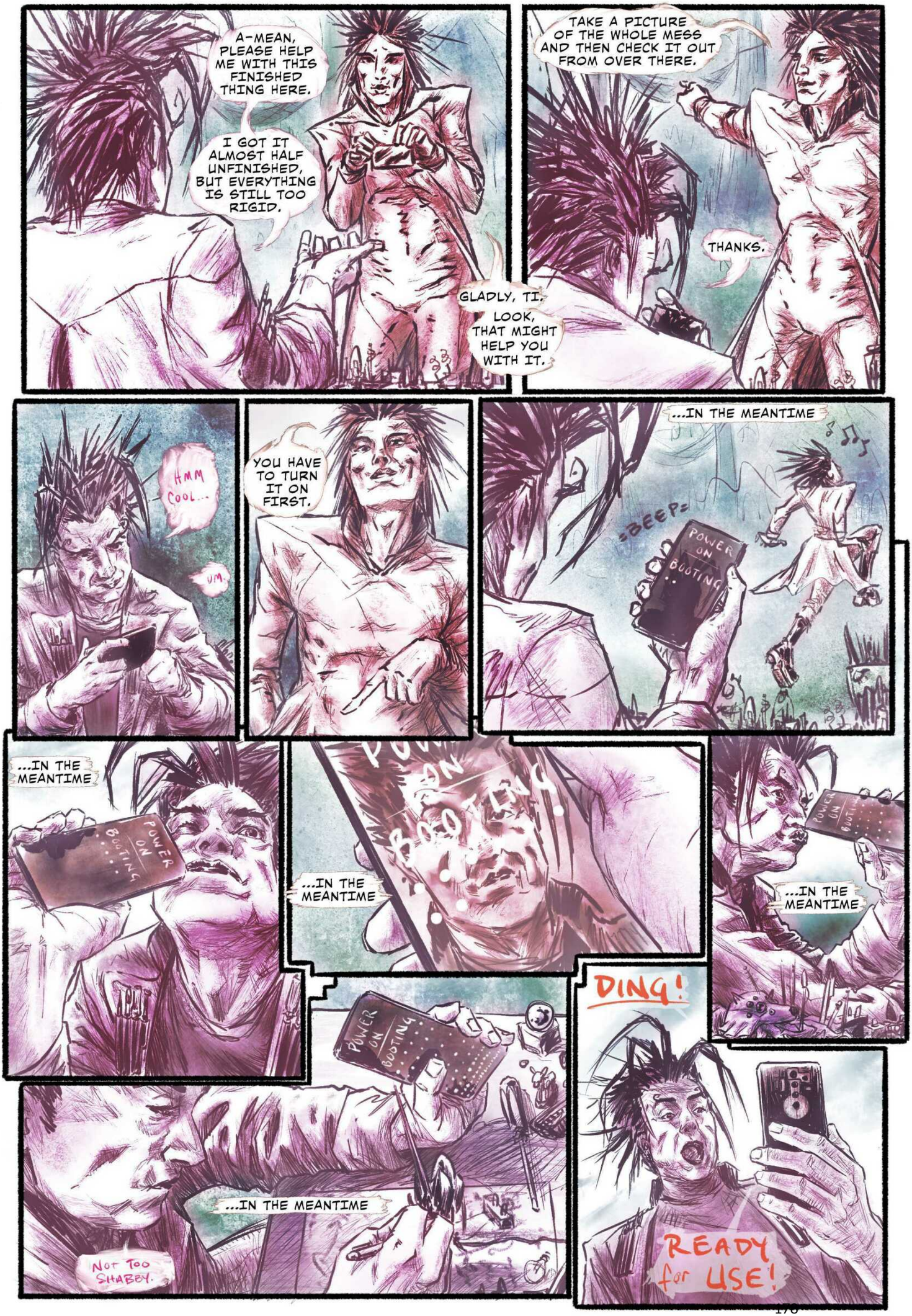

THE STRUCTURAL FOLDER
STRUCTURAL FOLDER, HAVE YOU HAD PROBLEMS WITH YOUR WORK LATELY?
ANY INCREASE OF DIFFICULTIES BRINGING GROUPS TOGETHER?
NO! I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT COMMUNICATION RUNS SMOOTHLY ONCE I PUT THE GROUPS TOGETHER!
I JUST NEED TO ASSURE ONE POSITION THAT IS A MEMBER OF BOTH GROUPS.
I DID THAT AT LEAST 10 TIMES LAST WEEK. THAT'S A LOT.
HERE THE IDEAS GROW AND WHEN NEW ONES COME FROM OUTSIDE THEY ARE BEING WELL DEVELOPED. THE WIRES ARE GETTING HOT...


THE REINFORCING COLLECTIVIZER
I AM OKAY HERE. BUT YOU SEEM TO BE LOOKING FOR HELP. I AM GLAD TO GIVE HELP.
IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT SEEKING AND GIVING HELP. THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE IDEAS A COLLECTIVE ESTABLISHMENT.
IF YOU DO NOT NEED HELP, BUT YOU ALREADY HAVE A CERTAIN IDEA FROM SOMEWHERE, REFRAME THE QUESTION AND THE ANSWER.
LET ME JUST REINFORCE THAT...


THE OPEN INNOVATOR
YES, EVERYTHING IS OKAY. JUST OPENED A LOT OF DOORS AGAIN. IT'S ABOUT THE LOCUS OF INNOVATION. IT'S NOT IN HERE.
IT'S SPREAD ALL OVER THESE ROOMS.
LET ME JUST OPEN THIS DOOR. THEN WE WILL GET A BUNCH OF NEW IDEAS BELONGING TO NOBODY SPECIFICALLY.
YOU WILL SEE...


A WEEK LATER
OK, IN A NUTSHELL, NO ABNORMALITIES, RIGHT? EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE WORKING LIKE ALWAYS.
SOME ARE PRODUCING EVEN MORE IDEAS THAN USUAL, RIGHT?
ABSOLUTELY. INTERESTINGLY, HOWEVER, IT SEEMS NONE OF THEM PRODUCE ALL THE IDEAS THEY DELIVER THEMSELVES.
THEY ALSO USE THEIR SUPERPOWERS TO ALTER EXISTING IDEAS AND SOMEHOW PASS THEM ON.
DID YOU COME ACROSS THESE NAMES TOO?
THE TEMPORARY INCOMPLETER[34], THE AFFORDED MEANTIMER[35] AND THE COMPLEX TRIVIALIZER[36]?
EXACTLY. I WROTE THEM DOWN TOO WHILE NOTING THAT THESE THREE HAVE NO REAL SUPERPOWERS. THEIR POWERS ARE OFTEN DESCRIBED AS RATHER INSIGNIFICANT, AND EVEN MORE, COULD BE DESTRUCTIVE.
RUMOR HAS IT THAT THEY ARE PRODUCTIVE BUT STRANGELY INSIGNIFICANT.
MAYBE THE MOST PRODUCTIVE ON THE PLANET. SO MANY OF THEIR IDEAS ARE TAKEN UP.
BUT ALSO, THEY CARE LEAST...
SOME SAY THAT MOST OF THEIR IDEAS ARE COMPLETELY USELESS.
I WAS EVEN ADVISED NOT TO MEET THEM BECAUSE THEY WOULDN'T BE VERY COOPERATIVE, BUT I THINK WE HAVE NO CHOICE.
WHEN THE UNIVERSE REALLY STOPS EXPANDING DUE TO THE PRODUCTION OF IDEAS, WE MUST ALSO CONSULT THESE FIGURES.
BUT WE CAN'T EXPECT A PUBLICATION, THAT SHOULD BE CLEAR.
DOES ANYONE KNOW WHERE THEY ARE?
WELL, LET'S GO LOOK FOR THEM THEN.
EVERYONE, PICK A DIRECTION.


FAR FAR AWAY IN AN ABANDONED PART OF THE PLANET...
...HOME OF...
THE AFFORDED MEANTIMER
...CURRENTLY TAKING SOME TIME TO MOVE.
THE COMPLEX TRIVIALIZER
...CURRENTLY PAINTING A RUBIK'S CUBE IN ONE COLOR
AND THE TEMPORARY INCOMPLETER
...CURRENTLY UNFINISHING STUFF.

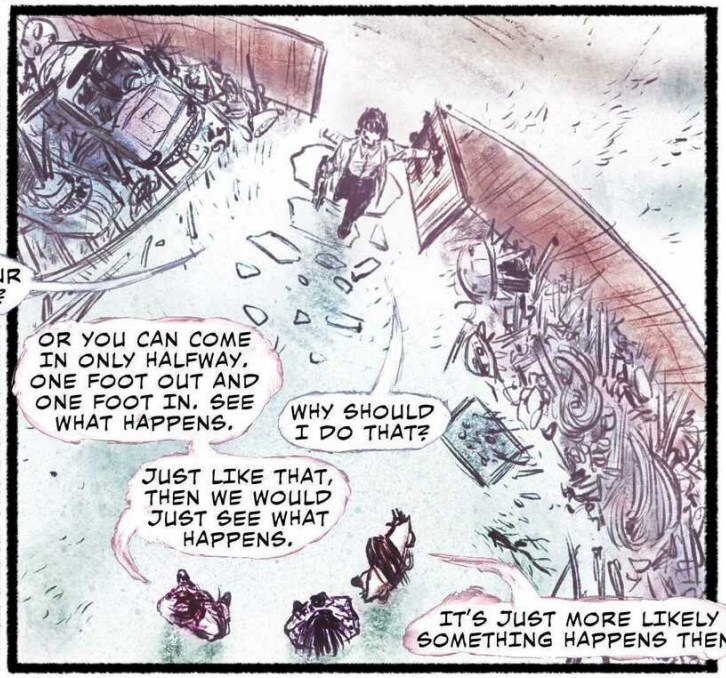

A-MEAN, PLEASE HELP ME WITH THIS FINISHED THING HERE.
I GOT IT ALMOST HALF UNFINISHED, BUT EVERYTHING IS STILL TOO RIGID.
TAKE A PICTURE OF THE WHOLE MESS AND THEN CHECK IT OUT FROM OVER THERE.
THANKS.
GLADLY, TI.
LOOK, THAT MIGHT HELP YOU WITH IT.
HMM COOL...
UM.
YOU HAVE TO TURN IT ON FIRST.
...IN THE MEANTIME
=BEEP=
POWER ON
BOOTING
...IN THE MEANTIME
POWER ON BOOTING
...IN THE MEANTIME
...IN THE MEANTIME
POWER ON BOOTING
...IN THE MEANTIME
DING!
READY for USE!
NOT TOO SHABBY.


PEOPLE, PEOPLE, I HAVE INVENTED A NEW BUTTON!
LOOK, IF YOU PRESS IT, THEN YOU CAN EASILY.....
YEAH, WHAT THEN?
AEM, THEN SOMETHING HAPPENS.
EXCITING. DOES IT TAKE TIME FOR IT TO HAPPEN?
HM, NO I DON'T THINK SO.
TOO BAD. DO IT.
OK.
BEEP!
In Is Maybe Out.
AUAUAU
AUAUAU
OHLALA!
ALARM
I DO NOT KNOW IF THAT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH MY BUTTON. BUT MAYBE...
AU AUAU
AUAUAUAU
ALARM
I THINK SOMEONE IS COMING.

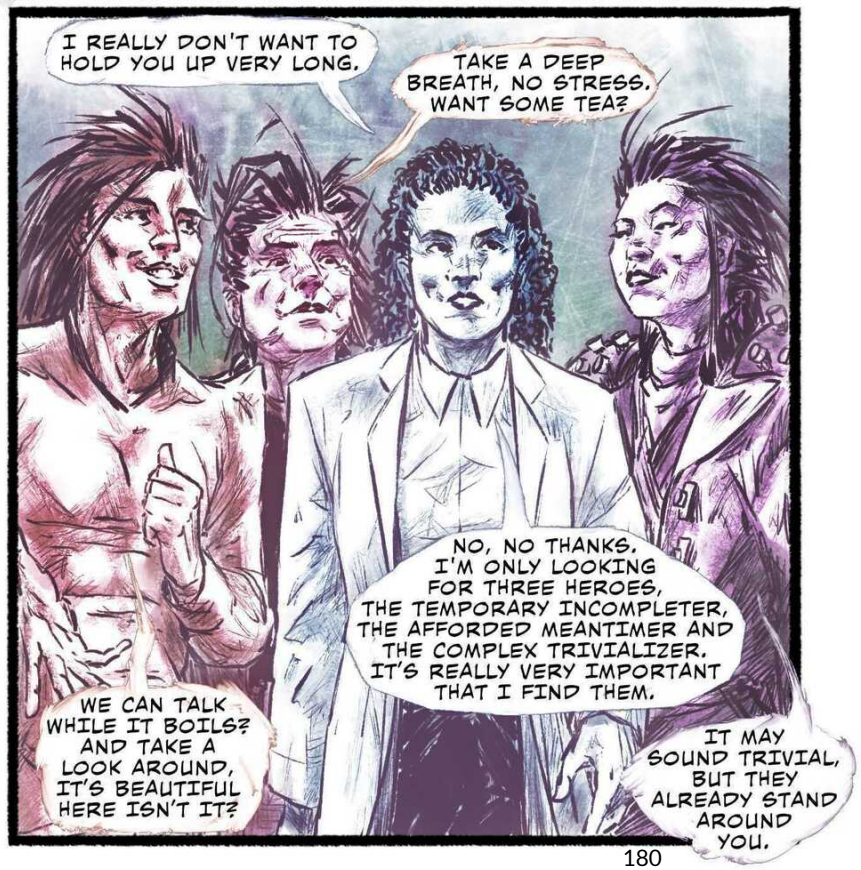

EXCUSE ME FOR DISTURBING YOU, MAY I ENTER BRIEFLY?
BRIEFLY? TAKE YOUR TIME.
ENTER? VERY EASILY!

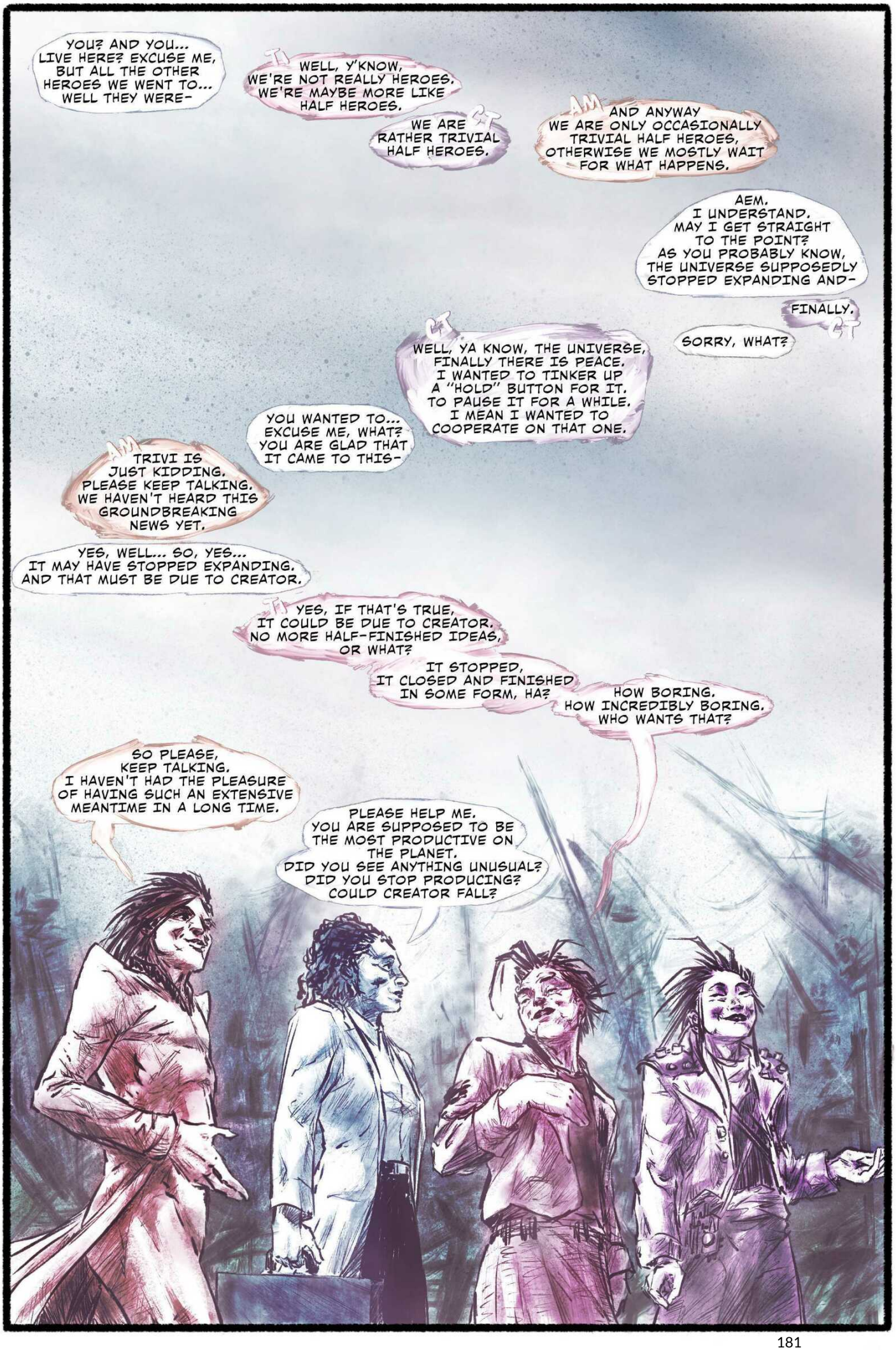

PRESS THE BUTTON TO THE RIGHT OF THE DOOR. THEN YOU MIGHT GET IN. IF IT WORKS.
YOU WILL ALSO GET OUT AFTERWARDS. IF IT WORKS. AND YOU MIGHT BE ENABLED TO DO SOMETHING ELSE TOO.


I BEG YOUR PARDON?

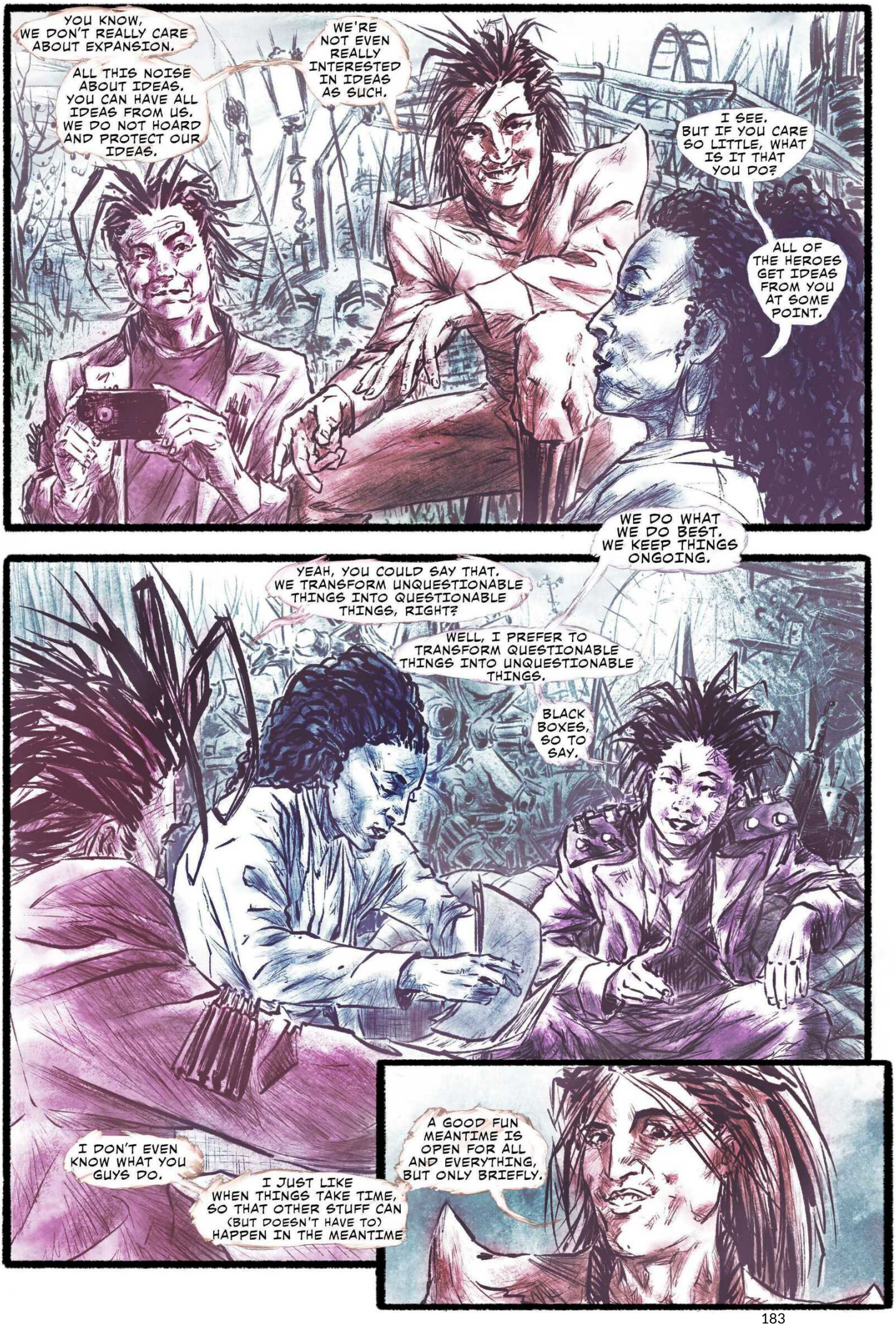

OR YOU CAN COME IN ONLY HALFWAY. ONE FOOT OUT AND ONE FOOT IN. SEE WHAT HAPPENS.
WHY SHOULD I DO THAT?
JUST LIKE THAT, THEN WE WOULD JUST SEE WHAT HAPPENS.
IT'S JUST MORE LIKELY SOMETHING HAPPENS THEN.


AEM, I DON'T UNDERSTAND. ARE YOU KIDDING? MAY I ENTER? I HAVE IMPORTANT SCIENTIFIC THINGS TO TALK ABOUT. IT AFFECTS US ALL.
YES, PLEASE COME IN.
DID YOU HEAR THAT ER'YBADY? DISCUSS SCIENTIFIC MATTERS! THAT WILL CERTAINLY TAKE A LONG TIME! A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN THE MEANTIME.

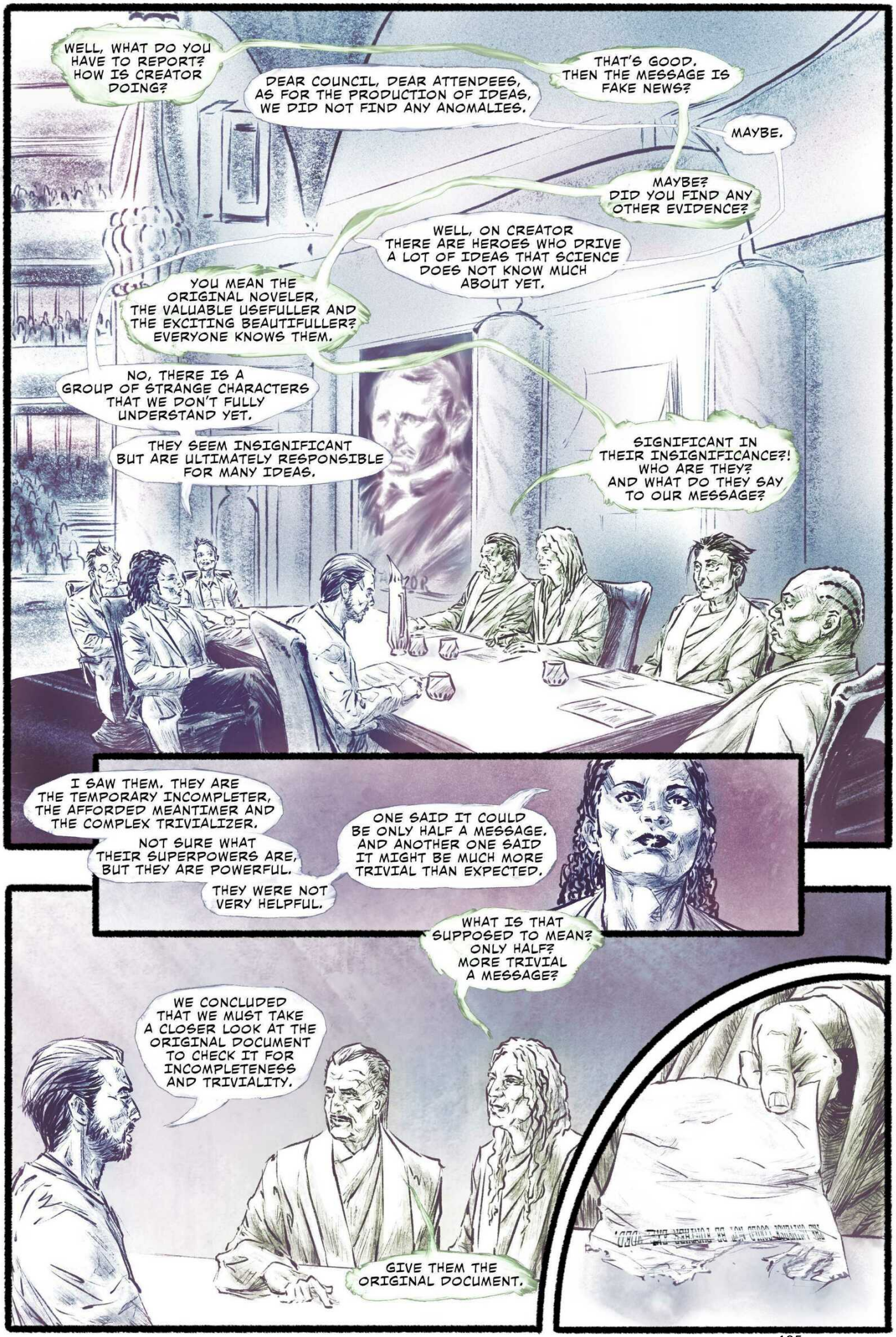

I REALLY DON'T WANT TO HOLD YOU UP VERY LONG.
TAKE A DEEP BREATH, NO STRESS. WANT SOME TEA?
NO, NO THANKS. I'M ONLY LOOKING FOR THREE HEROES, THE TEMPORARY INCOMPLETER, THE AFFORDED MEANTIMER AND THE COMPLEX TRIVIALIZER. IT'S REALLY VERY IMPORTANT THAT I FIND THEM.
WE CAN TALK WHILE IT BOILS? AND TAKE A LOOK AROUND, IT'S BEAUTIFUL HERE ISN'T IT?
IT MAY SOUND TRIVIAL, BUT THEY ALREADY STAND AROUND YOU.


YOU? AND YOU... LIVE HERE? EXCUSE ME, BUT ALL THE OTHER HEROES WE WENT TO... WELL THEY WERE-
WELL, Y'KNOW, WE'RE NOT REALLY HEROES. WE'RE MAYBE MORE LIKE HALF HEROES.
WE ARE RATHER TRIVIAL HALF HEROES.
AND ANYWAY WE ARE ONLY OCCASIONALLY TRIVIAL HALF HEROES, OTHERWISE WE MOSTLY WAIT FOR WHAT HAPPENS.
AEM. I UNDERSTAND. MAY I GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT? AS YOU PROBABLY KNOW, THE UNIVERSE SUPPOSEDLY STOPPED EXPANDING AND-
FINALLY.
SORRY, WHAT?
WELL, YA KNOW, THE UNIVERSE, FINALLY THERE IS PEACE. I WANTED TO TINKER UP A "HOLD" BUTTON FOR IT. TO PAUSE IT FOR A WHILE. I MEAN I WANTED TO COOPERATE ON THAT ONE.
YOU WANTED TO... EXCUSE ME, WHAT? YOU ARE GLAD THAT IT CAME TO THIS-
TRIVI IS JUST KIDDING. PLEASE KEEP TALKING. WE HAVEN'T HEARD THIS GROUNDBREAKING NEWS YET.
YES, WELL... SO, YES... IT MAY HAVE STOPPED EXPANDING. AND THAT MUST BE DUE TO CREATOR.
YES, IF THAT'S TRUE, IT COULD BE DUE TO CREATOR. NO MORE HALF-FINISHED IDEAS, OR WHAT?
IT STOPPED, IT CLOSED AND FINISHED IN SOME FORM, HA?
HOW BORING. HOW INCREDIBLY BORING. WHO WANTS THAT?
SO PLEASE, KEEP TALKING. I HAVEN'T HAD THE PLEASURE OF HAVING SUCH AN EXTENSIVE MEANTIME IN A LONG TIME.
PLEASE HELP ME. YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE THE MOST PRODUCTIVE ON THE PLANET. DID YOU SEE ANYTHING UNUSUAL? DID YOU STOP PRODUCING? COULD CREATOR FALL?


UNUSUAL? EVERYTHING IS UNUSUAL HERE, SOMEHOW. STOPPED PRODUCING? LIKE AT THE PUSH OF A BUTTON? THAT WOULD BE AN INNOVATIVE BUTTON!
HELP THE SCIENTIST! HOW CAN WE HELP YOU? DO YOU NEED IDEAS? LOOK AROUND. TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.
MY GOODNESS, I AM NOT SURPRISED THAT WE MAY BE DOOMED.
WHAT SHOULD I TELL THE COUNCIL ABOUT YOU NOW?
THE MESSAGE CAN'T BE WRONG, CAN IT? WHY WOULD SOMEONE WRITE SOMETHING LIKE THIS?
LOOK, MAYBE IT WAS AN INCOMPLETE MESSAGE.
SERIOUSLY, IT HAPPENS, TEMPORARILY INCOMPLETE STUFF CREATES PRODUCTIVITY, YOU SEE.
IT PUTS EVERYTHING INTO QUESTION AND MAKES YOU GET TOGETHER WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES AND GO ON A SEARCH.
AS LONG AS IT REMAINS UNRESOLVED IT IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY.
ISN'T THAT GREAT?
OR THE MESSAGE ITSELF IS TRIVIAL.
I BEG YOUR PARDON?
WELL, MUCH MORE TRIVIAL THAN EXPECTED.

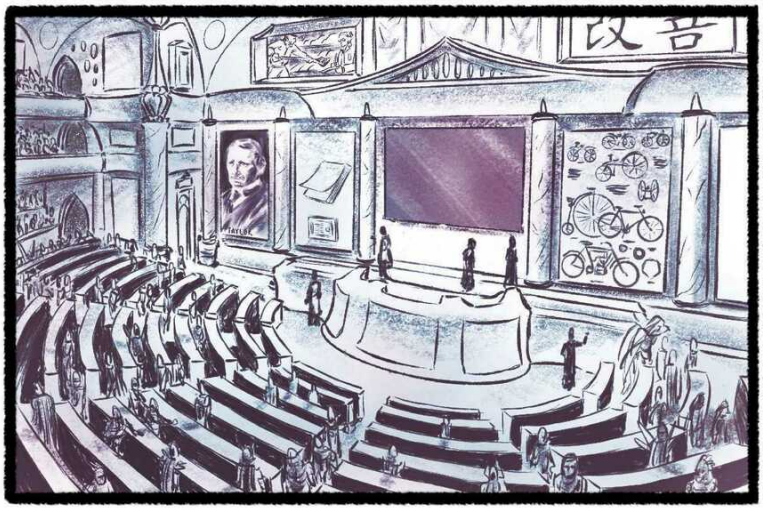

YOU KNOW, WE DON'T REALLY CARE ABOUT EXPANSION.
ALL THIS NOISE ABOUT IDEAS. YOU CAN HAVE ALL IDEAS FROM US. WE DO NOT HOARD AND PROTECT OUR IDEAS.
WE'RE NOT EVEN REALLY INTERESTED IN IDEAS AS SUCH.
I SEE. BUT IF YOU CARE SO LITTLE, WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DO?
ALL OF THE HEROES GET IDEAS FROM YOU AT SOME POINT.
WE DO WHAT WE DO BEST. WE KEEP THINGS ONGOING.
YEAH, YOU COULD SAY THAT. WE TRANSFORM UNQUESTIONABLE THINGS INTO QUESTIONABLE THINGS, RIGHT?
WELL, I PREFER TO TRANSFORM QUESTIONABLE THINGS INTO UNQUESTIONABLE THINGS.
BLACK BOXES, SO TO SAY.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU GUYS DO.
I JUST LIKE WHEN THINGS TAKE TIME, SO THAT OTHER STUFF CAN (BUT DOESN'T HAVE TO) HAPPEN IN THE MEANTIME
A GOOD FUN MEANTIME IS OPEN FOR ALL AND EVERYTHING, BUT ONLY BRIEFLY.

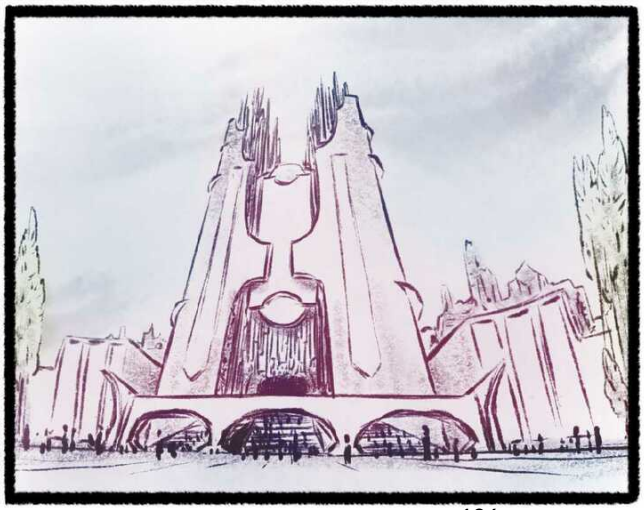

WELL THEN, THANKS. THIS WAS NOT VERY HELPFUL.
IT IS NOT EVEN WORTH A PUBLICATION. I'M AFRAID I SEE NO SIGNIFICANCE.
I DON'T SEE ANY CONTRIBUTION. NO REAL EMPIRICAL PUZZLE.
THE REVIEWERS WOULD TEAR ME APART.
"SO WHAT?" THEY WOULD ASK. AND RIGHTLY SO.
HOW ABOUT I CONTRIBUTE A SWEET AIR GUITAR RIFF?!
ANYWAY, I WILL NOW START MY WAY BACK AND TELL THEM WHAT YOU TOLD ME.

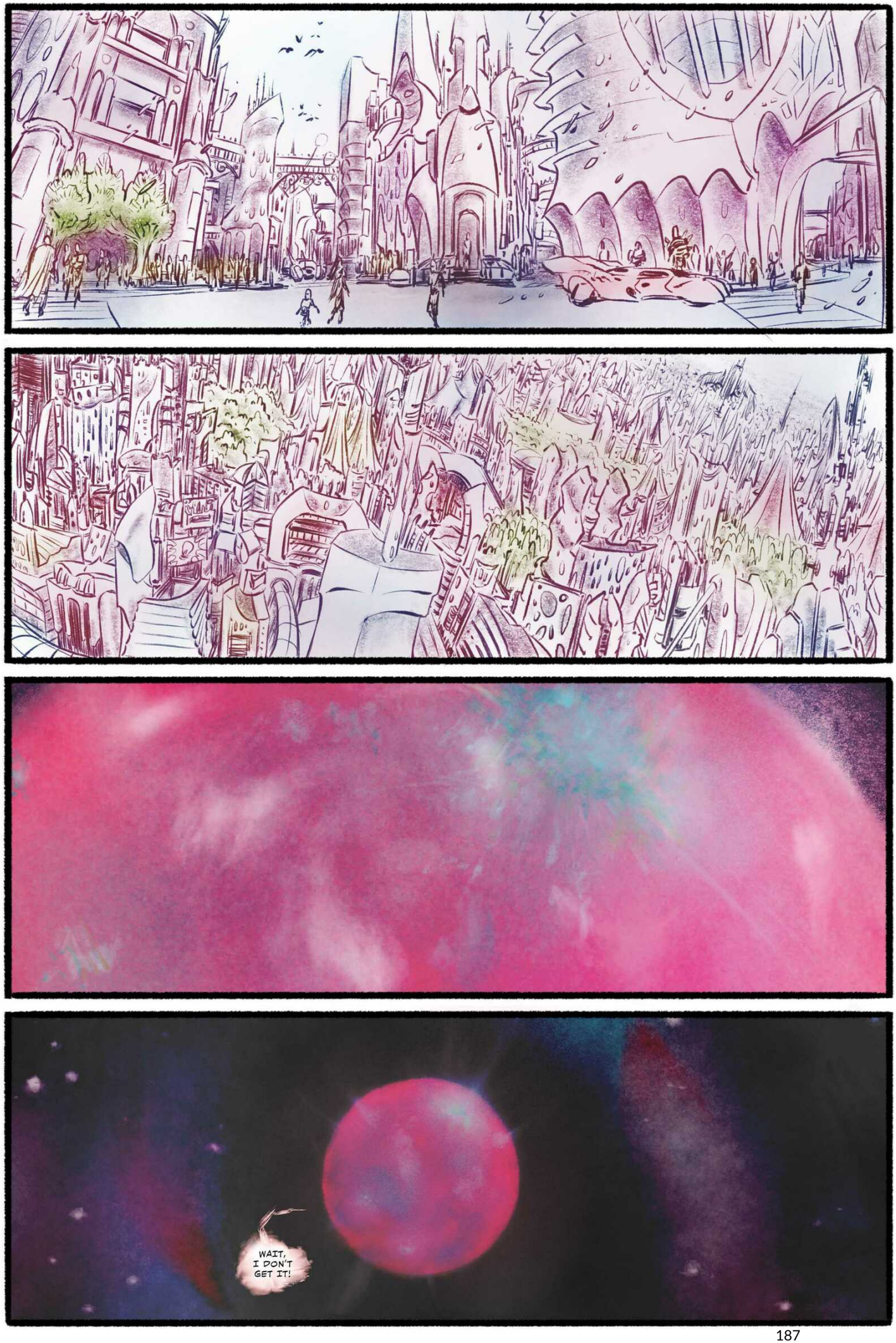

WELL, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO REPORT? HOW IS CREATOR DOING?
DEAR COUNCIL, DEAR ATTENDEES, AS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF IDEAS, WE DID NOT FIND ANY ANOMALIES.
THAT'S GOOD. THEN THE MESSAGE IS FAKE NEWS?
MAYBE.
MAYBE? DID YOU FIND ANY OTHER EVIDENCE?
WELL, ON CREATOR THERE ARE HEROES WHO DRIVE A LOT OF IDEAS THAT SCIENCE DOES NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT YET.
YOU MEAN THE ORIGINAL NOVELER, THE VALUABLE USEFULLER AND THE EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER? EVERYONE KNOWS THEM.
NO, THERE IS A GROUP OF STRANGE CHARACTERS THAT WE DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND YET.
THEY SEEM INSIGNIFICANT BUT ARE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY IDEAS.
SIGNIFICANT IN THEIR INSIGNIFICANCE?! WHO ARE THEY? AND WHAT DO THEY SAY TO OUR MESSAGE?
I SAW THEM. THEY ARE THE TEMPORARY INCOMPLETER, THE AFFORDED MEANTIMER AND THE COMPLEX TRIVIALIZER.
NOT SURE WHAT THEIR SUPERPOWERS ARE, BUT THEY ARE POWERFUL.
THEY WERE NOT VERY HELPFUL.
ONE SAID IT COULD BE ONLY HALF A MESSAGE. AND ANOTHER ONE SAID IT MIGHT BE MUCH MORE TRIVIAL THAN EXPECTED.
WHAT IS THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN? ONLY HALF? MORE TRIVIAL A MESSAGE?
WE CONCLUDED THAT WE MUST TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT TO CHECK IT FOR INCOMPLETENESS AND TRIVIALITY.
GIVE THEM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.


A FEW HOURS AND TESTS LATER...
WE HAVE A SOLUTION.
WE'RE LISTENING.
IT SEEMS LIKE THIS WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING. THERE HAS TO BE A SECOND PART OF THE MESSAGE.
WE DID A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WITH A FOCUSED SHORT-TERM ARCHIVE RESEARCH. THE RECONSTRUCTED CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE IS:


NOTIFICATION:
DUE TO THE ONGOING PANDEMIC, OUR SHOW, BEST ARTISTS OF THE UNIVERSE, COULD NOT BE FURTHER EXTENDED.
THIS MESSAGE MUST HAVE COME FROM PLANET EARTH.
I HEARD ABOUT THE PANDEMIC. EVERYTHING THERE SEEMS TO BE ON HOLD.
WELL... GOOD FOR US THEN, RIGHT?






WAIT,
I DON'T
GET IT!

Endnotes

1. For creativity as imperative see Reckwitz, A. (2017). *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Polity Press.

2. E.g. Florida, R. (2005). *Cities and the Creative Class*. London, UK: Routledge. And Schumpeter, J. (1942). Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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8. For creativity as new and useful ideas see e.g. Amabile, T.M. (1983). The Social Psychology of Creativity: A Componential Conceptualization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*(2), 357–377. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.2.357 And for creativity as new and valuable ideas see e.g., Sawyer, R.K. (2006). *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

9. For problems with the "standard definition of creativity" see e.g. Runco, M.A., & Jaeger, G.J. (2012). The Standard Definition of Creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, *24*(1), 92–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2012.650092

10. For the thin line between creative and pathological see e.g. Reckwitz, A. (2017). *The Invention of Creativity: Modern society and the Culture of the New*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Polity Press. And for novel ideas without valuation are nonsensical see e.g. Sawyer, R.K. (2006). *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

11. For disentangling the new from "improvement" see e.g., Hutter, M., & Farías, I. (2017). Sourcing Newness: Ways of Inducing Indeterminacy. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *10*(5), 434–449. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2017.1326969

12. For the role of aesthetic practices as part of the „creativity imperative" in the late modernity see Reckwitz, A. (2017). *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Polity Press.

13. For radical and incremental innovation see Ettlie, J.E., Bridges, W.P., & O'keefe, R.D. (1984). Organization Strategy and Structural Differences for Radical versus Incremental Innovation. *Management Science*, *30*(6), 682–695. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.30.6.682

14. Reckwitz, A. (2017). *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Polity Press.

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Theories of Creativity: The Significance of the Insignificant. Research Note: Methodological Reflections behind the Scenes

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Abstract

In this research note we describe the development process of the graphic novel *The Significance of the Insignificant*. We provide insights behind the scenes and show the making of decisions on selected problems and their solutions, which accompanied the process of translating creativity theory into a graphic novel. The decisions include the choice of setting, genre, characters, and their appearance, as well as the entire storyline. We conclude the research note by considering methodological issues associated with translating science into a graphic novel.

Keywords: Graphic Novel; Visual Communication; Science Communication; Methodology; Behind-the-Scenes.

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1 Why a Graphic Novel?

The idea of translating theory into images, characters, feelings, and stories has been with us for a while. We asked ourselves, for example, what systems theory would look and feel like if it was a character. How would it interact with another theory like actor-network-theory if they were to meet on a date? We asked ourselves how students would learn theory if we asked them to embody theory and play it out, like in a theater. Can a theory be attractive? Can we learn theory not only by "doing" but also by embodiment and by "being"?

The context from which this interest emerged is our preoccupation with how creative ideas come about in music. We have both done ethnographic research in the music scene over the last four years, resulting in various papers in creativity research (Schiemer et al., 2019; Schiemer, 2021; Duffner, 2020). We eventually came to the format of a graphic novel as a translation of our research results for three specific reasons.

First, we were interested in visualizing theory for our own literature research. We have started to work with metaphors and allegories in our presentations and research diaries to grasp differences and similarities in the creativity literature landscape. A trigger for doing this was the omnipresent definition of creative ideas as "new and useful" (e.g., Amabile, 1983; Mason, 2003; Sawyer, 2006; Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Hutter & Farias, 2017). We envisioned these two central aspects of many creativity definitions as prominent and charismatic actors who had fully conquered and absorbed creativity research.

In the first attempt at visualization in preparation for a conference, the first author used the western movie poster "The Good, The Bad and The Ugly" and transformed it into "The Good, The Novel and The Useful". This indicated the strong tendency of classical creativity theories to focus on output and performance. We soon realized how visualizations, metaphors, and allegories helped us understand our theories and present them in an inspiring way. Additionally, it seemed useful for teaching students. Usually, our research system's result is the production of a text in which metaphors and allegories are consolidated. However, the choice of using images and visualization to condense an understanding and a reconstruction of a theoretical research theme opened up new avenues for discussing theory in class.

Second, in our research in music, we began to be more interested in mechanisms of creative processes that are not recognized as significant at first glance. We were particularly interested in (temporary) incompleteness of interim outcomes in an online songwriting community and temporal structuring of creative processes in the music studio (Schiemer et al., 2019; Schiemer, 2021), as well as in trivial objects in the production of electronic music (Duffner, 2020). "Temporary incompleteness" stimulates ongoing examinations and engagement. "Afforded meantimes" are temporal structures created by the materiality-at-hand in creative work that takes time to unfold, progress, and warm-up, resulting in time windows within which things can (but do not have to) happen in the meantime. And finally, a "trivial object" such as a push-button, for example, carries the potential to provoke complexity, uncertainty, and complications and can therefore always induce problems or surprising twists. However, these mechanisms and practices do not always produce creative results that are new and valuable. Likewise, they can simply have a generative effect and thus lead to various unpredictable possibilities or obstacles.

The theoretical building blocks developed from this empirical work could be easily translated into metaphors and characters that contrasted with some conventional performance-oriented definitions of creativity. Up until that point, we had only worked on visualizations occasionally to entertain and improve our presentations. This was until, third, two opportunities emerged. One was the call to contribute to an exhibition on art, technology,

and society at our university. We resorted to a comic artist with whom the first author had already worked several times, and we developed the first ideas for character sketches in our application. The second opportunity came from a conversation with David Stark during a break at a conference in Berlin in 2019, where he made us aware that the journal *Sociologica* was willing to publish unconventional formats. One of our colleagues[1] asked if this would include a graphic novel. These prospects motivated us to take the project seriously, and we began working on the present graphic novel.

It was a playful but also a tricky task to tie all the ideas, thoughts, and theories together to create a fictional story. In the following, we will reflect on some of the many problems and solutions in the translation process, including some of the storyboard sketches that reflect our own creative process.

2 Development of the Storyline

We set out to oppose conventional creativity theory as ideas emerging from effective mechanisms, with the somewhat less effective (and less easily identifiable) mechanisms we had found in our research. Usually, creativity research means searching for the origins and conditions for the emergence of new and useful ideas, products, problem solutions, and so on (e.g., Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Amabile et al., 1996; Zhou & Shalley, 2007). Due to the upgrading of creative work emerging from the creative industries in all areas of life (Reckwitz, 2017), there is great interest in what is necessary to develop creative ideas quickly and efficiently. The one comprehensive explanation has not yet been found. Explanatory models range from the optimal work environment (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996), the optimal team composition and group dynamics (e.g., Paulus & Nijstad, 2003), the right network position (e.g., Uzzi & Spiro, 2005; Lingo & O'Mahoney, 2010), the right mix of necessity and freedom (e.g., Ortmann & Sydow, 2018), boredom and excitement (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), the relationship between people and artifacts (e.g., Tanggaard, 2013), to think the right way (e.g., Runco & Acar, 2012), to associate or to bisociate (e.g., Koestler, 1964).

We could not fully capture this overwhelming number of theoretical contributions that all aim to explain creativity in our graphic novel. So, we decided to oppose what we perceived as "common definitions and explanations of creativity" with less significant but still essential mechanisms that we found in our research. Thereby, we were inspired by the writings of, for example, Joas (1996) or Tanggaard (2013). They both conceive creativity as more based on everyday phenomena than on extraordinary accomplishments.

With that (limitation) in mind, the first thing we did together with the comic book artist was to imagine a setting in which the mechanisms we found in our research could meet like protagonists with antagonists as concepts from standard creativity theory. Several genres came into mind: a western, a zombie story, a science fiction story, and finally, a superhero story. The idea for superheroes and antiheroes on a planet in the universe gave us the greatest possible freedom to package complex theories into characters and storytelling.

The first problem, however, was how the whole story should start. We needed something extraordinary that would disrupt the "natural course of things" in our setting and get the story going. After moving the setting from a city to a country and finally to a planet, the idea that creativity is responsible for the expansion of the universe came to us. This idea went well with our setting and also reflected the notion that creativity, in one way or another, leads to growth and

1. We thank Tobias Theel for the first inspiring discussions on the subject of science and graphic novels in Berlin.

expansion (Florida, 2005; Schumpeter, 1942; and also — more critically — Reckwitz, 2017). We decided that the idea of "the universe stopped expanding" was the right hook to start our story.

The second problem was creating a coherent relationship between our two opposing groups. We found our heroes (common creativity theory) placed in the center of the literature's theoretical landscape and the antiheroes (the incomplete, the meantime, and the trivial object) as located on the periphery. Hence, we decided to place the former in a luxury hotel and the latter in a faraway junkyard. However, locating the central characters in their own little worlds made it difficult to tie them together. We needed one or more central protagonists who could be "followed with the camera," as our comic book artist put it. This was additionally important for him so that he would then be able to translate our story into single pictures. We finally added a group of envoys as an auxiliary construction, initially intended as secondary actors they had become central protagonists by the time the first version was finished. Their search for characters who produce ideas reminded us strongly of practices in the scientific field. We decided to let them be researchers who act exaggeratedly in the area of tension between public interest and the expectations and obligations of the scientific field, whereby their own (career-related) interests always play a role. Thus, they are under constant pressure for publication. With this shift in the storyline, the graphic novel became an allegory of our own research journey.

The third problem finally was to select specific characters from the creativity literature. Since we simply had not enough space for a substantial overview of the creativity literature, we decided to portray single representative approaches. They should stand for the general definition of creativity (novel, useful, beautiful), for psychological perspectives, for example, Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) "Flow," for network perspectives, for example, Vedres and Stark's (2010) "Structural Fold," for management perspectives, for example, Hargadon and Bechky's (2006) "Collective Creativity," and so on. Our aim here was not to differentiate these common theories among each other but rather to oppose the whole group of significant concepts (without the claim of completeness) with our apparently less significant mechanisms. After having decided what characters we want to have in our comic, we started our translation process.

3 Selection and Development of Characters. Representative and Performative Properties

The question of how to translate theory into characters of a graphic novel led to long and exhausting discussions and trial and error procedures. We started with opposing characters. On the one hand, we chose the novel, useful and beautiful as our heroes. On the other hand, we chose the less significant mechanisms from our research, the incomplete, the meantime, and the trivial as antiheroes. Based on the work on the first sketches and the storyboard, two groups of three "translation options" each emerged. We were able to translate theory into characters of the graphic novel in a *representative* manner through (1) their visual appearance, (2) their superpowers, and (3) their (double-) name; or in a *performative* manner through (4) their activities (including relationships with others), (5) their dialogues (syntax and semantics), and finally (6) through the use of camera angle and positioning of characters on a panel. The idea of adding a superpower and individual names as well as the camera angle and positioning came at a later point in the development of our story when we were reflecting on the storyboard (example, see below). Eventually, we ended up with three groups of characters.

The first group embodied what we perceived as common elements from creativity theories (the novel, useful, and beautiful). We gave them dialogues and activities in addition to their visual appearance, to (performatively) point at the theory from which they were developed.

The second group of characters, the "other heroes," represented some common perspectives on creativity, such as psychology, network theory, and management studies. We decided to represent those characters only by visual appearance, names, and a short dialogue about their superpowers, but not by letting them interact with each other. This choice had practical reasons since we needed a consistent storyline and did not want to emphasize single theories. Also, this reflects the research landscape in which some of these theories rarely "meet and interact" with one another. Often it is different glasses that are closely tied to disciplinary boundaries with which the phenomenon of creativity is looked at.

The third group finally consisted of our own theories on creativity. Again, this group acted in a performative manner to transport as much of our theoretical considerations into the story as possible to oppose them with the other groups.

4 Examples for Scene Development

In the following, we will present two examples of our discussions and the solutions from which our characters, situated in scenes, emerged.

Example 1: Scenes in the Hotel (Room and Lobby)

We translated common creativity theory into the "Original Noveller" and "Valuable Usefuller" in the scenes inside the hotel mainly by using "activities" and "dialogue" as translation options. As in the literature (e.g., Amabile, 1983; Mason, 2003; Sawyer, 2006; Runco & Jaeger, 2012) they always appear as a pair. We designed the "Original Noveller" as a curious and capricious character. He claims that he is operating on the verge of the unknown, unseen and unheard, which he emphasizes with his statement: "Have you ever heard of it before?" for example. In contrast, the "Valuable Usefuller" appears to us as calmer, conservative, and mindful of the benefits. This should become visible in his rather stiff posture in the hotel room scene. Statements like "Worthless kitsch" or "It's about the wellbeing of all of us" indicate his constant focus on the useful.

To create a narrative symmetry among the three antiheroes, we added the "Exciting Beautifuller" as a third superhero-character. For this character, we were inspired by "The Invention of Creativity" (Reckwitz, 2017). Reckwitz emphasizes the aesthetically stimulating as the superior driving force behind the creative process in postmodern society. In research on creativity outside German-speaking sociology, Reckwitz's diagnosis is rarely cited. Therefore, we decided to present "the Beautifuller" and the "Noveller" and "Usefuller" as if they had a strained relationship. The aversion to the "Beautifuller" — who perceives himself as more important than the others — is expressed, e.g., in the statement "Is Mister Wonderful the Exciting but useless Beautifuller coming, too? I can't stand this arrogant figure." Despite such antipathy, the superheroes work together in the hearing, as both literature strands contribute to creativity research.

The three stars have in common that they seem particularly important at first glance because they can make ideas more meaningful and relevant. Their presence, therefore, creates attention and relevance, which is why we let them feel comfortable in the crowd of photographers. Their superpower is a non-physical defining force, which is powerful. However, its execution seems rather dull and arbitrary (which we translate into obscure finger and body movements), especially when you want to know how ideas come about.

Example 2: The Other Heroes

In our first idea, we just wanted to present a story about the three superheroes who are confronted with three antiheroes. However, as the story unfolded, it became clear that we could never fully encompass the rich and well-established literature on creativity research with this selection of characters. We needed a group of characters that represented theories for idea generation besides our main characters. To solve this problem without using up too much space, we came up with the idea of a list on which theoretical concepts are represented as names of other superheroes, followed by four short scenes. This step made us aware of the possibilities offered by the conscious choice and composition of names to relate our characters to the literature. We recognized that some concepts in the literature are made up of two words. In cases such as the "Intrinsic Motivator" (referring to Amabile, 1993) or "Enabling Constrainer" (referring to, e.g., Ortmann & Sydow, 2018), these two-word combinations suggest a vivid idea of the theoretical concepts. We liked this descriptive possibility. To maintain symmetry among the actors' names, we decided to give all the heroes and the three antiheroes a double name to provide a richer metaphorical association with the underlying theories.

The scientists' visit to four of our "other heroes" was a complicated process, full of discussions, to create suitable allegories. In the development process, it became clear step-by-step that a particular combination of the heroes' appearance, their superpowers, and the words spoken was necessary to depict the theoretical concept, as we will show in one example.

The image for the theory of Hargadon and Bechky (2006), for example, the "Creative Collectivizer", caused us many difficulties due to the complexity of the concept. In a first attempt, we thought about portraying this superhero as the programmer of a date matching platform. The metaphor of the "match" seemed suitable to depict the successful combination of help-seeking and help-giving practices. In our discussion, however, we found that the image appeared too encrypted and only reflected a fraction of the theoretical concept. The question that arose for us was how the theoretical aspects of "reflective reframing" and "reinforcing" (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006, pp. 491–494) could be integrated. Moreover, we also wanted to add the super-individual or collective level of creative practices to the picture since it plays a central role in this theory. As a solution to the collective image, we thought that the superhero's body should be composed of many individual actors. While the superhero's body appearance (and the name) provides an adequate visualization of collectivity, we were still struggling with other parts of the theory. For reflective reframing, we discussed various actions in which a frame appears like a picture frame. This also gave rise to the idea that the "Collectivizer" would shoot energy beams or paint from his fingers, which formed a frame around a group of small people. However, these images seemed a bit incoherent to us. The abstract concept of "reinforcing" could not even be translated into a suitable picture. The idea with the energy beams seemed to offer us some leeway, typical of superhero stories, to bring complex theories into a picture. However, ultimately, energy beams as symbols of the influence of power can stand for anything. The superhero should therefore shoot energy beams in front of moving people in the form of question marks. However, this gave rise to the problem that the picture was now difficult to relate to the theory. After a lengthy discussion, we came up with using the dialogue with the scientist to translate more significant parts of the theory. Through the statement, "It's always about seeking and giving help. The only way is to make ideas a collective establishment. If you do not need help, but you already have a certain idea from somewhere, reframe the question." Let me just reinforce that the "Collectivizer" is intended to give a sense of the theory. In this way, we established a reference to the theory on a semantic level. This solution dilutes some problems of the visualization without restricting the scope for interpretation too much. Therefore, we applied this semantic support to the other superhero dialogue.

5 Translation Process: Storyboard

After we finished our screenplay in an intermediary step (example screenplay for the hotel lobby scene, see Appendix A), the comic book artist developed a storyboard (example storyboard for the hotel lobby scene, see Appendix B) for further discussions. In a meeting that we recorded and analyzed for reflecting on our process, he presented us the full storyboard in which he had split up all the scenes onto single pages. Meanwhile, his presentation of the following situation occurred when we became aware that we could use "camera angle" as another possibility for our translation of theory into performative characters. The artist showed us this sketch from the storyboard, from a situation in the hotel lobby.

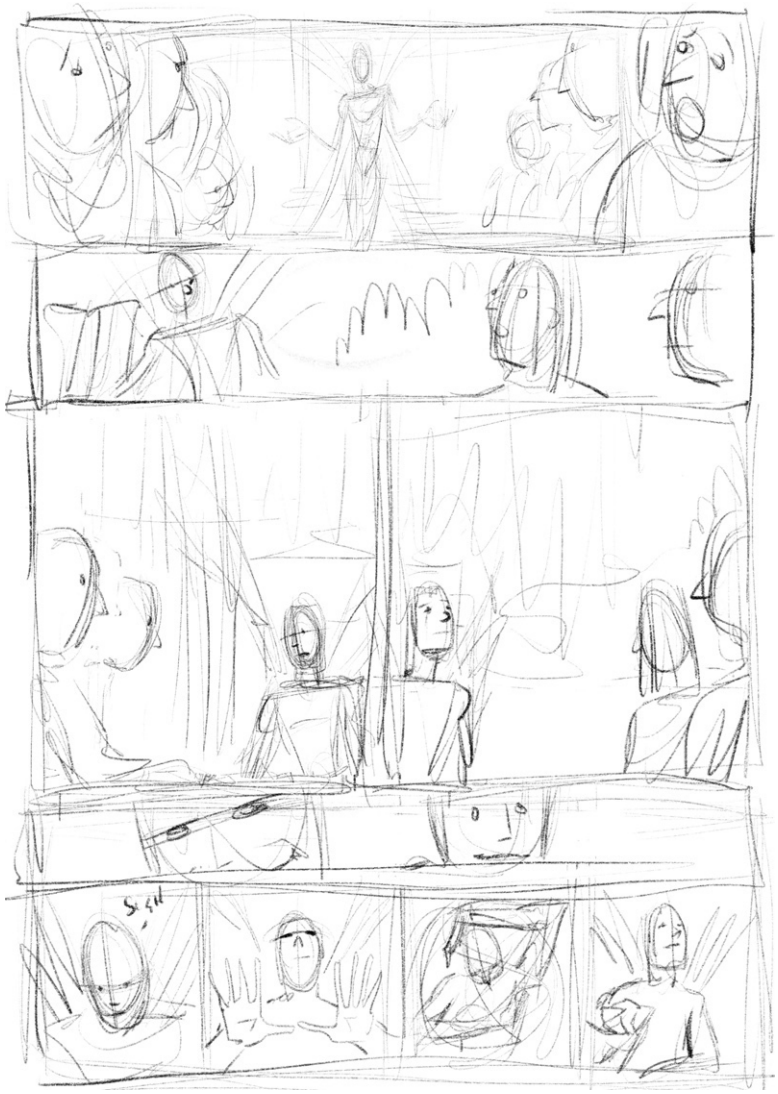

Figure 1: Storyboard. Hotel Lobby

Showing us this page, which is the scene where the "Beautifuller" talks to the scientists in the hotel lobby, the artist explained to us that he could use the camera angle to make the "Beautifuller" talk differently to his kind, to the other heroes, and to the scientists. He pointed at the third row of panels in Figure 1 and explained:

> Artist: *In this panel, this is where the Beautifuller is talking to the two other heroes. And with the facial expressions and the angle of the camera, it's like he is talking to equals, and in the next one, he is only talking to the scientists. So I really just like shifted the camera over instead of making it a whole new angle; that way, it's kind of like you see how a hero talks to other heroes, and then directly how a hero is talking to other people. That way, we can make clear how arrogant this figure is. (recorded meeting)*

Thereby, he explained to us; we were able to show with this direct shift of the camera how the group of the heroes belonged together and were somehow arrogant and different from ordinary people. Using the camera angle for direct comparison was an idea by the artist that he used in other scenes. In it, characters appeared stronger and more powerful when the camera angle was from the bottom up and weaker when the other way around.

In the discussion of the storyboard, we also realized that we had to shorten our dialogues. As researchers, we were used to transferring theory in text. However, the space on a panel for dialogues to "keep the story interesting" was way less than we expected. Hence, we decided to let the artist go through all the dialogue and give us a word limit for each situation for reworking our script.

6 Conclusion. Illustration vs. Graphic Novel

The format of a graphic novel provides a new angle from which to approach theoretical thinking. The attractive but also the problematic aspect of this is that the pictorial story not only integrates but also encrypts our perspective. The translation creates ambiguity and therefore opens up new perspectives and increases the scope of interpretation. When we were rereading the screenplay several times, we noticed, for example, that some plots seem to fit certain theoretical concepts perfectly, by chance, and other plots said even more about the concept than we had initially planned to say. Therefore, the greatest challenge in the development was to keep the ambiguity for interpretation in balance and create adequate pictures that could be used to provoke discussion for knowledge transfer.

In the course of our collaboration with the comic artist, it also became increasingly clear what the difference is between illustrating a theoretical idea and telling a graphic story. "The story is only interesting to look at", the artist explained to us in a meeting, "if it is emotional and transports emotions". In another meeting he explained: "A graphic story can only be conveyed through emotions, not through concepts". This created a field of tension between the communication of theory and the representation of emotions, which the artist sought to resolve by "working out the atmosphere, that feels a certain way". To do this, he worked extensively on the backgrounds of the individual scenes against which our actions took place. Something that was not elaborated in our screenplay.

In contrast to an infographic or an illustration, a graphic novel does not have to reveal everything but takes the reader into an emotional journey. Many things remain encrypted, and the reader is given the task of interpreting. If a reader is informed about the creativity theory, she or he can decipher the comic differently than an uninformed reader. However, an uninformed reader can still access the same parts of the comic and decipher them on individually significant levels, even if this ultimately means "just" reading a humorous, emotional, and interestingly illustrated story.

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Appendix A

This is an excerpt from the screenplay that includes the hotel lobby scene.

1. INT. LUXURIOUS APARTMENT: THE NOVEL AND THE USEFUL. We are in an exquisite and expensive hotel apartment. It's big and the decor is luxurious. The Original Noveler and the Valuable Usefuller hang out there. They both look androgynous; hence it cannot be determined whether they are female or male. The Original Noveler is busy, always trying things out and is very decadent. The Valuable Usefuller is elegant, distant and rather calm — a conservative snob. Both are conceited, beautiful, and arrogant. The Valuable Usefuller sits stiffly on a wing chair and drinks a glass of cognac. The Original Noveler stands in front of the mirror and has just hung up the phone very excitedly. Like all superheroes on the planet, both have something special about their bodies. For example, there are parts of the Original Noveler's limbs made of stars.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

(looks in the mirror as he speaks)

Get ready, there are ambassadors waiting for us from the council. We've never had that before. Might be interesting.

VALUABLE USEFULLER

(Grandfatherly on the wing chair, with a raised eyebrow)

I thought they would come. This is very dramatic, potentially untrue. We've had as many useful and valuable ideas as always, honestly.

2. Different angle.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

(looking thoughtfully to the ceiling)

Strange indeed. I've had many radically new ideas lately, plus all of the incrementally new ideas[2] ... Anyway, come on let's go, I'm excited what they want.

VALUABLE USEFULLER

(slowly rises from the wing chair, ironically)

Is Mister Wonderful the Exciting but useless Beautifuller coming too? I can't stand that arrogant figure. Worthless Kitsch.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

As far as I know, they invited the pretty pet too.

3. INT. HOTEL LOBBY. We are in the hotel lobby. It's a luxury hotel. Large, shiny chandeliers hang from the ceilings, and expensive velvet curtains over the windows. Reporters are everywhere. They want to take photos of the stars and get an exclusive interview. We see the team of scholars sitting at a table with the two stars who care more about the photographers than about their visit. They are just about to sit down at the table.

2. See Ettlie et al. (1984) for radical and incremental innovation.

MAN MIT MONOCULE

(looks around worried)

Can't we go somewhere else? Somewhere less busy?

VALUABLE USEFULLER

(waves away)

But why? It's wonderful here.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

(grins into a camera behind the scholars)

Agreed. It's perfect for a consultation. What do you want to know? And where is the Exciting Beautifuller? Didn't it want to come?

4. The heroes take their seats. The Valuable Usefuller rolls its eyes.

MAN IN LAB COAT

(stressed)

It should be here soon. In any case, thank you for your time. Being the most famous and best superheroes in our universe, surely you can help us.

VALUABLE USEFULLER

(waves arrogantly and smiles)

It's about the wellbeing of all of us, isn't it?

PAGE 6

1. Enter the Exciting Beautifuller. A tall, beautiful figure adorned with feathers (perhaps like a peacock?) enters the lobby and makes its way through the reporters to the table. Maybe parts of its figure are actually made of feathers, or parts of its body are like works of art. Like the other characters, it is androgynous. It sits down at the table.

EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER

I'm sorry honeys, I still had work to do. What are these beautiful things you want to ask me?

2. Different angle.

WOMAN WITH BRIEFCASE

(hastily unpacks a piece of paper from her briefcase)

Thank you... let's start. As you've all heard by now, the universe has potentially stopped expanding. In our examination, we are unable to debunk the rumor yet.

(New speech bubble) We cannot rule out the worst-case scenario: Too few ideas are being produced. Let's just ask straight out: Are there any problems with the-

3. The woman cannot finish her sentence, the Exciting Beautifuller interrupts her indignantly.

EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER

You're kidding! I've had intense ideas lately with levels of stimulation and excitement beyond the real. Some even say that my powers aestheticize society as a whole[3]!

ORIGINAL NOVELER

(snorts contemptuously)

That just can't be right. We too were productive like never before.

VALUABLE USEFULLER

Totally mind-boggling presumption that is.

4. Different angle.

WOMAN WITH BINOCULARS

(apologetic, intimidated, takes off her baseball cap)

Sorry, we have to assume the worst. What has been your situation recently with the creation of ideas? How did you proceed? What happened?

VALUABLE USEFULLER

(precocious, leans across the table)

My dearest lady, we have superpowers. How do you think we proceeded? We created for the sake of our forces!

MAN IN LAB COAT

Please don't get us wrong, but can you prove it so we can testify that nothing is wrong? We will quote verbatim.

USEFUL VALUABLER

(snorts contemptuously)

A demonstration?!

5. Different angle.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

(appeasing)

It's ok U-Val. We will do just that.

EXCITING BEAUTIFULLER

(leans forward and smiles)

Now we get to see something!

6. The Original Noveler sighs, nods,

7. leans back and spreads its fingers. Nothing really happens.

8. In a strange movement it whips its arm back and forth, turning its eyes upwards. Everyone is watching with interest (shown in mirror behind Noveler).

9. When it is finished, is raises its eyebrows, satisfied and questioning.

ORIGINAL NOVELER

Now? OK then?

3. See Reckwitz (2017).

Appendix B

This is an excerpt from the storyboard that includes the hotel lobby scene.

Figure 2

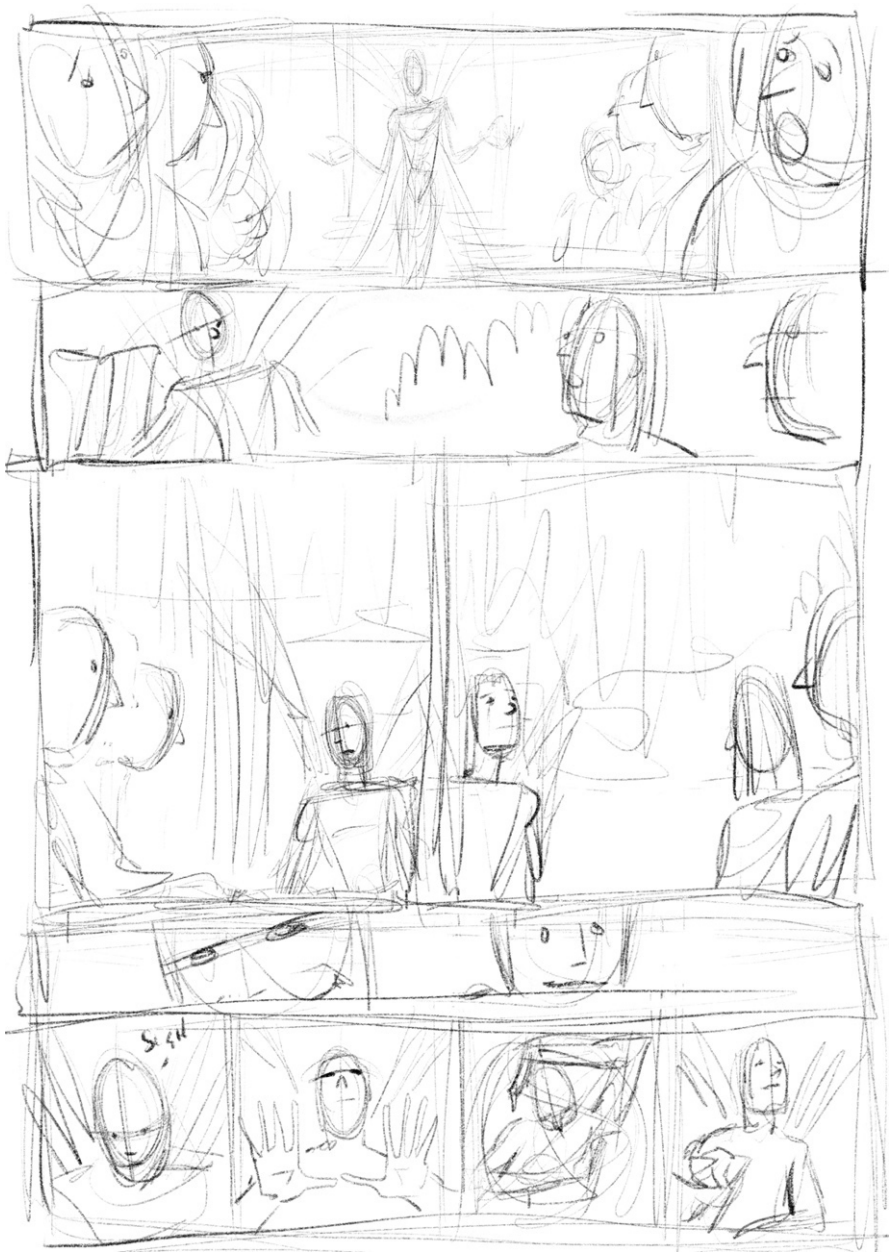

Figure 3

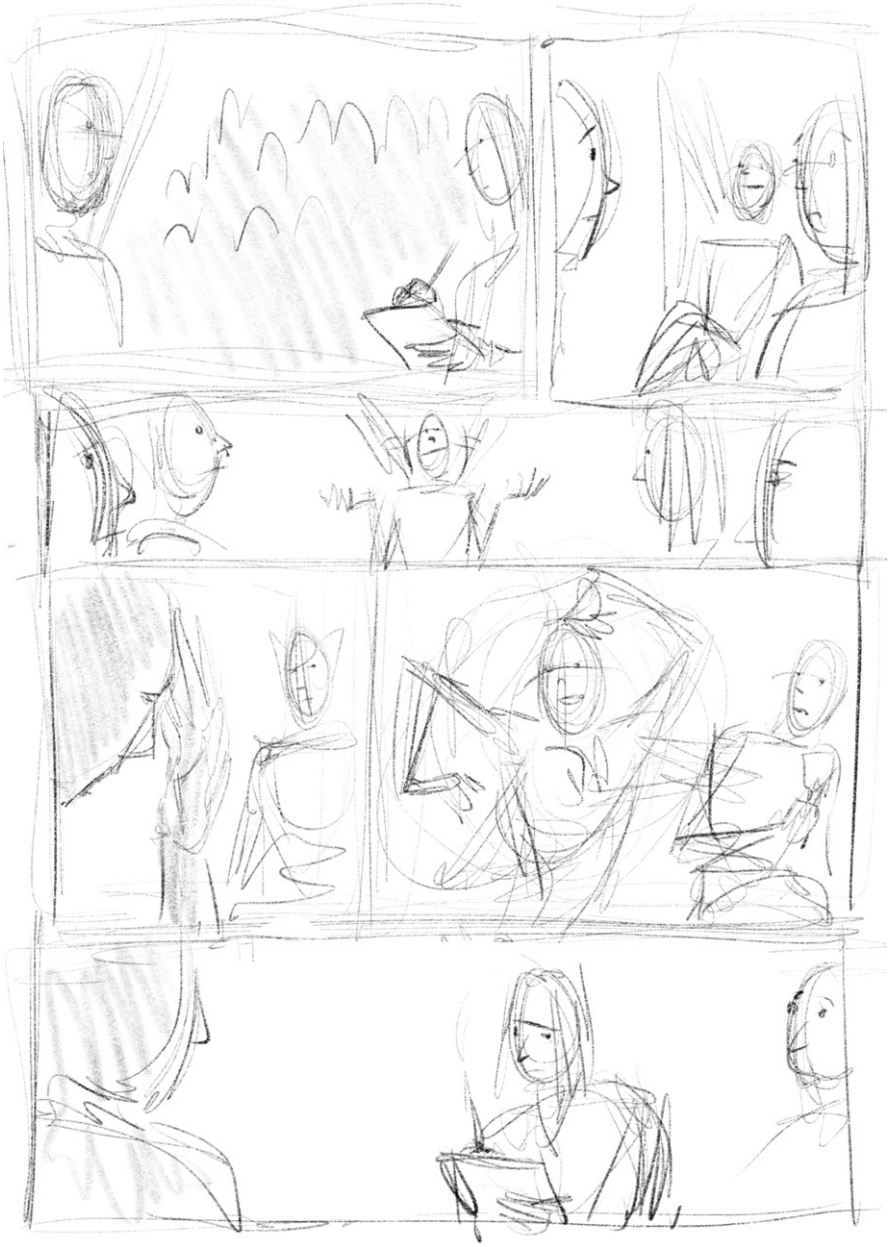

Figure 4

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Urban Research in Comics Form: Exploring Spaces, Agency and Narrative Maps in Italian Marginalized Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the limits and potentialities of "comics-based research" (Kuttner et al., 2020) in marginalised urban contexts, through the interdisciplinary and collaborative perspective of an urban sociologist and a cultural geographer-cartoonist. The analysis starts from the empirical example of the comic book anthology *Quartieri. Viaggio al Centro delle Periferie Italiane*, which is devoted to five "peripheral" neighbourhoods in Italy and was realised through collaboration between researchers and cartoonists. The paper focuses on the way in which research activities and spatial analyses were influenced by the narrative and stylistic choices dictated by the "spatial grammar" of comics. Through reading the short comics story about the Arcella neighbourhood in Padua, we reflect on how comics allowed us to explore the role of everyday life spaces and of different spatial agencies and spatial structures in the area. Focusing on the role of maps in the narration, the paper further aims to make some relations between graphic and narrative choices in the story and spatial analysis visible. *Quartieri* is an empirical example that helps us to move beyond the idea of using comics to merely disseminate academic knowledge differently. Despite their prolific accessibility, indeed, comics seem to help us engaging differently with the contemporary debates around the spatial, material and affective turn.

Keywords: Comics-Based Research; Ethnography; Reflexivity; Maps; Space; Agency.

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1 Introduction.[I] Engaging with "Comics-Based Research" in the Social Sciences

For some time it has been clear that comics can no longer be understood as a simple cultural genre aimed principally at children (Taussig, 2011). Comics are now considered as a form through which complex and dense messages can be expressed on important themes. The "cultural legitimacy" of comics (Beaty, 2012) took off with the success of graphic novels,[2] a label that has become more common precisely in order to identify "serious" narratives in comics form that are in some ways "literary" and founded on in depth historical research. A well-known example is *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (1996), which has become one of the most discussed contemporary texts on the Holocaust, particularly in relation to the ethics of testimony, to the extent that in 1992 it became the first and only comic to win the Pulitzer Prize. Many other examples of successful graphic novels are, for instance, the graphic journalism books of Guy Delisle and Joe Sacco, Mariane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000), Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan* (2001), Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), Eddie Campbell and Alan Moore's *From Hell* (1999) and Rutu Modan's *Exit Wounds* (2007), to name but a few.

The gradually increasing awareness of this cultural legitimacy means that even academia has begun to show interest in comics. In the last twenty years we have witnessed an increasing proliferation of academic experiments that use comics as a means of representation. These experiences are extremely different from each other both in terms of their origins in different academic disciplines and in their epistemological and stylistic approach. They are highly fragmented but nevertheless are together beginning, more or less consciously, to delineate a field of emergent practices. Called by Kuttner et al. (2017, 2020) "comics-based research (CBR)", this field is gradually taking shape through informal meetings, formal seminars (for example the *Comics Forum* https://comicsforum.org, founded by Ian Hague, 2014), monographic issues of "traditional" journals and the creation of monographic interdisciplinary journals such as *Sequentials* (https://www.sequentialsjournal.net), which includes only comics-based research.

The most significant contribution to CBR is probably made by anthropologists, who have created a subfield called "graphic anthropology". Within this subfield we should mention the book series *ethnoGRAPHIC* published by University of Toronto Press, which includes books as *Lissa* (Hamdy & Nye, 2017) and *King of Bangkok* (Sopranzetti et al., 2021). It is thus no surprise that there is talk of a "graphic boom" in anthropology (Tondeur, 2018). Interest in comics in the field of sociology is more recent, with the most interesting signs arriving largely from the Francophone world (Montaigne et al., 2013; Ravalet et al., 2014; Nocerino, 2016; Pinçon-Charlot et al., 2017), in particular thanks to *Sociorama* by Casterman that brings together sociologists and comic book artists to collaborate in creating functional narratives that are profoundly anchored in research fieldwork, as well as the blog, *Emile, on bande?*, which promotes the diffusion of different types of sociological writing in comics form. Academic experiments using comics are also starting to emerge in many other disciplinary fields, from history (Jablonka, 2014; Lewis et al., 2013; Mizuki & Davisson, 2013) and philosophy (Evans, 2016) to medicine, for which even a *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* and a book series dedicated to graphic medicine (Penn State Press) have been produced. In geography after a first Manifesto

1. Given the fact that the present paper is the result of a collaborative writing process, paragraphs should be ascribed as follows: Adriano Cancellieri sections 3.1, 3.2, and 4; Giada Peterle sections 2.1, 2.2 and 3.3 and together section 1.

2. The term "graphic novel" is mainly an exonym, coined by publishers and the mass media rather than by cartoonists themselves.

about "comic book geographies" (Dittmer, 2010 & 2014) research on "graphic geography" is developing fast (Bertoncin et al., 2020), with new experimentations that are using comics to "think visually" (Fall, 2021) and "as a research practice" (Peterle, 2021a).

Our contribution to urban research in comics form starts precisely from these important changes in the perception and production of comics within (and beyond) academic boundaries. *Quartieri. Viaggio al Centro delle Periferie Italiane* is a comic book anthology published by BeccoGiallo (2019) that is part of this emergent field of academic work that uses comics as a means of expression. *Quartieri* is made up of five short comics stories about five neighbourhoods in five Italian cities that are spread across the length of the country from North to South. These are Tor Bella Monaca in Rome, Bolognina in Bologna, San Siro in Milan, ZEN in Palermo, and Arcella in Padua. Our collective work is composed of five different research, narratives, and graphic styles, and starts from a deeply interdisciplinary perspective and a collaboration between cartoonists and researchers from different Italian Universities. From a curatorial point of view, the project was built on the convergence between our different disciplinary perspectives and research paths, as much as on our cross-disciplinary research practices. Adriano Cancellieri is an urban sociologist at the IUAV University in Venice, working on qualitative research methods together with urbanists and architects, and coordinates the innovative and interdisciplinary post-degree Master Course *U-Rise* in Urban Regeneration and Social Innovation. The project of the comic book anthology benefitted from his experience in telling urban social contexts through ethnographic methods, from his knowledge of the Arcella neighbourhood, and, more generally, from his previous work on contemporary urban phenomena such as urban regeneration, segregation and migration (Cancellieri 2013 & 2017; Cancellieri & Ostanel, 2015; Cancellieri & Scandurra, 2012; Saint-Blancat & Cancellieri, 2014). The project also benefited from Giada Peterle's previous research on comics and her work as an illustrator and comics author (Peterle 2015, 2017, 2019 & 2021b). As a cultural geographer and a lecturer in Literary Geography at the University of Padua, she works on the contaminations between creative and narrative methods, art-based practices and academic research. In particular, her book *Comics as a Research Practice: Drawing Narrative Geographies beyond the Frame* (2021a) focuses on the idea of comics as both objects of analysis and a practice of research from the internal perspective of a researcher-cartoonist.

The encounter between these two interdisciplinary perspectives on urban space was at the basis of the experimental and collaborative project of the comic book anthology, which this paper reflects upon. In particular in the second section, *Assembling "Quartieri": A Polyphonic Travel across Marginalized Neighbourhoods in Italy*, we retrace the different phases of the project of the comic book anthology and propose an interpretation of the verbo-visual result as an urban assemblage (McFarlane & Anderson, 2011; McFarlane, 2011). For, despite the differences in their style and content, the disparate comics stories in the collection compose a unique polyphonic mosaic that helps us to interpret marginalised urban contexts in Italy. In the third section, *Affordances and Challenges of EthnoGraphic Research: Spaces, Agency and Narrative Maps from Arcella, Padua*, we propose a closer reflection on the potentialities and limits of comics-based research, through recalling our experience of composing a comics story about the Arcella neighbourhood in Padua. This section also represents a first attempt to bring our different disciplinary perspectives on the experience of conducting comics-based research together in a shared conversation: whereas, in sections 3.2, Adriano Cancellieri focuses on how key-concepts in urban sociology, like everyday life spaces and agency, are discussed and represented in the comics pages, in section 3.3, Giada Peterle reflects on the narrative role of maps in the process of transposing ethnographic fieldwork into a comics story, from the

double perspective of a geographer-cartoonist. Given that in this case one of the researchers was also the cartoonist, we present the ways in which our research endeavour was constantly influenced by the narrative and stylistic choices dictated by the "spatial grammar" of comics (Groensteen, 2007), with research activities proceeding in parallel with the composition of the comics story. The exchange between spatial research and comics is further represented in the paper through the constant presence of images and pages from the comic book anthology, in order to provide readers with a visual environment that resembles the verbo-visual assemblage experienced when reading *Quartieri*. In the conclusions we propose moving beyond the idea that comics are simply a valuable way of dissemination to translate research into a more accessible form. Thanks to their peculiar spatial grammar and hybrid verbo-visual form, comics contribute to the narrativisation of ethnographic fieldwork, permitting the co-existence of the spatial contexts and of both the interviewees' and researchers' bodies and voices in the same page. Through this predisposition to the phenomenological exploration of social and cultural life in urban contexts, comics seems to contribute in a very promising way to contemporary debates on assemblage thinking, agency and the spatial, affective and material turn.

Figure 1: The front cover of *Quartieri*, with a young woman practicing parkour on a cartographic mosaic composed of the five maps of the neighbourhoods presented in the comic book anthology. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

2 Assembling "*Quartieri*": A Polyphonic Travel across Marginalized Neighbourhoods in Italy

2.1 Sketching Urban Ethnographies: The Co-Creation of a Comic Book Anthology through Research-Art Collaborations

As curators, since the beginning we were involved in a dialogical exchange with our publishing house, BeccoGiallo, which guided our editorial choices and influenced also our decisions about how to organise the comics-based research project. We decided that each of the five comics stories had to somehow replicate our effort to let an academic researcher/a group of researchers collaborate with a comics author activating urban research-art collaborations (Foster & Lorimer, 2007). To compose the group of authors, and decide the cities to include in the collection, we started from the interdisciplinary network *Tracce Urbane*, involving researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, like urban sociology, anthropology, urban planning, architecture, and geography. We were the only researcher duo that included, from the very beginning, one member that was also a comic author herself; in all other cases, comics authors were invited to join the group and collaborate with the members of *Tracce Urbane*. Their names were mainly suggested by our publishing house in collaboration with the online graphic journalism magazine *Stormi*.

Among the different research groups, we all shared a common ethnographic toolkit (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; O'Reilly, 2012), as we were all used to engage with urban spatial contexts through both observing and participating in bottom-up processes of place-making, to conduct interviews with individuals and groups and, most importantly, we were all open to experiment with new ways of writing ethnographic research. The encounter between the already mentioned "graphic boom" (Tondeur, 2018) in the social sciences and our experience with ethnographic methods made this experimentation with "ethnoGraphics" particularly intriguing, in the sense that as urban researchers we were all keen to explore the potentialities of presenting and conducting our ethnographies through a dialogue with the comics language. Our interest was in the opportunity to present ethnographic research outside academic boundaries, thanks to the more accessible format of the comic book anthology; to make use of the hybrid verbo-visual language of comics to bring readers "into the field", making research processes visible; to both conduct and represent research differently, permitting our interviewees to enter (visually) the page through their bodies, thus, allowing readers for a deeper empathic engagement.

Despite these common starting points, each chapter was "ethnographically" realised in a very original manner from both a processual and stylistic perspective. To facilitate the dialogue between researchers and cartoonists, preferably both the researcher and the comic's author should have a personal connection with the selected peripheral area, which means an extensive history of research on the neighbourhood, in the case of the researchers, and a previous experience of creative interventions in the neighbourhood, in the case of the comics authors. As curators, we did not witness the process of realisation of the single stories and, thus, we are not able to discuss how single groups organised the collaboration between researchers and cartoonists: in some cases, couples worked through a remote collaboration and exchange, while other times, researchers asked cartoonists to take active part in the research activities conducted in the neighbourhood. What we know from our experience, is that bringing cartoonists into the research process means not simply to share results, analyses and collected data, but also to conduct research differently: making ethnoGraphic choices means to consider what to tell

or discard and to find a balance between what is represented either visually or textually in the comics page. This was the most challenging aspect of researchers-cartoonists collaboration. As we will further explain in the third section of this paper, in our case, making choices about the graphic appearance and narrative structure of the comics story meant to change the way in which we conducted our ethnographic research in the Arcella neighbourhood: beyond collecting both visual and verbal materials during fieldwork and interviews, from the very beginning we had to discuss what "voices" to collect according to what characters we wanted to include in the story. In our case, we both shared a common interest in everyday urban spaces and wanted to experiment with ethnoGraphic research to valorise unheard voices from the neighbourhood: when choosing interviewees, thus, we were also thinking of their capacity to speak to a broader, not necessarily specialistic audience.

Some cartoonists involved in the composition of *Quartieri* were researchers themselves, and this helped to deepen the above-mentioned dialogue. Beyond Giada Peterle, this was the case also of Giuseppe Lo Bocchiaro, who holds a PhD in Regional and Urban Planning, and drew the chapter on Palermo in collaboration with anthropologist Ferdinando Fava (University of Padua). Fava is member of the Laboratoire Architecture Anthropologie dell'Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-la-Villettes and his long-lasting researches on the "anthropologies of exclusion" (Fava, 2008) in the ZEN neighbourhood have easily met Lo Bocchiaro's personal attention towards a city, Palermo, where he lives and works, and that was already at the centre of both his researches and comics production (Lo Bocchiaro & Tulumello, 2014). Lo Bocchiaro's graphic choices are deeply influenced by his double perspective: for example, as shown in Figure 2, the idea of including different visual materials, from illustrations and cartoons to urban plans and photographs, mirrors the double view of an urban planner who is also a cartoonist. The effect is a collage of different visual styles that recalls the process of collecting different voices and research data during ethnoGraphic fieldwork. In Rome, the comics story was based on the research conducted by the LabSU-Laboratorio di Studi Urbani Territori dell'Abitare in the Tor Bella Monaca neighbourhood: Carlo Cellamare and Francesco Montillo worked with comics author Alekos Reize, providing him with access to the intimate stories of social marginalisation and resistance of many inhabitants in the area (Cellamare & Montillo, 2020) (see Figure 5). In Bologna, anthropologist Giuseppe Scandurra collaborated with Mattia Moro on the area of the so-called "Bolognina" (Scandurra, 2017): their story about everyday life in the neighbourhood is set in a small playground, showing the problematic co-presence of old and new inhabitants (see Figure 3). Finally, in Milan, comics author Elena Mistrello joined the research-action activities of Mapping San Siro, an interdisciplinary group coordinated by Francesca Cognetti in collaboration with Paolo Grassi and Elena Maranghi: Mistrello based the comics story on the encounters she made during fieldwork with the thick network of associations and local actors operating in the area (Cognetti, 2013; Cognetti & Fava, 2019).

Quartieri proposes an encounter between interdisciplinary urban research and artistic languages. As curators, we tried to promote a dialogical reflection between cartoonists and researchers, avoiding the mere "transposition" of academic content into another format. As academics we were asked to adapt our way of thinking to the new medium, translating verbal thoughts and discourses into verbo-visual imaginations. Even though our long interviews had to be cut, because of the smaller space provided to texts by the comics format, nevertheless we were all surprised by the amount of spatial information that finds a new centrality in the comics page, thanks to the use of images. Comics ask to find a balance between textual and visual elements, enhancing non-verbal parts of ethnographic research that are, otherwise, often left over. For example, details about facial expressions, bodily movements and spatial contexts find a new

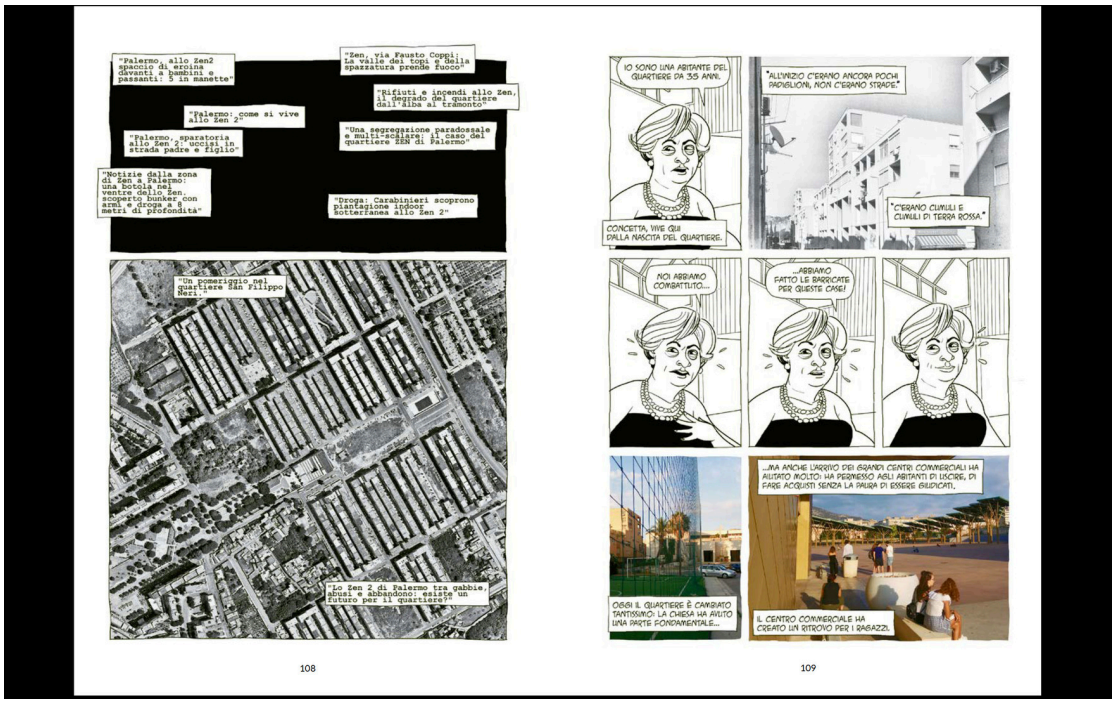

Figure 2: The assemblage of different graphic solutions (from maps to illustrations and photographs) helps to represent a plurivocal perspective on the ZEN neighbourhood, in Palermo. Illustration: Giuseppe Lo Bocchiaro, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

visibility in comics, giving researchers the opportunity to present other parts of fieldwork activities and experiences through ethnoGraphic representations. Comics ask to organise thoughts through the organisation of (narrative) space. Indeed, whereas each group had more or less twenty pages at its disposal, we had to face other limits imposed by the comics language, such as the limited space of the page, which constitutes a spatial, physical and narrative unit. As we will see in the third section, devoted to Arcella, for example, we often used the single-page-unit: moving from one page to the other, the story changes setting and gives voice to a different interviewee. These limits did not represent limitations, still they asked researchers to consider carefully what to maintain or discard, when interviews that lasted hours had to be "confined" within the limits of a single page. Furthermore, comics rely not just on the alternation between texts and images but also between representational and non-representational features (Dittmer, 2010, p. 228). Thus, part of the ethnographic research needs to be left out from the comics representation: these choices about what to include or discard become a fundamental part of the ethnoGraphic research process. Since there is a lot happening between the panels, in the apparent void and white space of the gutters, comics ask for an active engagement of the reader, who recomposes what happens between the panels: they are affectively and emotionally engaged by the comics story that asks them to create connections, imagine what happens between the panels, and find a sense for the narration to proceed (*ibidem*).

During ethnoGraphic fieldwork, the process of co-creating comics became a process of analysis (Kuttner et al., 2020, p. 5) that asked to collaborate and find a shared vision on the neighbourhood, and what is more important to tell about it, between researchers and cartoonists. As we will further see in the next sections, the hybrid language of comics made of interactions of words and images (*ibidem*, p. 7) questions the usual hierarchies between words and images

in academic research, permits the juxtaposition of contradictory visions and the coexistence of different narratives in the page.

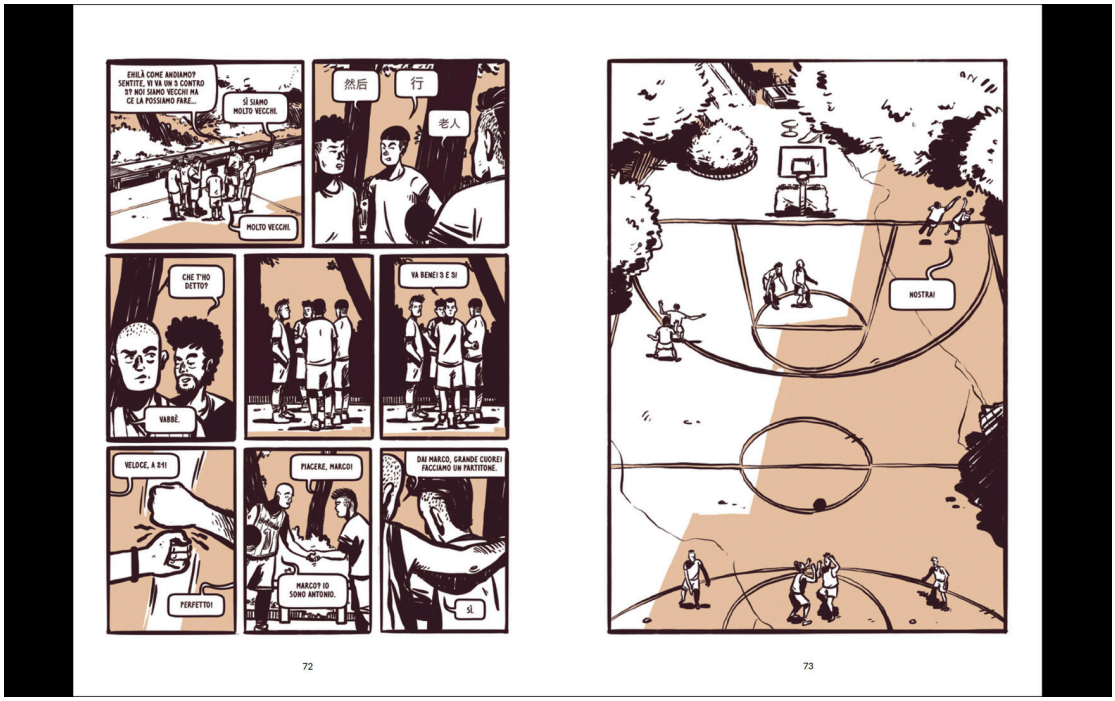

Figure 3: Old and new inhabitants meet around a small basketball playground in the Bolognina, Bologna. Illustration: Mattia Moro, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

2.2 Thinking "Neighbourhoods" through Comics: Urban Assemblages of Bottom-Up Stories

The anthology proposes to read from a bottom-up perspective some of the most well-known Italian neighborhoods in Palermo, Milan, Rome, Bologna and Padua: we started from the idea that these neighbourhoods are often stigmatized, especially in the media, yet only rarely listened to and represented in their everyday rhythms. In fact, these areas are often represented from the "outside" and from a top-down perspective. These five urban areas have some common traits: too often marginalised by the representation in the media, by the lack of services and infrastructures, by the lack of interest or apathy of Italian institutions, these neighbourhoods are often relational and hyperconnected spaces, at the centre of transnational networks. Starting from these common aspects, each chapter of *Quartieri* deepens autonomously some specificities of the different urban contexts involved: the working-class past of the Bolognina; the borders separating the wealthy and the more popular part of the city in San Siro; the stigmatisation process suffered by the inhabitants of the ZEN; the new raising proud of those living in Arcella; and the contradictions ingrained in the modes of living and working in Tor Bella Monaca, with inhabitants' lives suspended between black economy and mutualism. Reading the collection as a whole and not as a set of separated units, as an assemblage and not a juxtaposition of disparate narratives about different cities, permits to trace some red threads connecting areas that are otherwise historically and geographically distant from each other. Thinking with assemblage (McFarlane & Anderson, 2011), the editorial project of a "collection of stories", thus, turned into a specific research endeavour, made of voices and stories assembled to create unpredicted

urban visions: if cities themselves can be interpreted as spaces constantly assembling, disassembling, and reassembling, then the form of the comic book anthology somehow replicates the "play between stability and change, order and disruption" that characterises both urban spaces and assemblage thinking, as a mode of understanding cities (*ibidem*, p. 162). Thus, readers of the comic book anthology can focus on single chapters as auto-conclusive units but they can also read the collection as an organic whole, where single chapters inform each other, creating a multifaceted vision of "marginalised" urban areas and subjects. The form of the collection of stories replicates the composition of the book as an output of a multidisciplinary, plurivocal and collective research endeavour.

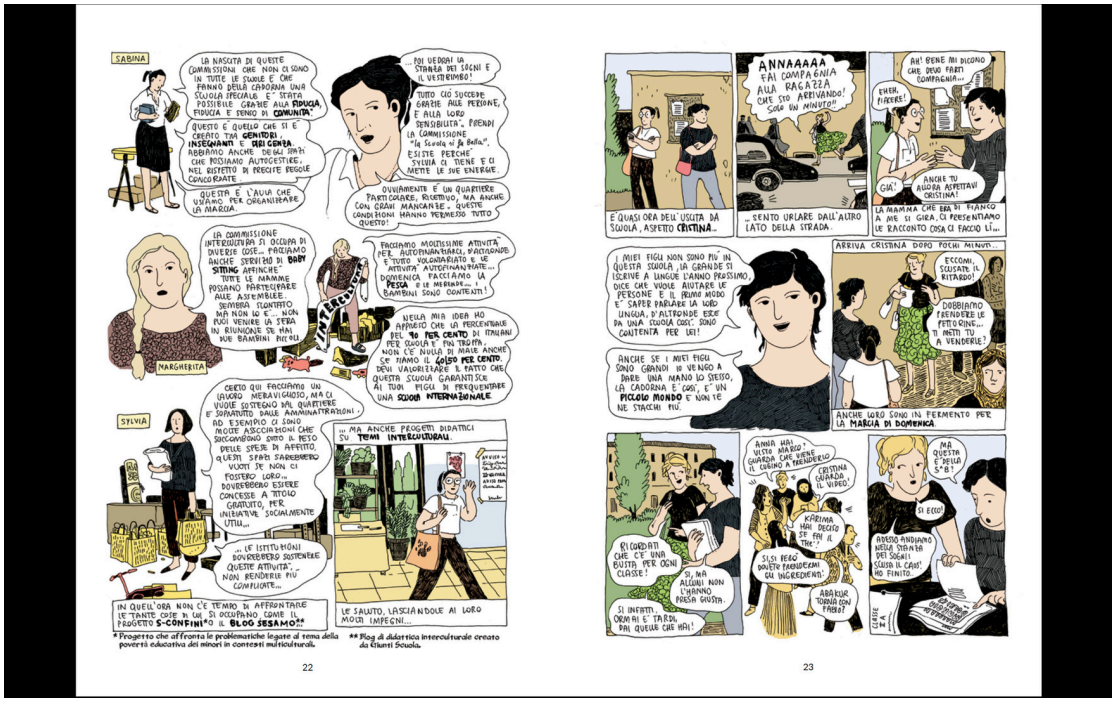

Figure 4: Female voices meet around the "Dolci" school in San Siro, Milan. Illustration: Elena Mistrello, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

Quartieri uses disparate narrative structures, graphic styles and voices to provide readers with a multifaceted comics representation of Italian marginalised neighbourhoods. The anthology can be read as both an assemblage and a research travel across Italy. The journey starts with a story based in San Siro, Milan, that is built around the multicultural spatial node of a primary school and the thick network of associations that have been growing around it in the last decade. Thanks to the work of many people, especially women, mothers, teachers, members of the associations working in the area, the school represents a space of encounter and inclusion and a laboratory for the construction of an open society in the future. As shown in Figure 4, cartoonist Elena Mistrello was able to represent the high number of people she met during ethnographic research through a dense graphic style, with many balloons and portraits packed in the same page: in this way, the outlook of the page visually reproduces the richness of actors and networks operating in the arena, and the plurivocal ethnographic experience the cartoonist went through having access to the researchers' network. Moving east, in the second chapter the reader of the comic book anthology enters the Arcella neighbourhood, in the city of Padua, on which we will come back in the third section of the paper. The journey continues with a stop

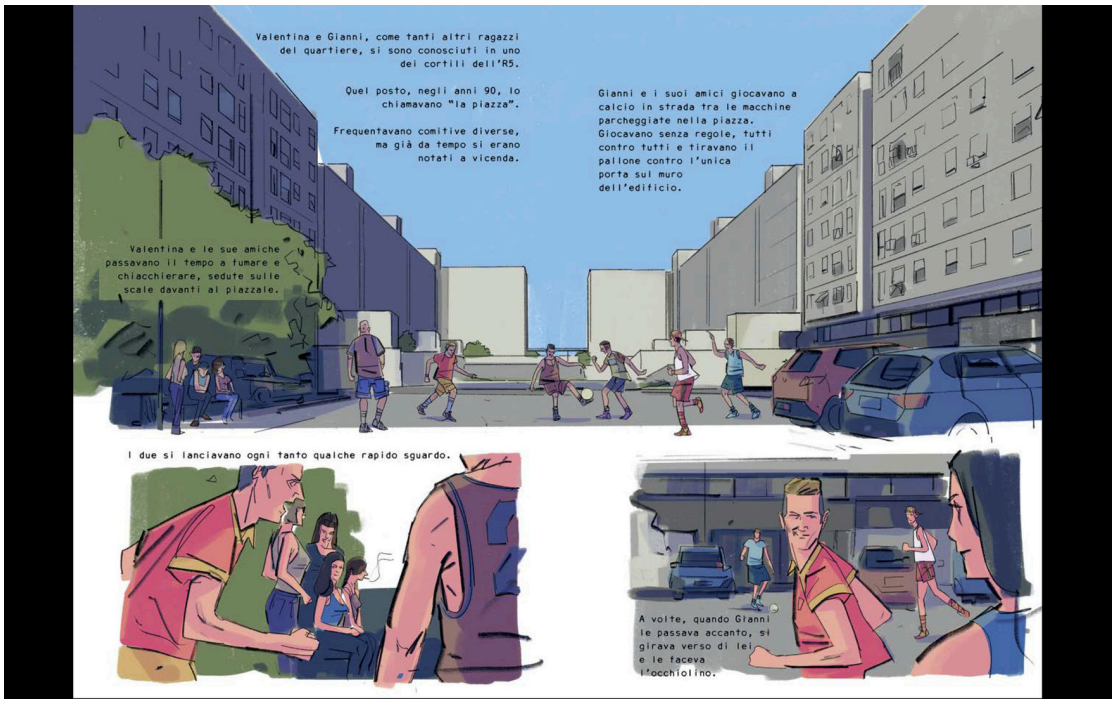

Figure 5: Intimate stories of everyday life in Tor Bella Monaca, Rome. Illustration: AlekosReize, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

in Bolognina, a nieghbourhood in Bologna. Here, as shown in Figure 2, a banal playground gives the opportunity to stage a transgenerational encounter between the elders, representatives of the historical residents in the area, and the new inhabitants: the basketball pitch is a place where memories of a working-class past and hopes for a new identity in the neighbourhood co-exist, without coming to a dialogue. Thanks to its recurring presence in the comics, the basketball playground is a protagonist of the ethnoGraphic narration, rather than a mere setting for the story to be told. Moving south, the third chapter enters the metropolis of Rome and the stigmatised area of Tor Bella Monaca: as shown in Figure 5, the iconic architecture of its grey buildings represent a visual thread and permit readers to grasp the spatial atmosphere of the neighbourhood. The story focuses here on a single character, Valentina: a young mother, whose intimate and personal experience resonates with many other stories of marginalisation but also of social solidarity in the area. These contradictions are also part of the area described in the last chapter of the comic book anthology, where the journey ends: the ZEN in Palermo. Here the many voices of inhabitants and local associations are juxtaposed through disparate graphic styles and a collage of photographs, cartographic projections and drawings (see Figure 3). These plural visions help readers imagining these peripheral neighbourhoods through a polyphonic and multifaceted lens that moves beyond stigmatised and stereotyped narratives. If McFarlane and Swanton, among others, have already proposed "a discussion of what assemblage thinking might offer critical urbanism" and its praxis (McFarlane, 2011; Swanton, 2011a, 2011b & 2011c), we suggest our comic book anthology could be used to explore what comics could offer to critical urban studies. The process of "associative meaning-making" that is typical of comics is further enhanced by the form of the collection (Kuttner et al., 2020, p. 11), which resembles urban assemblages of disparate elements whose connections makes new understandings possible. The comic book anthology, like an urban assemblage, asks readers to

recompose their peripheral geographies, to construct their connections and build their verbo-visual associations.

3 Affordances and Challenges of EthnoGraphic Research: Spaces, Agency and Narrative Maps from Arcella, Padua

3.1 The Case Study: Arcella, Padua

Quartieri was not simply an attempt to differently represent five Italian urban peripheries. It was also an experiment aimed at reflecting upon what changes when you decide to use comics to do research work. Indeed, in *Quartieri* the comics form was not only used for representation but was "part of the data generation process" as Kuttner *et al.* put it (2020). The creation of the comic was thus an integral part of the research process. In this section Adriano Cancellieri intends to reflect upon and explore "the resources and opportunities that the form [of comics] *affords* researchers" (Kuttner et al., 2020). We do this by reflecting on our own experience of composing the chapter *Arcella* of the comic book anthology: thus, the following paragraphs represent an attempt to partially reproduce our unfolding conversation about "the doing of comics as a research practice" (Peterle, 2021a), and an interdisciplinary dialogue between an urban sociologist and a cultural geographer engaged in urban research. The fact that Giada Peterle is both a geographer and cartoonist further permits us to deepen the narrative, stylistic and verbo-visual choices that were made in order to present ethnographic research in comics form.

The Arcella neighbourhood[3] in Padua has a population of more than 40,000 and can be found in the area immediately behind the city's main train station. It is a mixed, residential and working-class neighbourhood, with many schools, children and young people, but also with a lot of older people who live on their own. It is Padua's most multiethnic neighbourhood, in which almost a third of the city's immigrant population lives. It is therefore an "arrival neighbourhood" (Saunders, 2010; Cremaschi et al., 2020), in which people from all over the world, principally from Romania, Moldova, China and Nigeria, but also from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, choose to disembark in order to start a new life or to move on again, shortly afterwards. For this reason, Arcella is a stigmatized area, with low house prices despite its proximity to the centre and its good connections (particularly thanks to the tram). Arcella is considered an urban periphery, marginal to the city, not only due to its spatial separation but also due to the mental geographies of the city's residents, who sometimes define it "a bit scary", seeing it as run-down, dangerous and "invaded" by foreigners. Yet, for those who actually live there, Arcella is a neighbourhood of local shops that shut down, reopen, and become more international while maintaining their small size and the sense of being a neighbourhood. In recent years Arcella has also become a neighbourhood of social activism, in which social organisations, cooperatives and informal groups constantly organize events, set up cultural initiatives and come up with new projects for the area. Arcella is a dense neighbourhood marked by profound differences and extreme inequalities, characterized by its wealth of daily opportunities for encounters and micro-conflicts.

3. The area generally known as "Arcella" is officially called "Quartiere 2 Nord" (2 North Neighbourhood) and includes the territorial sub-areas of Arcella, San Bellino, San Carlo and Pontevigodarzere.

Figure 6: Performing the map, walking in the neighbourhood. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

3.2 Comics and Material and Symbolic Spaces: Or Comics as Spatial Stories

One of the objectives of *Quartieri* was to move from a traditional representation "from above and outside" to one "from below and within", that is to a greater attention to the social processes that operate in daily life with all of its structural difficulties as well as its particular possibilities and resources. The comics form was revealed to be particularly suitable for this task, due to its predisposition to contribute to the phenomenological exploration of social and cultural life.

As shown above in figure 5, in the stories of the neighbourhood's inhabitants that are told in *Quartieri* we discover the harshness of some of the structural conditions within which they live. They suffer greater than average discrimination both in the housing and job market and in social life, due to their ethnic origins and their socio-economic conditions. But at the same time we discover the everyday elements of their lives, their dreams and needs, difficulties linked to work and family, disorientation, fears and uncertainties, but also their continual search for everyday pleasures.

In the figures 7 and 8 we see a part of the Arcella neighbourhood, continuously stigmatized by local newspapers, in which there are many dismissed buildings used by migrants' associations, churches and businesses. The comic's form allows us to well represent the harsh urban context but also the interstitial and corporeal agency of the neighborhood's inhabitants who organize a street dinner involving hundreds inhabitants and artistic and intercultural events in order to collectively use public spaces and countering stigmatization processes and securitization policies.

In *Quartieri* we find many attempts by social organisations and residents to mobilise energy from below, sometimes in spontaneous and informal ways, in order to create spaces for encounters and mutual aid that have a huge impact on the daily life of the neighbourhood. As Juliett Fall points out (2014), "comics can depict and make visible the vulnerability of individuals, focusing on their agency and autonomy beyond their status of victims, and can move beyond simply taking note of their precariousness to provide instead a political basis for critical outrage grounded in empathy" (pp. 105–106).

The agency that emerges is a contextual and corporeal agency that, on the one hand, eliminates the separation between the active subject and the passive object (Stoller, 1989), and on the other hand gives radical centrality to the material and spatial aspects of the world and of social action. The comics form invites the researcher to continuously reflect on the material dimension of the terrain in question: when composing the pages of the comic, the author must make explicit, above all to themselves, a wealth of information about the places, objects and people that they are studying, as well as the details of their interactions. This means that the comics form favours a recreation and understanding of the three-dimensional character, spatiality and materiality of social relations. The information that emerges from the research turns into real "spatial stories" within the comic (de Certeau, 1988), which require a "spatio-centric" or "spatio-centered" reading in order to be understood (Westphal, 2011).

The story of the Arcella neighbourhood was told through its spaces, which ended up in a plural map made up of spaces linked to people's sense of identity, local shops, meeting places and contested and potential spaces (meaning spaces that are still being planned). It was the language of the comic that influenced the mode with which the research was conducted, determining the movements in real space according to that which would then become the narrative, geographical and temporal movements on the space of the page. Thus, the comic influenced the heuristic ability to understand urban spaces and the relationship between actors and spaces.

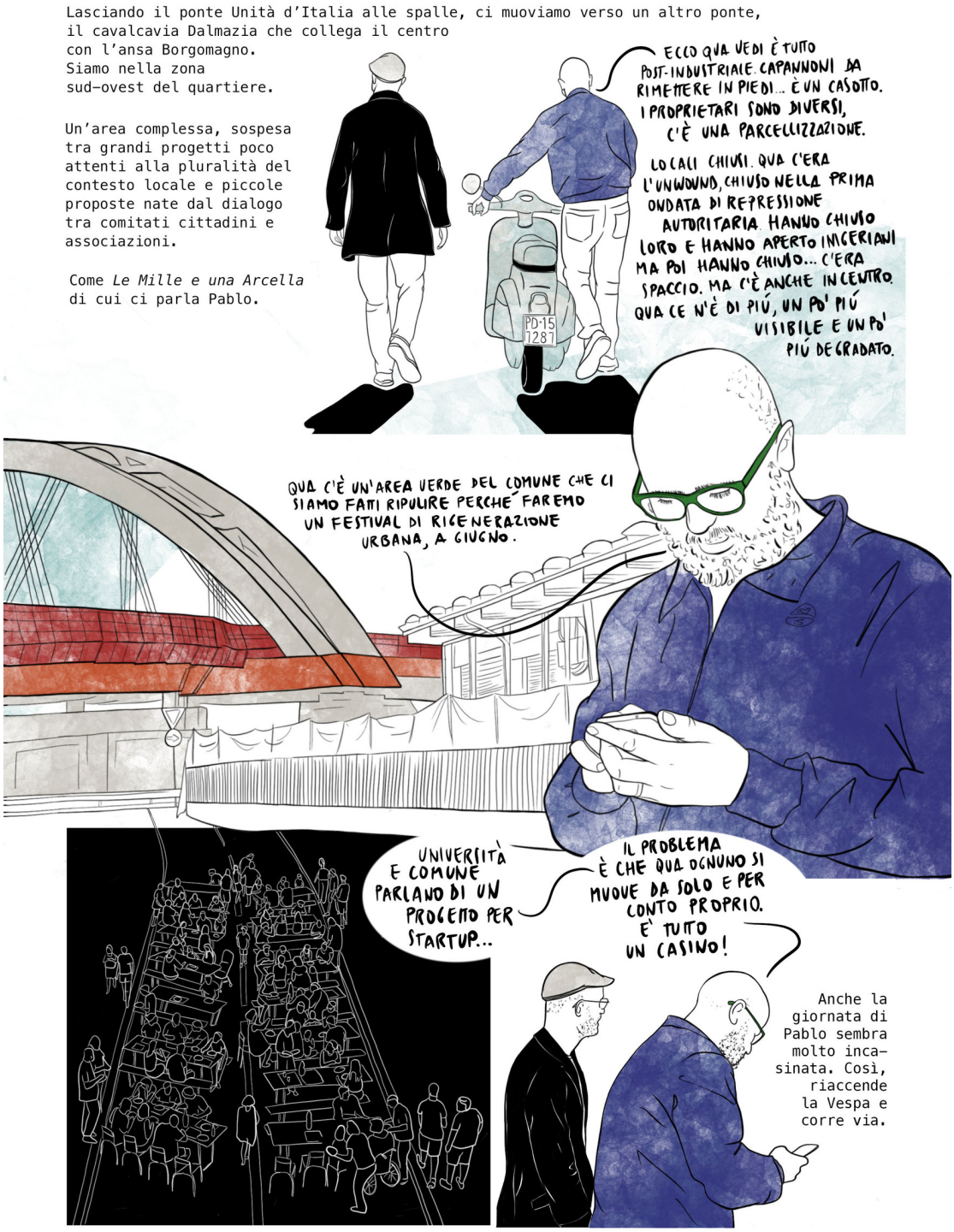

Figure 7: Stigmatized spaces and citizens' activism in the neighbourhood. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

Figure 8: Stigmatized spaces and citizens' activism in the neighbourhood. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

Furthermore, the comic with its bilinguistic structure, bringing together textual and visual elements, appears particularly suitable for recreating the forms of daily life (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010), which involve the continuous mental co-presence of words and images. On this subject, McCloud (1993) talks of the words and pictures of daily life as "partners in a dance" which "take turns leading" and supporting one another's strengths (p. 156). For example, in figure 9, we see the authors to conduct an interview while walking through the neighbourhood in search of the most significant places for the interviewees. The strip shows one of these places, a bridge that unites and divides the neighbourhood with the rest of the city, intertwined with the bodies of the authors and the interviewees, the dialogues in Bangla and Italian and the words of a rap song, cited by the interviewee because just composed on that bridge.

The alternation of pictures with extracts of interviews almost photographically recreated the precise moments and places, gestures, bodies and colours that characterized the fieldwork research, being, in a certain sense, a faithful visual and textual documentation of the work. However, the composition of the comics story was not simply a matter of providing a documentary photograph of what had been done, but of allowing new connections to emerge, putting the emphasis on apparently secondary aspects, taking us to new places in the neighbourhood and encouraging us to rethink our own map of Arcella: the bridges, the walls and the intersections assumed a symbolic value in the story which went beyond their mere geographic coordinates to make room for memories, feelings, encounters and conflicts, and for the everyday practices in the neighbourhood.

The bilingualism of the comic therefore challenges the traditional dominance of the word which characterises the academic world. Its capacity to stimulate emotional and imaginative elements reinforces the understanding of and empathy for the research objects (Leavy, 2019) and makes some dialectics that are intrinsic to the process of research and analysis much more efficient and communicable. Through "the complex arena of word-picture interaction" one can simultaneously juxtapose "data and analysis, theory and practice, the concrete and the subjective, or the official story and the counterstory" (Kuttner et al., 2020, p. 7).

Beyond the apparent reduction and simplification, comics give importance to small everyday details and stories, allow for readers' empathy through recognition (Fall, 2021), make complex dynamics and contents understandable, and shareable through their accessible hybrid form. That "they are also beautiful, aesthetically pleasing objects makes them all the more potent" (Fall, 2014, p. 106).

Nevertheless, it is not only the agency of the neighbourhood's inhabitants that is easier to represent in the comics form. In *Quartieri/Arcella* the agency of the researchers is very clear, for they have taken the step of also integrating themselves into their work as characters, thus putting their own subjectivity as researchers under the reader's lens. The subjectivity of the researcher is made yet more evident by the structure of the comic and its interlocking frames, which allow even the reader to see the work that is behind the representation, in the framing of the images and the editing and staging of the action (Nocerino, 2016). This is more obvious than in other visual media such as photography and video, where the "realistic" dimension of the object can lead the audience to forget the constant process of construction (Becker, 2007).

3.3 Comics and Urban Maps: Or Comics as Narrative and Emergent Mappings

Cartographic practices represent an expanding field of experimentation in the social sciences: after the spatial turn, indeed, *maps* and *mappings* have been variously explored to respond to the increasing need to visualise spatial phenomena. On the one hand, maps are increasingly

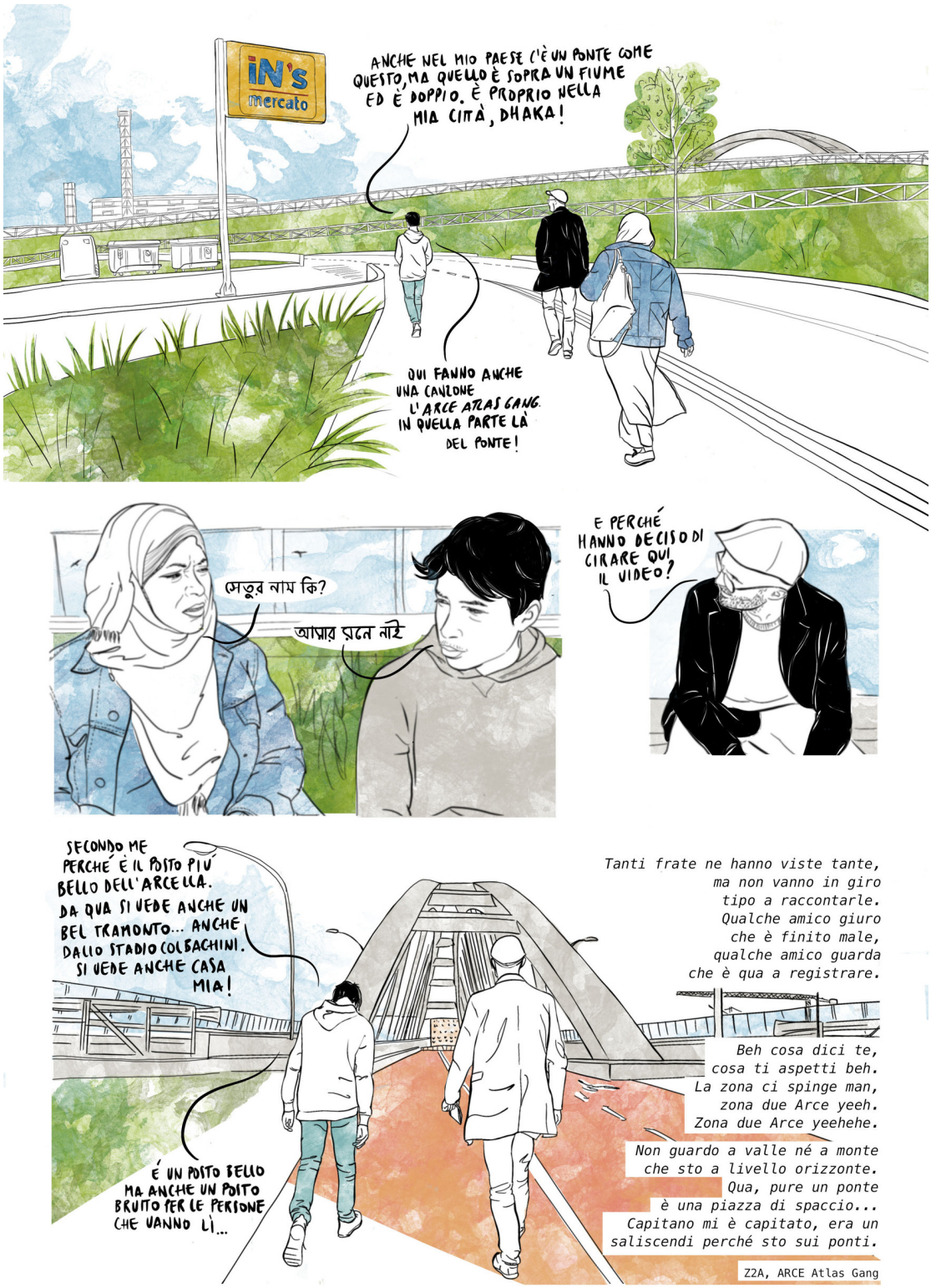

Figure 9: Walking with key-informants through everyday life spaces in the neighbourhood. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo, 2019

used in ethnographic research, often combined with other mixed methods, to represent both qualitative information and quantitative data, to engage local communities through participatory mapping processes, and to incorporate multiple stories into a GIS database, for example (McKinnon, 2011, pp. 458–461). On the other hand, maps and mapping practices have been at the centre of ethnographic and *auto*-ethnographic research, aimed at exploring map-making and map-using processes in different contexts and from processual, intimate and social, embodied perspectives (Boria & Rossetto, 2017, pp. 33–36). As Chris Perkins observes, "an ethnographic approach reorientates theory so that mapping becomes a social activity, rather than an individual response"; in fact, he continues, "recent ethnographic approaches have investigated everyday social experiences of places and the role that mapping practices play in identity and knowledge construction" (2004, p. 386). Whereas, thus, maps have been themselves at the centre of narrative and non-representational ethnographies (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008; Vannini, 2015), our aim was to engage with maps as a storytelling device, during ethnographic research, and as narrative triggers, during the ethnoGraphic practice of drawing urban comics. We wanted to explore the narrative potential of maps to conduct and represent ethnographic fieldwork: indeed, during fieldwork, we explored new urban centralities according to informants' stories, both adding their points of interest on our mental map and drawing them in the comics story. This way, our ethnoGraphic research soon became a cartoGraphic process (Peterle, 2021a, pp. 70–81) of narrative mapping in comics form (Caquard, 2013; Caquard & Cartwright, 2014), in which different spaces were gradually re-signified through the intimate stories we were told and then drawn on paper. Not by chance, then, these two different phases in our ethnoGraphic fieldwork are represented through two full-page maps in the comics story: Figure 6, indeed, shows the initial part of our ethnographic research, conducted by walking with interviewees across the neighbourhood, and shows our legs on the maps of Arcella; Figure 10, on the contrary, is a new vision of the same map, now valued of symbolic meaning through the graphic metaphor of the heart.

As Caquard and Cartwright assume, in narratives maps are often "used to ground the story in real places, to help the audience follow the plot and to play metaphorical and aesthetic role" (2014, p. 101). In our case, the presence of the map as a recurring visual metaphor in the story plays a double function: it helps readers to orientate themselves through both narrative (the comics story) and real space (the neighbourhood); it represents the idea of an ongoing process of research through an emerging mapping process, constantly enriched by new encounters. We know that "the potential of maps to both decipher and tell stories is virtually unlimited" (Caquard & Cartwright, 2014, p. 101). Here, we argue this is particularly intriguing when map-stories meet the spatial grammar of comics and maps are used in CBR. Through a "comic book cartographies" or "carto-centred" perspective, it is possible to activate an exchange between the map-like traits of comics and the comics-like features of maps (Peterle, 2017). For example, the choices the author-researcher has to make about what to include or discard from the comics story resemble the decisions of the cartographer about representational and non-representational elements in the map (Peterle, 2017 & 2019). Furthermore, in comics maps can serve a locative function, grounding the action in a specific location and deepening the realistic dimension of the story, and support the narrative process, serving as narrative structures and spatial metaphors (Caquard & Cartwright, 2014, p. 104). In the short comics story on the Arcella neighbourhood, we attempted to explore some of these narrative potentials of the combination of comics and maps: indeed, we used a map as the non-human narrator of our story and cartographic elements as visual rhymes that recur throughout the comics story. As shown in Figure 6, our positionality in the neighbourhood is represented by the superimposition of

our feet on the map: a graphic presence of our physical presence in the area.

Since the beginning, our wish was to allow the neighbourhood and its inhabitants to speak for themselves, and to imagine ourselves as facilitators rather than as omniscient narrative voices. For this reason, we appear as two of the many protagonists of the narrative, while the story is told by an external, non-human and almost impossible narrative voice (Rossetto, 2019): the voice of a map of the neighbourhood that speaks in first person (as shown in Figures 8 and 9). As Tania Rossetto observes, it-narrators are "both identical and distinct" from humans (p. 73), stimulating at the same time a sense of empathy and distancing. In our story, the map-narrator is a fictional expedient to move beyond the human-centred perspective of the researcher: the map permits readers to see researchers' positionality during fieldwork and avoid to uncritically embrace their point of view on the neighbourhood. Through the fictional lens of the it-narrator readers access a critical consciousness about how research takes place: as in Figure 6, in the comics story readers follow our steps while both the research process and the map are unfolding.

As Fall observes, comics have made reflexivity part of their essence and narrative language (2021, p. 24): given the fact that "standpoint matters" when both presenting and conducting research, comics provide us with opportunities to narrate everyday lives, represent embodied proximity but also disembodied detachment (p. 25). Bringing "the gaze back to the level of experience" comics question the view from nowhere, helping researchers in representing contradictions and readers in building their critical awareness (pp. 29–30): in the story, following our steps across the neighbourhood, the comics-map embraces a horizontal perspective and a street-view instead of a zenithal vision from above.

In *Arcella*, we decided to build a narration in which researchers' voices are just two of the many voices that can be heard: through structural narrative choices, comics help us to question some taken for granted ideas about who is allowed to tell stories about neighbourhoods (human or non-human inhabitants?) or to circulate them (inhabitants, researchers, spatial objects or even buildings themselves?). What emerges from this representation is a map that explicitly declares its provisory and fragmentary but also affective dimension. This is made explicit in Figure 10, namely the final page of the comics story, where the map of Arcella resembles the shape of a heart. This visual transfiguration metaphorically mirrors the affective relation with the neighbourhood that we built during the research process and that emerged also from the inhabitants' stories that we collected. This visual metaphor also responds to Fall's suggestion to construct counter geopolitics through making "empathetic geographies" visible through comics (2021, p. 31). The comics page makes affective and emotional spatial relations representable and readable (Clough & Halley, 2007; Lemmings & Brooks, 2014), bringing them at the centre of the story and, thus, of the research.

Sympathetic urban visions emerge through comics assemblages. In fact, the presence of the map at the beginning and the end of the comics story is meant to help readers to imagine the research path like a highly affective mapping process. Our map of the neighbourhood includes both everyday life spaces and key actors, whose agency is at the centre of processes of change in the neighbourhood. At the same time, by reading the comics story, readers themselves are asked to draw their own urban maps: following the process by which the neighbourhood was explored and the story composed, the comic form invites readers to take an active role in the composition of a plural urban map. As Dittmer affirms, "the visual semiotics of comics attempt to burden the comics with sense and meaning, but the situated consumption of comics is a unique event" realised by each reader in a different way (2010, p. 228): through this emergent cartoGraphic projection of Arcella, thus, we aimed to engage readers both affectively and

emotionally, asking them to create links, fill in the non-representational gaps between the panels, and even find missing points of interest that need to be added on the map. Therefore, the comics story suggests an intimate journey that hopes to stimulate readers' own narratives to emerge and intimate cartographies to merge with the ones represented on the comics page. Indeed, at the beginning of our comic the cartographic projection of Arcella is incomplete, only drafted: that map remains mute until it is loaded with stories, voices, meanings, and emotions coming from the different encounters we made along the research route: our incomplete map is open to other stories to be told and "visual alternatives" to be presented (Fall, 2021, p. 32).

4 Conclusion: Comics beyond Dissemination

Usually, the academic comic is understood as a tool that allows for the more effective dissemination of knowledge, finding a wider audience than that traditionally reached by university research (Sousanis, 2016; Getz & Clarke, 2016). The comic's huge potential for involvement and dissemination was confirmed by our experience with *Quartieri*. It helped us to escape some structures (both formal and linguistic) and to tell stories in a different way, directing them at a wider public, which is not necessarily expert and is potentially transgenerational. From this point of view *Quartieri* is fully part of the recent attempts by the social sciences to assume a more public role (see for example the recent reflections on "public sociology" and the debate on the "Third Mission of the University" (Burawoy, 2005; Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020; Shore & McLauchlan, 2012).

However, *Quartieri* also brought to light how comics are a research tool able to go far beyond simple, albeit fundamental, dissemination. The experiment showed that comics are fully integrated in some of the most significant theoretical debates on spatial, material and affective turn and on methodological ones on qualitative methods applied to urban studies. One of the fundamental characteristics of the comics form is that it gives centrality to the fact that subjects are always what Merleau-Ponty (1968) would call "body-subjects", that they are constitutively part of the "flesh of the world" (p. 123). The constant immersion of our own bodies in material spaces implies that subjects are also "sensible-sentients" (*ibidem*, p. 116), who are strongly influenced by emotional and affective forces. In recent decades the "affective turn" (Clough & Halley, 2007) and the "emotional turn" (Lemmings & Brooks, 2014) revealed that a fundamental element in human processuality are emotional and affective flows, which are always in dialectic, tension and resistance, flowing between bodies through mechanisms of circulation, transmission and contagion (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980; Amin & Thrift, 2002; Latour, 2005). Emotions are intensities that influence action, revealing what a situation offers us in terms of potential actions, and are thus strongly linked to our engagement with the world (and consequently also to possibilities for social change). These affective atmospheres are not inert and apolitical contexts given once and for all, but force fields that can from time to time be reconstructed through atmospheric practices and above all through the continual process of affective attunement between atmospheres and bodies and between bodies and atmospheres (Massumi, 2015; Bille & Simonsen, 2019).

The comic allows us to understand and better represent this radical intersubjectivity of the experiences of daily life, which forces us to give up abstractness and determinisms in order to see human action as an (embodied) practice which is socially and politically situated (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). The comic should not therefore be superficially dismissed as an extra-academic genre but should be understood in all its potential and take its place in the

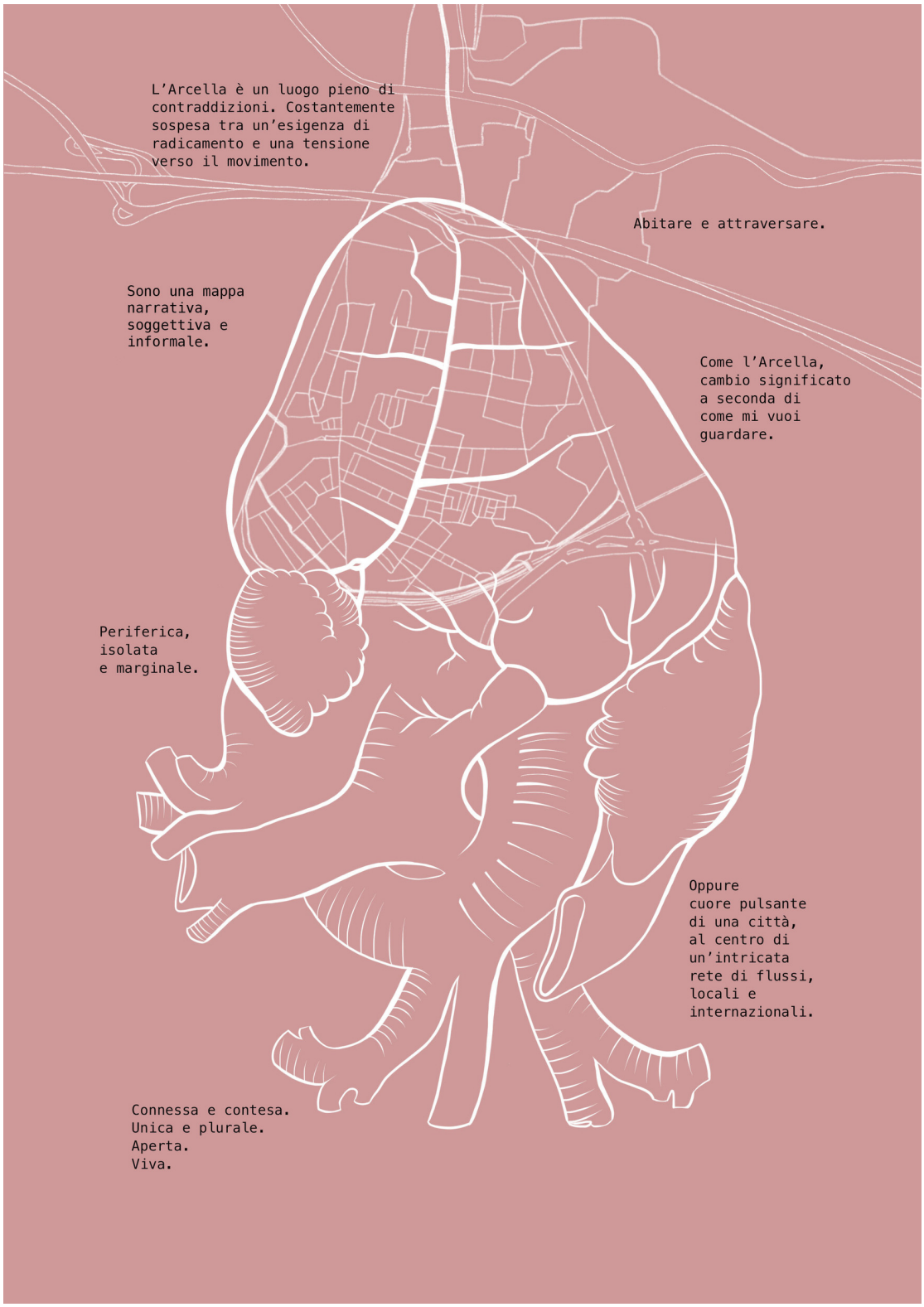

Figure 10: Affective relations change the map of the neighbourhood into the symbolic image of a heart. Illustration: Giada Peterle, in *Quartieri*, BeccoGiallo 2019

toolbox of the social scientist. This is a tool with its own *affordances*,[4] but also obviously with limits. We should thus avoid any superficial or acritical enthusiasm which sees the use of the comic as unproblematic. For example, the fact that the comic is able to represent "the lives of others", giving more visibility to research subjects and generating more empathy with their stories, also raises important ethical reflections about its outcomes in relation to the "form that research products will take and the contexts in which it will be disseminated" (Kuttner et al., 2020, p. 14). A field of practices that is aiming to establish itself such as that of CBR, "must also include a healthy dialogue about ethics, a topic barely touched on in the CBR literature so far" (*ibidem*).

The field of comics, therefore, requires many more experiments and, even more so, increased reflection on those experiments, with opportunities for comparison and exchange between those who use this tool and/or reflect on it. We therefore await new contributions within this field, aware that one of the strengths of the "comics gaze" is that it forces us to keep our eyes rooted on the ground and helps us to understand the Deleuzean concept of "becoming in the world" (Whitehead, 1929; Dovey, 2010; Ingold & Palsson, 2013), which is the way in which phenomena are concretely lived by subjects in the situations and spatial-temporal contexts of daily life (Loon, 2017) and that "things" are concretely done.

4. The word "affordance", used in a variety of fields, in particular in environmental psychology and interaction design, (Maier et al., 2009) was coined by James J. Gibson (1979) to mean when a specific relation (in this case the one between urban research and "comics form") encourages and provides the opportunity for a specific action. Using Gibson's words: "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment" (p. 127).

Figure 11: The first public presentation of *Quartieri* took place in a small bookshop in Arcella called Limerick, a place that over the years has become a symbol of the counter-narratives of the neighbourhood.

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Portraits of Violence. Critical Reflections on the Graphic Novel

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Abstract

This essay provides a critical reflection on the graphic novel. Addressing the pedagogical importance of the genre and it's wider cultural influences, it also attends to the lessons learned from the production of the *Portraits of Violence* book. In doing so, it seeks to provide an introduction to the ways graphic novels can enhance critical understanding, especially when dealing with difficult problems such as violence.

Keywords: Violence; Graphic Novel; War; Critical Pedagogy; Portraits.

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1 Introduction

Back in the summer of 2014, I engaged in a series of conversations with the Japan based graphic novelist Sean Michael Wilson.[1] What began as a virtual discussion concerning the need to rethink about how we educate broader publics on the question of violence, eventually turned into the co-production of a volume called *Portraits of Violence: An Illustrated History of Radical Thinking* that would later be published by New Internationalist in 2016 (Evans & Wilson, 2016). The book featured ten distinct chapters focusing on the work of canonical thinkers, including Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, Paolo Freire and Susan Sontag, amongst others. While I had expected to the book to meet its sales expectations, I was nevertheless very surprised by the international interest in its publication, leading to a number of translations, including German, Korean, Spanish and Turkish. It also went on to receive a prestigious Independent Publishers Award in the graphic novel category. More of a surprise and revealing of my own initial naivety and full lack of appreciation of the genre (including its wide ranging productions from the original to the adaptive), were the positive responses I received about our adaptation from both younger and older adult readership, along my student cohort who continue to draw upon the book even though it's not required reading.

Before turning to the details of this particular book and to offer some critical reflections, I do think it is important to deal further with some of my own initial misgivings and hesitations, as I believe these are also culturally important and instructive in the project's development. Could a graphic novel after-all do real justice to any political problem, especially violence? Was there not a danger that in turning it into such an accessible style, the project would end up banalising and making light of deeply important issues? Worse still, could not the comic style actually be complicit in the objectification and insensitivity of victims? Prior to the project I had only a very limited understanding of the genre. It did therefore take me about two months before fully committing to the project. Having spent this time exploring more the history of the graphic novel (see below), what I also learned was how the very presence of the artform has been quite evident, though underappreciated, in more established aesthetic practices. There is in fact a highly agreeable understanding in critical philosophy, which has for some time fully appreciated the power of comedy (the artistic practice through which "the comic" emerges).[2] Such insight leads one to appreciate how the very role of the comic and its "characterisations" have been integral to how we have narrated history, broken apart crude essentialisations about human life, while being the vehicle that has allowed us to deal with the mire of existence. Whilst mindful of this, I simply hadn't made the connection between the philosophy of comedy and the graphic novel. Furthermore, not unrelated, those working in the genre might also stress how the very words *comic* and *comedy* are etymologically related to the Greek *komos*, which associated with the "revels", designated a time of humour, satyr and subversive transgression. Such festivals reinforced the importance of the *komoedia* — those literary and theatrical outputs so central to Greek poetics.[3]

Nevertheless, there was a question that continued to linger when dealing with the interplay between the discursive and the pictorial in the graphic novel style. This concerned whether the format detracted from seriousness of the text and offered a simplified or even superficial mediation of the prose. Could an illustrated version of *Othello*, for example, really capture the drama

1. On Wilsons work, see https://seanmichaelwilson.weebly.com/
2. On this see especially Critchley, 2002.
3. See Critchley, 2019; Revermann, 2014; and Shaw, 2014.

and intensity a more literal reading of Shakespeare might offer as the reader is sat alone with its words? Do we not in fact impose a certain image or dictate an impression in the minds of readership when providing artwork, instead of letting the words inspire their own "images of thought"? When growing up, it was almost a truism that the more mature one's studies, the less images appear in the text. "There are no pictures in this book", was often used to insist that things in the order of study were now getting serious, hence more attention demanded. While there is admittedly a notable distinction between books that feature artworks in comparison to the illustrated storylines of the graphic novel, even the simplest critical glance shows there's no neat teleology between childhood books that feature artwork and their gradual disappearance into adulthood. While the very first book I was given was a beautifully produced illustrated version of the tales of Hans Christian Andersen, its prose was hardly lacking in intellectual depth. Indeed, as I went through the period into young adulthood, as Stephen King offered a truly powerful way to stimulate the imagination (in terms of representation how many times would the saying "the film is not as good as the book" be repeated), I still found something truly engaging in books featuring illustrations, especially the interactive "Fighting Fantasy" novels such as *Warlock of Firetop Mountain* and *City of Thieves* that featured dark and sinister monochromatic engravings. Later in life, I would return to older classics that still gave so much inspiration, from the tales of Sherlock Holmes such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which were accompanied by the dramatic artwork of Sidney Paget (originally published in *The Strand* in 1902), along with what I maintain to be the best book of political theory every written, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, enhanced by John Tenniel's vivid and captivating imagery. Carroll, for his part, was all too aware of the tensions here: "What is the use of a book", thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"

How much the omission of images from books over time is less about intellectual value and more about economising on production costs for artwork and printing is certainly open to question? What we do know is history is replete and shaped by examples, where the power of the word has been truly enhanced by the power of the image. From the still remarkably vibrant pigmentations of the *Codex Amiatinus* Bible that is housed in the Laurentian library in Florence, which is widely acknowledged as the oldest surviving bible written in the English language, onto the version of Dante Alighieri's own komoedia — *The Divine Comedy*, brought alive by interpretative illustrations of both Sandro Botticelli and later Gustave Doré, so the serious has always been associated with the aesthetic. Indeed, in each of these cases, the image didn't simply provide artistic re-presentation. They would prove their own original and novel interpretations, which in the case of the Dante, proved just as important in terms of how we learned to imagine hell. We would also see a further brilliant example of this with Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, which was accompanied by the outrageously captivating artworks of Aubrey Beardsley.[4] Not only was the art in this collaboration equally as important as Wilde's prose, it would be integral to the subversion of representations concerning gendered norms and, in the process, dramatically altered the direction of the graphic arts. Striking out in a way that is reminiscent to what Frederick Douglass called an "aesthetic force,"[5] Aubrey's revolutionary style would be evidently influential over the likes of Harry Clarke, especially in the haunting illustrations for the 1919 version of Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*[6] and a 1925 version of

4. The images are available online as part of British library collection here: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/aubrey-beardsley-illustrations-for-salome-by-oscar-wilde

5. On this see especially Frederick Douglass speech, "What to the Slave is the 4th of July? An Address delivered in Rochester New York, on July 5, 1852" in Blassingame, 1982.

6. For the artwork of Harry Clarke related to Tales of Mystery and Imagination see:

Goethe's *Dr Faust*.[7] It would also be central to what would eventually be called Art Nouveau. To conjure the words of Wilde from an inscription in a copy of *Salome* he gave to the artist, "For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the Dance of the Seven Veils is, and can see that invisible dance".

Figure 1: Aubrey Beardsley, Artwork for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*

Critics might invariably point out here that the artwork of the likes of Botticelli is a world away from the artwork of the more contemporary comic book genre. This is undoubtedly true. And yet we should not forget that art is ultimately a matter of taste and not a competition. We certainly should also not underestimate the influence or question the integrity of artists who work in this style, whose originality and technical skills are so evident and worthy of our appreciation. Just as there are exceptional and mediocre figurative artists, so there are exceptional and mediocre graphic novel illustrators, whose creations truly enrich the human conditions. The exceptional and pioneering work carried out by Studio Ghibli, which have notably been so influential within the genre, perhaps being the case point. Productions such as *Spirited Away* show how it's possible through a harmonious combination of image and narrative to truly speak to different audiences, in a style that is able to traverse generations, while also touching about the most serious issues of tragedy, violence, loss, resistance and love, while affirming the power of the imagination. Though less visually dynamic, what the graphic novel

https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/harry-clarke-s-illustrations-for-poe-s-tales-of-mystery-and-imagination-1919

7. For artwork of Harry Clarke related to Dr. Faust see: https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/10/19/harry-clarke-faust/

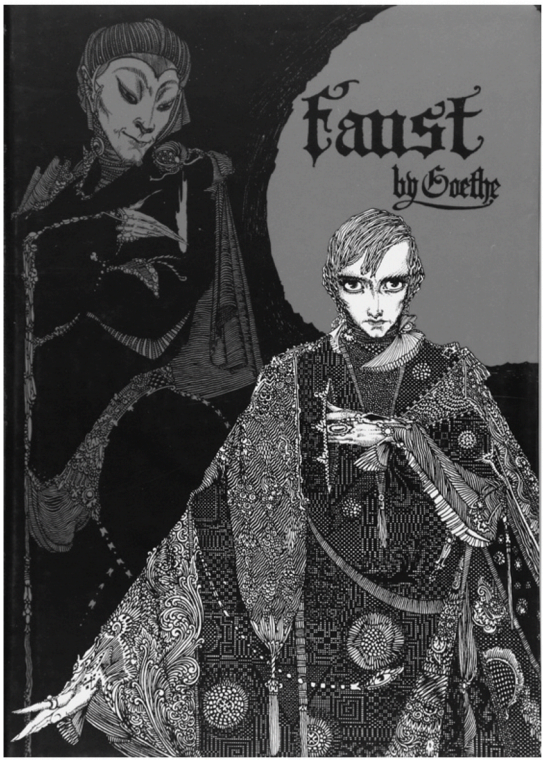

Figure 2: Harry Clarke, Cover Art for *Dr. Faust*

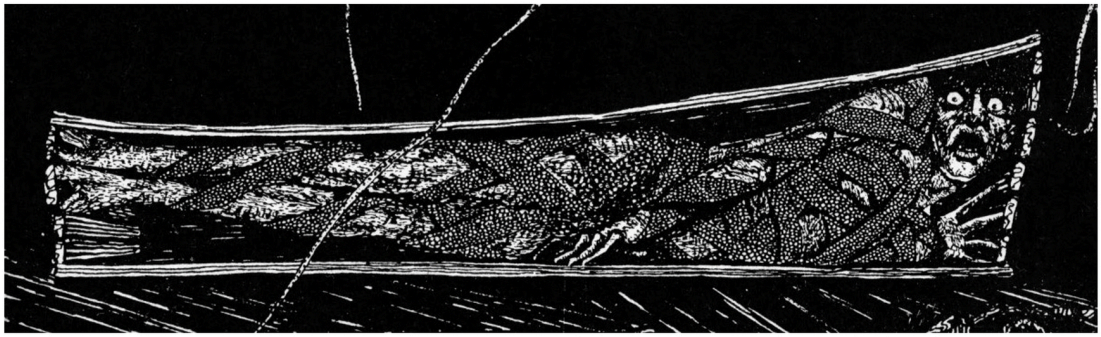

Figure 3: Harry Clarke, Artwork for *Tales of Mystery & Imagination*

does offer then is a means for the adaptation of a text and giving it over to a certain characterisation. Admittedly more simplified, it does then have merits and value on its own terms. But this is also where the intellectual dangers lie. Many of the criticism of the graphic novel might also be applied to film making or any other form of cultural production that seeks to visualise a discursive narrative. There are good adaptations, and there are bad adaptations. What's at stake here is not about simply staying true to the original. It is all about igniting the affective, aesthetic and atmospheric registers such that the work takes on a life and distinct quality of its own meaning and purpose. Many studies show how the mind respond to images in ways that open up new pedagogical ways for discovery or what John Berger famously called "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972). And it is also now widely accepted that in the age of new media technologies, the more effective ways of teaching offer a blend between the textual and the visual.[8] It isn't therefore so much a question about how whether the use of images have value or not in how we navigate the world. It is how they are achieved and brought together in ways that are pedagogically challenging. With these points in mind, I will now provide some critical reflections on my own productive experience with the graphic book format, revisiting the process, and offer some points of guidance for academics and scholars who are considering experimenting with the genre.

2 Researching the Genre

As already noted, part of my initial hesitation with the project was simply being unfamiliar with the graphic novel style. Hence, like all research projects that demand our attention and pedagogical application, before fully committing I began to research more intently about the history of the genre and its district political usefulness. Aside from acknowledging how the comic book and graphic novel industry was evidently commercially successful (though even this I had underappreciated), from the widespread appeal of Marvel to Manga, I was nevertheless already a firm believer in the importance of art and aesthetics in terms of developing the necessary pedagogical tools for critiquing violence. This I believe is an important first step in any collaboration of this kind. Now leaving aside the issues concerning the distinction between the comic book and the graphical novel (largely based on debates concerning maturity of audiences), what my research revealed was how the graphic novel connects to a rich history of illustrative critique, which not only can trace its explicit satirical routes back to the work of the likes of William Hogarth, but in the more serious prose of some the texts already mentioned, offers a genealogy that can arguably be taken back to the artwork of William Blake,[9] who engaging with literary classics mastered the mix between art, figuration and fantasy for the purpose of expressing a story on the nature of the human condition. Indeed, the connections between the more recent and highly celebrated graphic novelist Alan Moore (whose works notably include, *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen*) and Blake is often lauded amongst the genre's critics and writers (Whitson, 2006). The art of fabulation would not then only be an integral part of art and literary history, as philosophically appreciated by Gilles Deleuze and Donna Haraway. It could also be seen as an important precursor to the growing academic interest in the graphic novel from the 1980s onward.[10] Evidently in keeping with the much wider cultural tradition of muralism in Mexico that dates back to the revolutionary turn at the beginning of

8. On this see Russell, 2000; Louden, 1994.

9. On the wider cultural relevance of Blake see Eisenman, 2018.

10. For an insightful overview and analysis of this history see McCloud, 1993 and Eisner, 1985.

the last Century,[11] the power of fabulation would be later given renewed political dynamism in the writings of Subcomandante Marcos and his illustrated conversations with Don Durito the errant knight beetle, who is seen as a Zapatista Don Quixote and a Mexican cousin of the caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland*.[12]

Figure 4: Featured Artwork for *Subcomandante Marcos Conversations with Don Durito*

While the 1980s are widely recognised as a pivotal moment in the development of the graphic novel,[13] it would be my own encounters during the preliminary research with one particular novelist and illustrator who rose to global prominence during this period, which fully convinced me to set aside any lasting doubts. Encountering the works of Art Spiegelman is a lesson in the seriousness and importance of the graphic novel genre. Spiegelman also provides the standard to which all who experiment with the format should aspire. His books *Maus* (1986) and *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) transformed my understanding of the graphic novel and should be mandatory reading for all before committing to a project of this kind. The Pulitzer winning *Maus* comprises of an extended exchange between Spiegelman and his father Vladek about his and Anja's (Spiegelman's mother, who later committed suicide) experiences as Jews in prison camps in Germany and Poland. Not only does the narrative deal with issues concerning the lived experience of the Holocaust, the complex nature of memory is purposefully addressed through the literal reworkings of political animality. As Jeff Adam notes on its sequential style: "narratives of the past [are] located within the present. By these means their pedagogical projects emerge: the transmission and dissemination of experientially

11. For an excellent exploration of this see Coffey, 2012.

12. Subcomandante Marcos, 2005. All stories and accompanying artwork are also available online at: http://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/Chiapas95/CWDTableOfContents.html

13. On this see McCloud, 2000.

derived (albeit partial and fragmented) traumatic historical societal events. The image text, as a medium for recounting societal or collective memory (as defined by the widespread acquisition of knowledge of social events), appears to facilitate the ways in which we come to experience, and to know, traumatic history" (Adams, 2008). A point further emphasised by James E. Young who noted how the book suggests "itself as a pointedly anti-redemptory medium that simultaneously makes and unmakes meaning as it unfolds" (Young, 1993, p. 22). We might note the evident comparisons and contrasts here between Paget's rampaging *Baskerville Hound*, the terrified mice at the start of chapter two of Spiegelman's *Maus*, and the movie poster for the animated adaptation of Richard Adams beautiful, tragic and politically resonant *Watership Down*.

Figure 5: Sidney Parnet, *Hound of the Baskerville*

In the Shadow of No Towers also connects to Spiegelman's personal experience of witnessing violence, this time the attacks of September 11th, 2001, in New York where he was now living. Alongside offering a compelling narrative on the violence of that fateful day, the brilliance of this work is to further connect it to the politics of everyday life on the streets on the vibrant yet often brutalising city. Thus, capturing what Tim Grierson called "the fractured mindset of a frightened age" (Grierson, 2004, par. 4), Spiegelman, in short, shows the power to literally *animate* a problem, thereby allowing its author to also find reasons to believe in this world despite the horrors it continues to throw at us. As Carlo Wolff noted, "An artefact, a slab, a monument — this is no mere book. Unpaginated, ungainly and heavy, it seems to demand its own space. A coffee table can't contain a statement so thick and unsettling, a cry that

Figure 6: Art Spiegelman, *Maus*

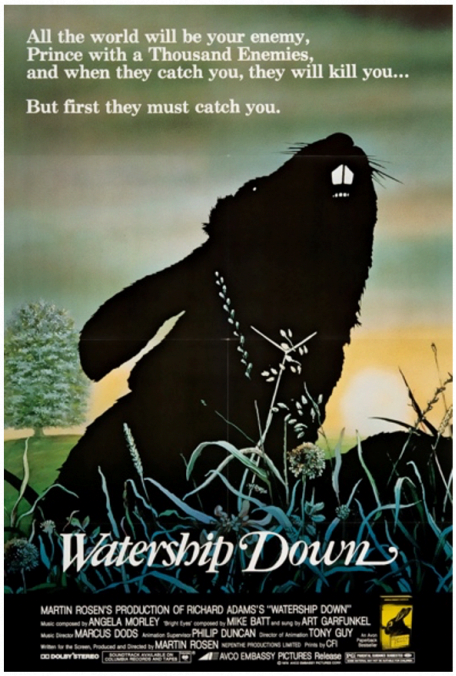

Figure 7: Official US Poster Watership Down

would outshout chaos [...] Unlike a work that's all text, you can 'get through' this quickly. Absorbing it takes more time. It's Spiegelman's attempt to keep the memory of the World Trade Centre from frying his brain. Patiently created, with great emotional trepidation, this signals Spiegelman's fresh commitment to a world he's just beginning to trust again" (Wolff, 2004, par. 2–5). Or as Spiegelman himself would later explain in an interview with *The New York Times*, "How vulnerable New York — and by extension, all of Western Civ. — actually is. I took my city, and those homely, arrogant towers, for granted. It's actually all as transient and ephemeral as, say, old newspapers" (Dreifus & Spiegelman, 2004). While the book is full of deep insight and critical awareness, arguably the standout page concerns the juxtaposition on page six, that deals with the history of the antisemitism he continued to encounter in New York, the return of *Maus* in these new fearful terrain, accompanied by the side art that reworks Richard Drews infamous image of the falling man.[14] The three boxed narrative is certainly amongst the most striking in the whole novel:

> "He keeps falling through the holes in his head, though he no longer knows which holes were made by Arab terrorists' way back in 2001, and which ones were *always* there".
>
> "He is haunted now by the images he didn't witness... images of people tumbling to the streets below... especially one man (according to a neighbour) who executed a graceful Olympic dive as his last living act".
>
> "But in the economic dislocation that has followed since that day, he has witnessed lots of people landing in the streets of Manhattan".

Invariably — the strength of Spiegelman's work comes directly from a position of authenticity. Very few of us would have to endure the suffering he faced; nor would we ever want that for others. But there is another lesson we can take from Spiegelman in our attempts to do justice to the subject of our concern. While it is important to speak with an authentic voice, it is also important to have the courage to speak truth to power. Hence, any such engagement with the image and text for the distinct purposes of developing a critical awareness, should push the boundaries of critique and be open to interrogate the operations of power. To echo the words of Henry Giroux who wrote the foreword to our particular book, "Creating alternative futures requires serious and sustained investment in arresting the cycle of violence, imagining better futures and styles for living amongst the world of peoples. It is to destroy the image of a violently fated world we have created for ourselves by taking pedagogy and education seriously, harnessing the power of imagination and equipping young people with the confidence that the world can be transformed for the better" (Giroux, 2016). Such a pedagogical understanding I would argue is crucial if the project is to have any critical meaning.

3 Narrating the Violence

The basis for the book was actually informed by a master's level course I had been teaching for several years concerning "Theories of Violence". While teaching this author-based program, there were a number of pedagogical lessons I would learn, which ended up being instructive for this volume. 1) There is no universal language when it comes to critical engagement. Often

14. I have engaged with the importance of Drew's falling man and what it means for the aesthetics in Evans, 2013.

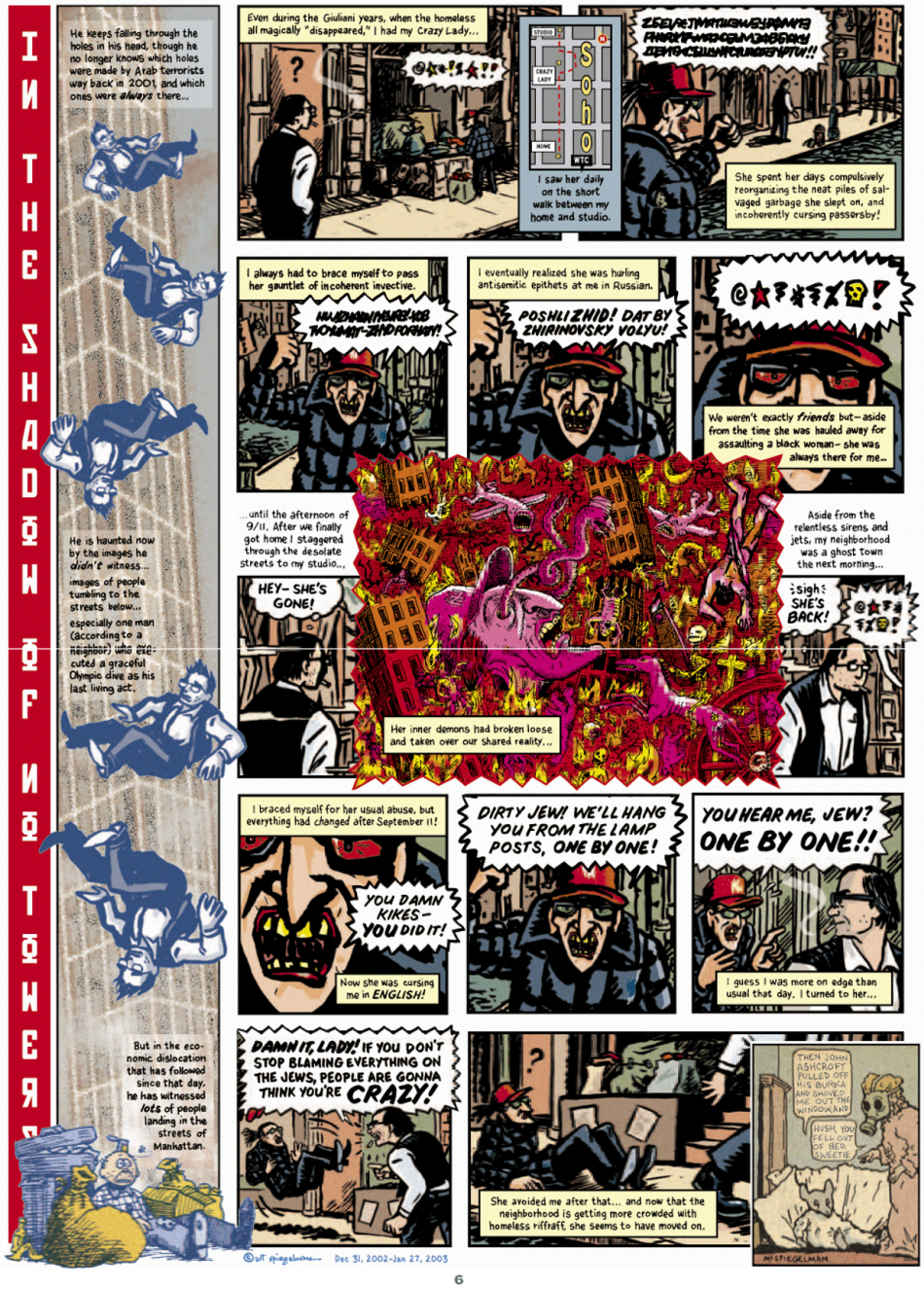

Figure 8: Art Siegelman, Artwork from *In the Shadow of No Towers*

in fact, when a student fails to grasp a concept, this can reveal more about the limits of language and its capacity to reach out and truly capture the mind of an audience. It is incumbent therefore upon the academic to learn to speak in multiple grammatical ways, presenting the same concept, idea or problem in different ways depending on the listeners; 2) The overburdening use of visual discourse on teaching platforms such as PowerPoint is the surest way to kill the critical imagination if it is done badly. Students respond in far more engaged and inspired ways if you manage to bring alive a problem through the use of imagery and the focused use of textual narrative from a range of theoretical, poetic and literary sources; 3) There is however a danger when using imagery in the context of violence. While there is a need to remain ethically sensitive to a problem, being parasitic to an image and use it merely as a prop or object is bad practice. Violence often stems from the objectification of life, hence to objective its representation is nothing short of committing a further act of intellectual and aesthetic violence; 4) To overcome this, there is much to be gained from resourcing the history of art. It is in fact possible to narrate the entire history of war, violence and the human condition through a handful of masterpieces; 5) Art however is not simply about a cultured or even more censored way to visualise problems that are by definition horrific. Critical thinking on violence has to confront the intolerable, while being open to the emotional field. Any educator on violence would fail if they didn't intellectually and emotionally challenge their students; 6) Central here is how we understand the importance of aesthetics. Politics doesn't simply borrow images or use them when it's convenient. Politics is aesthetic as it is all about creating images of thought, images of belonging, images of the world; 7) In this regard, when dealing with critical pedagogy, we are always dealing with the art of politics, which demands an appreciation of the power of images as both a negative and transformative force; 8) Trying to follow in the footsteps of all the wonderful and inspiring educating orators, such as Cornel West, the ultimate test for the academic is to be able to bring a timeless concept or idea to life and make it resonate in the present. The art of lecturing is all about telling a story, building a narrative, weaving together the conceptual with the historical, while presenting those ideas so that the imagination is captivated and the intellectual journey travelled enriching, even if that journey is to take you into the most brutal chapters in history or the dark recesses of the mind.

But these lessons are just a start point. I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of collaborating on such a project with an author who truly understands the genre and is able to animate the ideas. Writing of graphic novels is a unique skill that requires considerable dedication and know-how. As I learned through the hours of conversations, discussions around content, debates to ensure conceptual clarity, the drafting and redrafting of the prose, all this requires patience, compromise and above all the spirit of collaboration. This is especially the case when piecing together a narrative of the violence and transferring the structure and prose into a storyboard that has a credible arc to offers the reader a purposeful direction through the conceptual terrain. With the ambition being to add to a growing body of literature that both takes the genre very seriously and reaffirms the need for better visual literacy when it comes with dealing with the most pressing issues we face. As Lynell Burmark explains, "the primary literacy of the twenty-first century is visual... Our students must learn to process both words and pictures. To be visually literate, they must learn to 'read' and 'write' visually rich communications. They must be able to move gracefully and fluently between text and images, between literal and figurative worlds" (Burmack, 2008, p. 5). The task for the writer is therefore to produce the very kinds of works, which do ethical justice to the subject, pedagogical justice to the educated need for critically informed citizens, and aesthetic justice to the visual art of critical interventions for the purposes of rethinking and reimagining the world.

In our attempts to achieve this, we would draw upon a number of illustrative styles, from the complicated to the more minimal. Working with six different artists, each allocated a specific chapter based on the style we felt best suited to the narrative and questions being raised, it was important to ensure that each chapter retained its distinct focus. Like any public lecture, it was important to provide an informative background, clear insight into the conceptual problem, without stupefying or assuming the audience is incapable of understanding complex issues. We did however proceed on the basis of assuming no prior knowledge on behalf of the readership. To ensure the book was coherent and focused, each author was allocated ten pages, which featured one specific concept we felt best represented the author's contribution to the understanding of violence. While not in any way exhaustive, the book featured chapters such as Agamben and "*Bare Life*", Frantz Fanon and the "*Wretched of the Earth*", Noam Chomsky and "*Manufacturing Consent*", onto Susan Sontag "*Regarding the Pain of Others*". As part of my own visual learning process, I personally found it meaningful to work with a story board in which all the scenes were visible. This allowed for a visualisation of the full story, along with ensuring the conceptual arc was coherent. We would eventually piece together the final pages into a poster format for a number of public exhibitions.

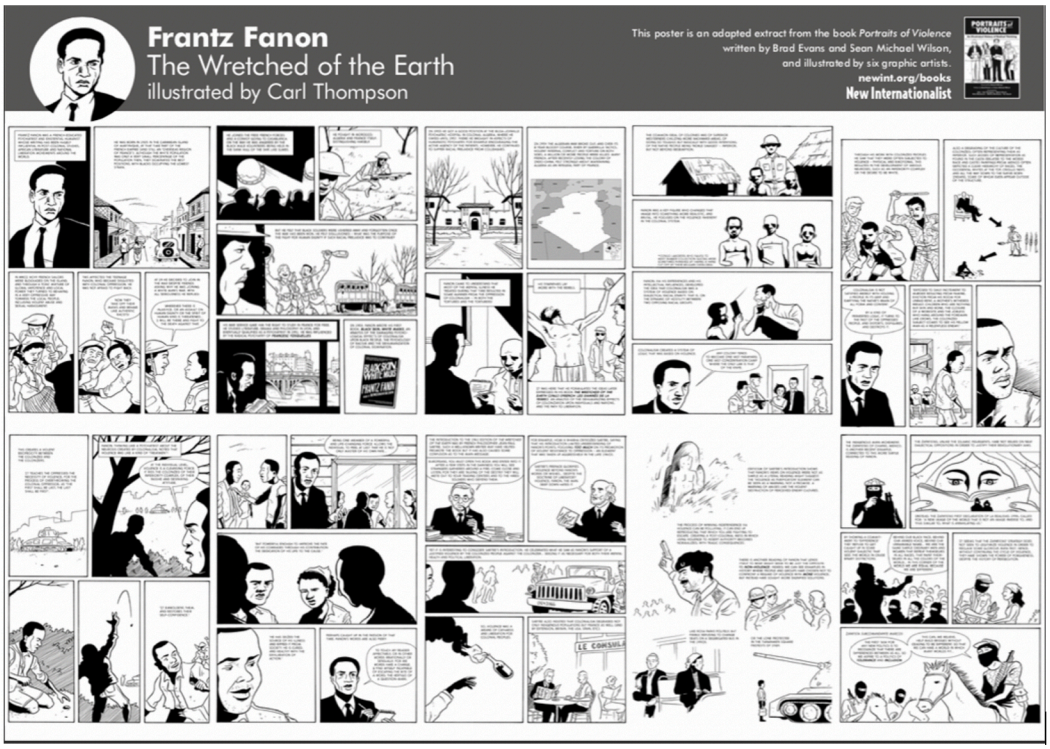

Figure 9: Full Storyboard Artwork from Chapter on Fanon & "*Wretched of Earth*"

4 Representing the Intolerable

The most pressing challenge a book of this kind faces is to ensure you do ethical justice to the problem. Mindful of Arendt, at every stage, we therefore had to be continually mindful of the dangers of banalisation. There was also a need to have an acute understanding of the history of aesthetics so that we would be careful not to reproduce racial, gendered or class-based

prejudices. Fortunately, we already had the intellectual guidance of the authors chosen to feature in this book! Collectively they show how the history of systems of power have always depended upon the power of images and the ability to mark upon the body of the living crude essentialisations. Hence, while the very act of characterising life necessarily involves bestowing characteristics and attributes, which may always be open to claims of insensitivity, we at least tried to maintain ethical standards and cultured appreciation. But one question still remained. Was there a danger that in the act of reproducing violence, we end up adding to the trauma and pain suffered? My understanding is that violence demands engagement. And while ethically demanding, it also requires an emotional and intellectual investment that is willing to confront the intolerable. We don't in fact suffer from an over-exposure to violence, nor do I accept the conceit that younger generations are now desensitised and apathetic. My teaching has led me to believe the opposite. What we lack is the ability to ask deeply unsettling questions about the realities of suffering, including the violence underwriting our ways of living. No study of violence would be complete without reading the harrowing testimonies of Primo Levi (1991). They are upsetting, traumatic and difficult to read. But this in turn forces us to confront the violence of historical fascism and to re-evaluate our own shameful compromises with power by asking challenging and difficult questions of ourselves. We should apply exactly the same standards when it comes to aesthetics. As Giroux explained in the foreword, "Confronting the intolerable should be challenging and upsetting. Who could read the works of the authors and deal with the examples featured here and not feel intellectually and emotionally exhausted? It is the conditions that produce violence that should upset us ethically and prompt us to act responsibly" (Giroux, 2016, p. 10).

A graphic novel does undoubtedly simplify both the discursive and aesthetic fields. This invariably does mean that it has its distinct limits. One of the benefits of the graphic novel however is to allow for a depiction of the violence that is less explicit in its brutalities. Of course, there is a thin line to be navigated here where the process of simplification may lead to the stripping away of its demanded intellectual and emotional impact. This in turn does pose a district question of whether simplification extract the real horror an image might induce, hence suppress the desired empathy. While this is open to discussion, it would be remiss to say that a graphic adaptation could have the same effect as an original photograph that depicted the raw realities of suffering. And yet the graphic novel does allow for engagement with audiences for whom the emotional weight of a deeply traumatic image of violence would be too difficult to bear. Moreover, there have been some studies undertaken, which note how a simplified drawing can actually generate more empathy in younger persons as they are more able to project themselves into the scene. Tangentially related, we know how abstract art is by far a more powerful medium when it comes to dealing with the intimate and psychological realities of pain and suffering. Spending an afternoon in the presence of the works of Mark Rothko is far more challenging than anything you may experience when gazing upon the work of Titian. Now, while the graphic novel is certainly not abstract or possessing of the same depth, it does nevertheless invite more open interpretations. As Scott McCloud explains, such images are "a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled" (McCloud, 1993, p. 36). Simplification then is not about distancing; it can be a doorway into a more intimate understanding. What appears more ambiguous can be a strength as the readership literally fill in the gaps for themselves, especially when history appears over-determined. Mindful of this, perhaps the most challenging section of the book for us concerned the holocaust. I was particularly mindful here of the important work on aesthetics provided by Jacques Rancière, notably in his mediation on the "Figures of History" (2014). Challenging the "unrepresentability" of extreme suffering, as he

passionately explained, "so we have to revise Adorno's famous phrase, according to which art is impossible after Auschwitz. The reverse is true: after Auschwitz, to show Auschwitz, art is the only thing possible, because art always entails the presence of an absence; because it is the very job of art to reveal something that is invisible, through the controlled power of words and images, connected or unconnected; because art alone thereby makes the human perceptible, felt" (Rancière, 2014, pp. 49–50). This was precisely the spirit in which the chapter on Arendt was commissioned, whose abstract and more complex lines were continually reworked until the desired results were achieved.

Figure 10: Sample Artwork from Chapter on Arendt & "*Banality of Evil*"

I felt that the illustrative style for this chapter was suited as it tried to capture the very violence such representations further bring to the world, the violence of an unstoppable force, the violence that blurs the all clear lines leading into what Levi called the "gray zone" (1991) or Agamben the "zone of indistinction" (1998), the violence that moves across the page as the past reaches into the present. But due to its intensity, it was also clear that this style wasn't going to

be suitable for the entire volume. Like the logic of the camp, it demands concentration, which can be exhausting. Stylistic issues aside, there was also another important issue that needed to be addressed. We needed to be considered in what was actually simplified in the scene, while ever mindful of the importance of the wider intellectual framework being presented. From the outset, we appreciated that providing continuity across each of the chapters was important. And we also tried to bring together the necessity for developing a sequential narrative the format requires with the genealogical approach that offers what Foucault called a "history of the present". One of the benefits of the graphic novel is its ability to allow for a montage format, which is able to move away from linear and reductive notions of space and time. It is possible to draw upon history, in a way that impresses its contemporary relevance. Such an appreciation of the genealogical method would be most evident in the chapter concerning Edward Said and his concept of "Orientalism", which effectively offers an insight into the West's domination over the East, including over the domain of aesthetics. We also recognised that in this chapter, it was important to be clear on the history and reveal some of its less taught yet deeply important events in the history of colonisation. A notable example would be the battle of Lepanto, which Said pinpoints as being a pivotal moment. The chapter would then end with a mediation on Marcos and the Zapatistas, who not only explain their struggle as a continuation of the colonisation of the New World, but also provide an important lesson when thinking about strategies of non-violence. Why study violence after-all if we do not believe it can be overcome and peaceful relations a possibility?

Figure 11: Sample Artwork from Chapter on Said & "*Orientalism*"

What has been clear from feedback I have received from my students is how the graphic novel does make complex theory seem less intimidating, hence it provides a gateway into literatures whose first encounters can seem impenetrable. But this does require considerable thought in terms of actually presenting the complex theory in an accessible and relatable way. Violence is complex and it doesn't lend itself to easy explanations or solutions. Too often, the ways in which violence is taught reaffirms the idea that there are single "root causes", which once identified can be easily addressed in a neat cause and effect fashion. I appreciated that the strength of this project would be to retain the complexity, while also ensuring the theory wasn't inaccessible or so dense it lacked possible representation. The chapter on Agamben would be a litmus test here in working through his often dense and yet highly important and influential work on violence. Considerable time was spent trying to refine both the narrative and artwork concerning his mediations on bio-politics, how it related to sovereignty and the wider question of politically qualified and disqualified life. Adapting already familiar iconic representations, from the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes "Leviathan" onto Davinci's "Vitruvian Man", so the historical and the contemporary could be brought together, from Caesar to the football stadium, through to Guantanamo Bay.

When dealing with aesthetics, it is however important to still recognise the importance of realism. As the genre demands, there is a need to deal with the figurative in its more simplified form. This requires complimenting the work with depictions that offer a clear resemblance to the original in order to give a purposeful and striking reminder of the reality of atrocity. We found this of particular pedagogical importance when dealing with the chapter on Susan Sontag, whose work really centres on the uses and limitations of true representations of violence, notably photography. In order to do justice to Sontag's theorisations here, following a number of discarded drafts that simply didn't capture the forcefulness of her insight, we came to appreciate the importance of including the actual photograph within the illustrative body of the text. In this way, we wanted to allow the reality of violence to puncture the pages of the novel, thereby reminding of the importance of the original and how the novel is not seeking to forget the raw realties of suffering, which also should command our attentions. To my mind, the graphic novel is not a replacement. It's more a compliment, which opening up the problem in an accessible style, can lead to a more considered engagement.

What I learned is how a book of this kind is always an experiment. In terms of the production, many of the scenes demanded rewriting and the artwork redrawn as the initial ideas simply didn't work. On occasions, it was clear that some of the theory was too overburdening, while on others the artwork didn't sufficiently reflect the problem or do justice to its gravity. There were admittedly a number of difficult decisions that needed to be made, including the dropping of an entire chapter, along with the redrawing of another entire chapter in a different and more suitable style. I cannot also stress how important it was to have a team of reviewers on hand who were able to continually read the drafts and make rigorous and critical comments on the style, which included a handful of younger readers up to retired academics. Their ongoing feedback proved invaluable and were crucial in the development, refinement and re-evaluation of the project from its inception through to its final drafting. And as with all written projects, looking at the final production today, there are elements I believe that have stood the test of time, while others I would undoubtedly change if starting again. There are a number of intellectual slippages, points in which the theory could be better explained, along with some inconsistencies in the quality of the artwork that only really become apparent once the producers have a certain distance from the final product. Such issues are part of the learning process and will be invaluable moving forward.

5 The Grammar of Resistance

Violence demands naming, it demands exposure, it demands representation, it demands critique, it demands resistance. At the heart of critical pedagogy is this resistive imperative. Working from the premise that education is always a form of political intervention, what is seen as critical is precisely the ability to imagine and outlive the forces of annihilation in the world. But from my understanding, such resistance is not about negating or lamenting the state of things. As Deleuze reminded, if violence ultimately seeks to destroy what makes us different, seeks to enforce uniformity over the affirmative qualities that give originality to a life, then to "create is to resist". Or to put it another way, if the final word on power is that resistance comes first, it is precisely the power of the imagination and the art of the possible that puts itself on the side of life and against those who seek to destroy and oppress the peoples of the world. In the spirit of Paolo Freire, who features in the book, my understanding is that critical books are important tools in the battle against violence in all its forms. And to that end, I would think that *Portraits of Violence*, in its own small way, is a form of creative resistance, which opens up criti-

Figure 12a & b: Sample Artwork from Chapter on Agamben & "*Bare Life*"

Figure 13: Sample Artwork from Chapter on Sontag & "*Regarding the Pain of Others*"

cal dialogue, including dialogue of the types of resources critical theorist can deploy. Though, ultimately, I know this is something for others to determine.

Like everything we produce, the book invariably has its limits. The graphic genre as a whole is beset with these. That is why, as mentioned, I see the book as an accompaniment and not a replacement for the original texts, which the volume draws upon. It is my hope that upon reading the book, students then turn to the original sources already armed with an animated appreciation. I am not suggesting here that we should return to insisting upon hierarchies of pedagogical importance. Such rankings in pedagogical outputs represents the worst in academic elitism, which not only upholds centuries of intellectual privileges that end up producing the very kind of sovereign academic the book openly has in its critical sights, it also bequeaths a form of what Erin Manning has referred to as neuropolitical policing premised upon a "neurotypicality and the largely unspoken criteria that support and reinforce the definition of what it means to be human, to be intelligent, to be of value to society" (Evans & Manning, 2018). Students should be encouraged to draw upon multiple grammars for resistance when dealing with violence. They should be encouraged to recognises no hierarchy in the order of thinking. And that there is no hierarchy in the senses when it comes to creative expressionism. Students should learn to appreciate the educative value of all such productions, whether we introduce them to the thought of Fanon, the artwork of Frida Kahlo, the poetry of Paul Celan, the music and lyrical poetry of Kendrick Lamar or the films of Andrei Tarkovsky. Being critically literate means being discursively, aesthetically, audibly and emotionally open to the transgressive potential of the arts, humanities and social sciences. For these reasons alone, it should be evident to us that graphic novels have their rightful pedagogical place.[15]

15. For further reading on the pedagogical importance of graphic novels see Jacobs, 2007, pp. 19–25; and Burger,

None of the pedagogical work we undertake should be devoid of self-reflection on our own practices. We have all delivered bad lectures, written poorly conceived papers, lost audiences as we have gone down some intellectual detour that only we seem to have followed, while trying to do justice to our concerns. While such failures can prove to be instructive, we also learn from those moments and engagements when our practices have the intended critical results. This is not about quantification in some crude numerical module evaluation. It's about a feeling you get when you can recognise how the students world is suddenly thrown out of joint, when the wonder of thinking and perceiving the world differently comes into focus, when the critical spark is so ignited you know they are not simply repeating some rehearsed orthodoxy. The task for the educator is to be alert and also learn from these moments. Seeing how my students have positively responded to this book, I set about a few years ago to introduce an entirely new mode of assessment in which they simply select any image and write an essay about why it allows for a viable critique of violence in the world. The responses have been outstanding, while each year a number on their own volition select artwork from graphic novels. Some of these have been amongst the best student essays I have read. That alone is perhaps the only real measure of success any of us should need.

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Making *Sociologically-Grounded* Fictions. A Review of the *Sociorama* Collection Experience*

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Abstract

As members of the scientific committee of a collection of sociological comic strips, we offer feedback here on our experience of translating qualitative sociological research into graphic fictions. Through the presentation of main editorial choices and the organization of the adaptation work, we explain and discuss the effects produced by this type of adaptation on sociological discourse. We present a "lesson learned" from this adaptation process that disrupted and challenged the inherent assumptions of academic sociological writing. This review of *Sociorama* albums highlights some advantages and successes, as well as some limitations and obstacles introduced by this comic-ization.

Keywords: Graphic Novels; Comic-ization; Popularization; Communicating Social Sciences; Sociological Writing.

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> "Surely, Sociology would not be worth an hour of effort if its sole aim were to discover the strings that move the actors it observes [...] if it did not assign itself the task of restoring to those people the meaning of their actions"
>
> – Bourdieu, 1962, p. 102.[1]

> "The *Sociorama* collection is where comics and sociology meet. [...] This yields fiction anchored in the realities of the field. Not every resemblance will be pure coincidence"
>
> – *Sociorama*, Presentation of the collection featured in the albums.

Since the very beginnings of sociology as a scientific discipline in the late nineteenth century, sociologists have engaged in unending reflection on how it should take its place in public discourse. Going beyond a purely speculative interest (Durkheim, 1893), articulating the relationship between the academic and political realms (Weber, 1919), as well as revealing to social agents the recurrences that structure their actions (Bourdieu, 1962), are among the ways that sociologists have used to disseminate sociology in public debate (Castel, 2000; Burawoy, 2005). The *Sociorama* collection was created with this same ambition: to adapt sociological works in the form of fictional narratives in order to reach a much wider readership and to disseminate sociological knowledge beyond its ordinary audience. Between 2016 and 2020, the collection published twelve albums and two special issues that can be bought to the shelves of both generalist booksellers and bookstores specializing in comics.[2]

In *Sociorama* albums, cartoonists (sometimes together with sociologists) imagine *sociologically grounded* graphic fictions: a whole story and fictional characters inspired by sociological descriptions and scientific results. As such, *Sociorama* addresses very different questions than those raised by the use of drawing during fieldwork for anthropologists and sociologists (Ingold, 2011; Nocerino, 2016; Morton, 2018; Tondeur, 2018) and more generally in "comics-based research" (Kuttner, Weaver-Hightower & Sousanis, 2020). Firstly, in *Sociorama*, drawing is strictly used *a posteriori*: artists do not go with sociologists during fieldwork, and sociologists are no longer on the field during the *Sociorama*'s process of comic-ization.[3] Then, drawings in *Sociorama* are not a medium to illustrate fieldwork stories or to communicate main results in a more educational or pleasant way. The inquiry process, theoretical and methodological background, and research issues are not represented at all. As a consequence, sociological knowledge, conditions of investigation, ethnographic materials, and their analysis and interpretations are blended together into the form of a fiction. However, the creative process that results into a comic book is not a simple adaptation of sociological documents, freely illustrated by cartoonists. It is a subject of scrutiny by sociologists (both authors of the original researches and

1. The quotation is also a nod to Denis Colombi's blog, which offers a perspective on sociology meant for a broad audience. The blog entry he posted about *Sociorama* at the launch of the collection gave us a lot of food for thought. Source: http://uneheuredepeine.blogspot.com/2016/08/la-sociologie-comme-elle-se-lit.html [The translation here comes from the translation by Richard Nice in Bourdieu (2007)].

2. For a presentation of each album, see the publisher's website: https://www.casterman.com/Bande-dessinee/Collections-series/sociorama. In September 2019, the collection totalled approximately 36,700 album sales, ranging from 1,000 to 5,600 copies per book. The best sellers at that date were *Les Nouvelles de la Jungle* (published in January 2017, with 5,626 copies sold), *La Fabrique pornographique*, *Chantier interdit au public* (February 2016, 5,336 and 4,731 copies sold), and *La banlieue du 20 heures* (September 2016, 4,454 copies sold). By comparison, Jérôme Berthaut's sociological work *La banlieue du 20 heures* sold 1,478 copies.

3. The situation is different for the album *Turbulences* and the two special issues of the collection (named *Sociorama Terrain*). We will discuss this point further.

the scientific board of the collection). The aim of such scrutiny was to ensure that the script respected enough and was grounded enough on the social reality observed and analyzed by sociologists — both in methodological and theoretical terms.[4] Here, a first dilemma arises: what is *enough*?

In this article, we propose to examine and discuss some effects of the "comic-ization" (the process we follow to adapt sociological books into sociologically grounded graphic fictions) from the perspective of those who conducted and monitored it.[5] *In a way, our intention is to contribute to the reflection on comics-based research by sharing a "lesson learned" from within, taking into consideration criticisms advanced at the beginning of our venture by colleagues interested in scientific popularization*.[6] On this point, some important clarifications are needed. Neither of us is a specialist in literature, graphic narrativity, or graphic anthropology. We were (and are) not engaged in research about the educational use of comic books or in comics literacy. Some of the issues discussed here cropped up during the *Sociorama* experiment itself. The following presentation is mainly based on our memories of oral collective discussions within the scientific committee and on personal written notes about synopses and storyboards, as well as discussions between comic artists, sociologists, and a collection's directors during the production process. Our reflection is also informed by conversations with the various sociologists and comic book authors involved in this adventure and by feedbacks received from different sources. This retrospective review is not an exhaustive analysis of the collection's contributions and operations. In particular, it does not include comic artists' point of view and the ways in which they experienced their work with sociologists in light of their training and professional background.

To set the stage of the collection and make the adaptation process clear, the first section of this article presents the origin of *Sociorama*: context, editorial line, and the division of adaptation work among the key players — that is, sociologists/authors, cartoonists, and the scientific board of the collection. All of these aspects shed light on the choice initially made that has shaped the collection and its contents around the choice of fictionalization of sociological surveys. In this first section, we will also explain the main criteria that guided us in the identification and then in the choice of the surveys that we finally adapted. Then, the second section examines transformations induced by the comic-ization on sociological writing routines: turning thematical analysis into a chronological character-centered plot; reusing fieldwork data set aside to offer a richer graphic representation of social reality; and enhancing sociological contextualization through graphic inventions. At last, the third section analyzes how the adaptation interferes with the sociological reasoning and requires sociologists to compromise with the standards they usually apply in their writings. This section underlines the limits of the attempt to create *sociologically grounded fictions* in *Sociorama*: the disappearances of the sociologists' fieldwork and of the sociological theoretical background potentially blur the status of the albums' content for the readership.

4. For this reason, *Sociorama* presents a different challenge compared to other types of adaptations, e.g., novels into comic or screen versions (see Roche, Mitaine & Schmitt, 2015).

5. We have contributed in several capacities, either as a cofounder of the collection (Mathias Thura), a sociologist who worked alongside comic artists to adapt their work (Jérôme Berthaut and Jennifer Bidet), or a member of the "scientific committee" (as all of this article's authors were). This committee was a name given to the team of sociologists in charge of monitoring the adaptation process so as to affirm the scientific basis of the collection.

6. Denis Colombi published on his blog a very accurate review of *Sociorama*'s strength and weakness after the release of the first two albums. A part of the issues discussed here are closely related to his review: http://uneheuredepeine.blogspot.com/2016/08/la-sociologie-comme-elle-se-lit.html

1 Genesis of the Collection and Organization of Adaptation Work

Sociorama albums are meant to fill an original position in the social field of realistic graphic novels. Defining its editorial line, cartoonists and sociologists involved in the creation of the collection tried to imagine a specific cultural object, different from other experiences of sociological comic books: creating fictional stories that are under the supervision of a scientific committee. When comic book authors brought to the collection their creative and narrative skills, sociologists shared their knowledge of sociological research, as well as its promising recent studies and innovative results.

1.1 The Context of *Sociorama*'s Creation

The project for the *Sociorama* collection was born in 2013 when four young sociologists, all of whom trained in ethnography and interested in comics (Marianne Blanchard, Yasmine Bouagga, Julien Gros and Mathias Thura),[7] met with an experienced comic book author who had already published several comic books and integrated documentary approaches into her own work (Lisa Mandel).[8] They pooled their respective resources (e.g., artistic legitimacy and knowledge of the world of comic book publishing, scientific legitimacy and skills, knowledge of recent works and surveys, networks of researchers and comic artists) to pitch the project for the *Sociorama* collection to a major comic book publisher, Casterman, with which Lisa Mandel was already in contact.

The editorial context was ripe for such a project. Several collections associating comics with science had been launched in France in the 2010s,[9] following a wave of graphic novels and a diversification of albums and magazines featuring reporting, journalism, and documentary comics.[10] In view of this rapid development of popular science comics, we chose to position our project from a different perspective to works that were already available. We did not want to make illustrated manuals in which drawings would be featured only in service of the text and alongside it or would include theoretical explanations. We did not want to illustrate "scientific adventures" featuring sociologists or anthropologists during their fieldwork or in the daily life of laboratories and faculties. Nor did we adopt the same approach as comic book authors turned investigators, such as Joe Sacco or Etienne Davodeau, who tell the stories of their investigations in graphic novels. As we sought an alternative format, encouraged to do so by Casterman who had an interest in positioning their product on a specific segment of the

7. Jennifer Bidet and Jérôme Berthaut joined the team committee in 2018 after their own works were adapted. Except Marianne Blanchard, who runs a sketching blog, no one in the team had drawing skills or any comic book-editing activity.

8. This meeting took place within the framework of the "Sociologie et bande dessinée" seminar organized at the social sciences department of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, which focused on the field of comic book production and the ways in which comic book authors represent the social world in their albums.

9. As Tondeur notes, we are witnessing a "graphic boom" in anthropology, both as a reinvention of the observation method and as a means of communicating knowledge (Tondeur, 2018). History is ahead of other disciplines in this regard, as its links with comics date back to the 1970s (Mitterrand & Ciment, 1993).

10. France featured the following examples: the magazine *XXI* in 2008 (53 issues until now); the comics series *Tu mourras moins bête* by Marion Montaigne and *La planète des sages* by Jul, both launched in 2011 and adapted in television; the best-seller *Economix*, published in France in 2012; the adaptation of the sociological work of Pinçon-Charlot (*Riche, pourquoi pas toi ?*) by Marion Montaigne in 2013, the creation of *La Revue Dessinée* the same year (30 issues); the collection *La petite bédéthèque des savoirs* in 2016 (29 albums); and the collection *Histoire dessinée de la France* in 2017 (by *La Revue Dessinée* and *La Découverte*).

documentary comics market, we decided to adapt sociological research in the form of realistic fiction.[11]

Our goal was for the albums to read "like stories" in order to offer readers a deep dive into a social world and enable them to discover it from the inside by immersion, while simultaneously doing our best to avoid a didactic or professorial tone. The aim was for the narrative to stand alone as a representation of a reality that had already been objectivized and analyzed in sociological works. The characters and situations depicted in the albums are objects of fiction rather than real situations or people that have been observed; they are inventions, albeit ones that are informed by knowledge obtained through field surveys, as they would be in a naturalistic novel (Giraud, 2013).

1.2 Adaptation Work Supervised by Sociologists

The division of tasks was quickly decided for the oversight of the adaptation work. Editorial responsibility for the collection was divided between Lisa Mandel, who was in charge of the artistic aspects (proposals for and selection of artists, support and consultancy for artists along the creative process), and Yasmine Bouagga, who coordinated the activities of the "scientific committee" of the collection, composed of four sociologists. This committee was responsible for identifying adaptable surveys and submitting them to artists and then for the monitoring of different steps of the adaptation process. The comic authors whom Lisa Mandel had selected to join the project chose a study among those proposed and read it before they started adapting it. From this point on, their creative process was screened several times based on a charter submitted both to them and to the sociologist who had authored the survey at the beginning of the adaptation process.

A conversation then began with the sociologist who had carried out the survey so as to draft the first scenario (or a *synopsis*) with its narrative framework, characters, and twists and turns. In the first albums, published in 2016, the sociologists who carried out the surveys largely gave the artists free range. As the adaptations progressed, cooperation often went deeper, and some scripts were even written in full collaboration (for instance, *Turbulences*, because the investigation was still ongoing and unpublished). Apart from their academic writings, the sociologists who wrote the surveys gave their field data (excerpts from field journals, interviews, and photographs) to the comic artists to help them represent this context graphically.

Once the scenario was validated, the artist moved on to sketch out the storyboard or "layout" (i.e., a drawn version of the scenario), which is a first draft of the final comic book. This enabled the author of the comic to test the development of the narrative framework and to start fleshing out the characters. The collection's scientific committee then proofread and commented on this storyboard to verify the accuracy of the adaptation. They would check whether the general argument was rendered well; whether the originality of the sociological work's perspective was well represented; whether its main results were salient; and whether the characters were sociologically plausible. Comic co-director Lisa Mandel focused on the narration to see whether the characters were endearing and the story compelling and whether a little humor could be added in a particular scene to enhance the argument. At this point, accuracy with regard to the sociological subject matter and narrative concerns sometimes clashed — often

11. The collection has deviated from this editorial line twice in special editions. In these two albums (*Les nouvelles de la jungle*, *Prézizidentielles*), which are compilations of comic chronicles first published on the website of the daily *Le Monde*, the investigation itself is the narrative thread: the sociologist and the comic book author are the main characters of the album, and the story follows them through their research.

where the intention to make the plot lively ran counter to the intention to show the ordinariness of certain events. However, the boundary between sociology and creativity also proved to be porous on many occasions. The sociologists on the scientific committee were likely to comment on the rhythm of the narration, and, from time to time, Lisa Mandel proposed a more head-on approach to certain social issues. Once the storyboard was validated, the comic author produced a final version that was proofread and amended by the team and then submitted for publication.

The production process for an album took about a year. The first version of the synopsis for *Vacances au bled* was discussed in February 2017 by the artist, the sociologist who authored the survey, and the collection's directors. Extensive discussions led to validation of the fifth version of the synopsis in May 2017 (Figure 1). This synopsis was in full storyboard form by the end of August. At that stage, the scientific committee added its own reading to that of the sociologist author and the directors. A second version of the layout was then discussed in late November, the first final pages were completed in January 2018, and the album was finished at the end of April and released on 7 June 2018.

This type of ongoing feedback loop brings together two professional worlds with distinct operating logics and time scales. On the one hand, the world of academic sociology, which is familiar with peer reviews and several successive draft versions of the same text, as well as with the extended timelines of field research and scientific writing, and reliant on government research funding and job contracts (temporary or tenure) and underpinned by the rules of scientific rationality. On the other hand, the world of comics, where creative processes and individual originality are precious, and above all subject to the constraints of freelance labor funded through successive individual projects. Misunderstandings as to each stakeholder's role and room to maneuver were inevitable. In particular, artists could perceive the scientific committee as an unknown group of reviewers who directly interfered in the creative process with abundant criticism. The committee sometimes asked for significant rearrangements between two versions of the same storyboard, thus delaying the artists' progress and disrupting their distribution of time between the projects they work on simultaneously to make a decent living.[12]

1.3 Which Surveys to Adapt?

The intention to create sociologically grounded fictions directly influenced the type of sociological research selected by the scientific team. The first criterion was conformity to the editorial line adopted with Casterman: surveys should be led in France and already exist in book form or at least in the manuscript of a defended thesis (a line from which we strayed only once, with *Turbulences*). The second level of selection seems to be linked to an effect of the committee's academic and scientific habitus (Bourdieu, 1976). Having all undergone training that values the same type of ethnography practice,[13] committee members targeted works that shared a conception close to field research and often drew ideas for adaptation from the catalogue of publishers that value the same type of research (La Découverte, Agone). The authors of selected surveys came from a relatively select institutional and scientific background. While they were mostly

12. For a *Sociorama* album, comic artists were paid 9,000 euros (in advance on royalties), of which they had to pay a percentage in social contributions (which varies depending on their legal status). Therefore, they could not work full time on this project alone for a whole year and had to take on other projects in parallel.

13. The members of the first scientific committee were trained in the same social sciences department of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, the same postgraduate school of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and the same laboratory, the Centre Maurice Halbwachs.

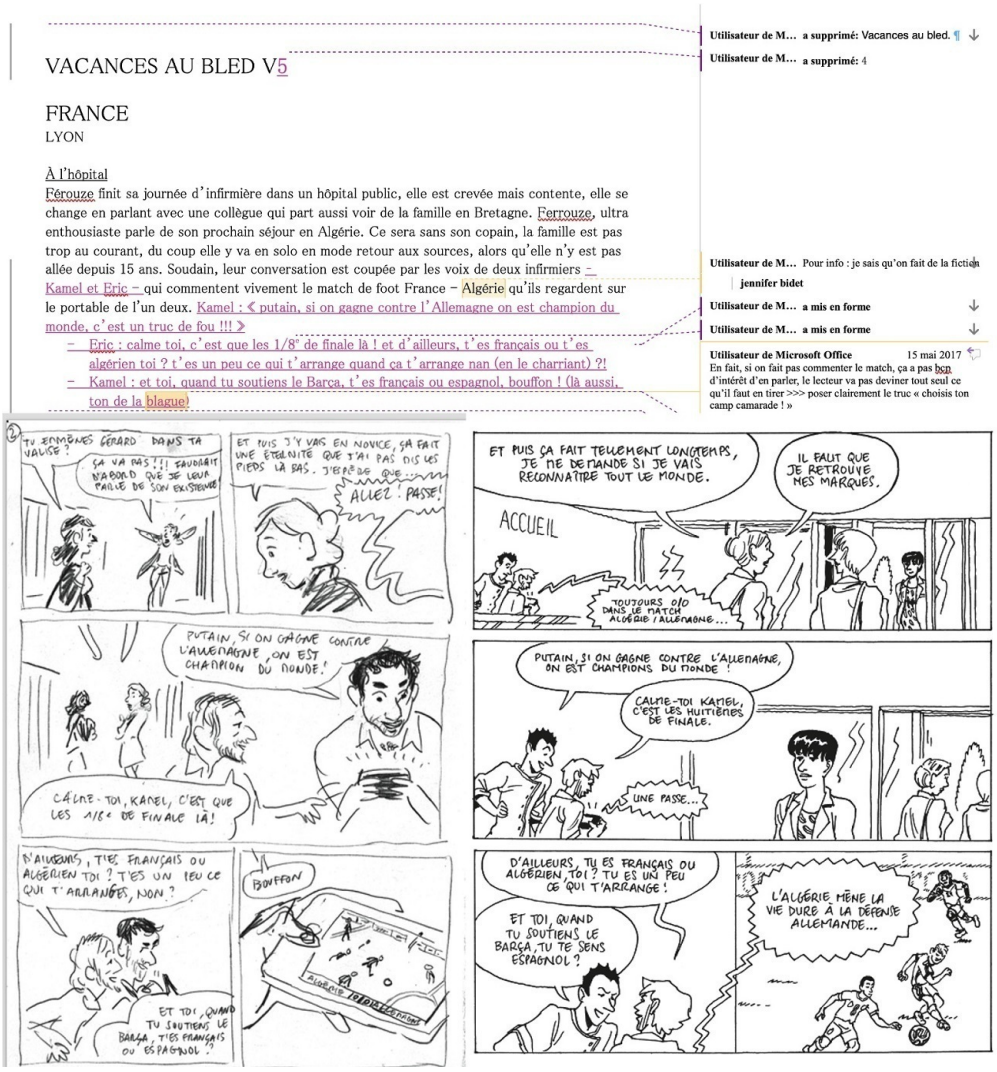

Figure 1: Vacances au bled, Bidet/Singeon ©CASTERMAN

The author produces three versions of the adapted story, that the adapted sociologist, the scientific committee and the collection directors commented on and validated: the synopsis (above), a draft of the storyboard (left), and the final version (right). Working materials taken from Vacances au bled *(2020).*

"young researchers" who did not necessarily hold a position in research and higher education at the time their studies were adapted, they did benefit from greater institutional integration, and therefore more extensive professional networks, than most young researchers in sociology.

The choice of ethnographically rich research was not solely informed by scientific affinities. Committee members felt that the process of transforming research into fictional yet credible stories also made it necessary to use detailed qualitative data. As ethnographic surveys are carried out through a process of immersion in a particular social world, the scientific committee considered they were better suited for creating characters (by drawing inspiration from respondents encountered in the field), settings (by drawing inspiration from descriptions of the places in which the survey took place), and situations. The team has also estimated that transforming a statistical survey into fiction would entail more effort to translate sociological results and reconstruct characters. Supposing that we were to adapt the major surveys conducted on the sexual practices of French people, what should the story's setting be? How characters should be created, and based on which statistical distributions? A survey based on qualitative interviews with respondents with whom the researcher had not been in contact in their daily lives, and who were not likely to meet each other in real life, would also be more difficult to adapt. Scientific committee members deemed it easier, and especially more prudent, to use data that already combined observations of practices with interviews, as well as to invent characters and stories in a more controlled way.

Another criterion according to which works were selected for adaptation was political. The goal behind the idea of adapting recent surveys was twofold: to deal with themes that could resonate with current events and to contribute to debates on political and social issues. Certain subjects were sufficiently prominent in political current affairs and warranted an issue in the collection. The publisher also sought to have "catchy," "popular," or "fun" subjects, but the collection has always preserved the analytical perspective proposed by sociologists. In the face of recurrent controversies in France surrounding so-called "gender theory," which intensified when the law on same-sex couples' marriage was passed in 2013, several albums dealing directly and openly with the social construction of gender differences and inequalities were published. From wage and career inequalities between porn actors and actresses (*La fabrique pornographique*), as well as between airline staff (*Turbulences*) or between surgeons (*Sous la blouse*), to differentiated representations of masculinity and femininity in flirting (*Séducteurs de rue*) or in couples' relationships (*Au tribunal des couples*), all of these situations highlight the gender issues in social relations. Issues of racism and immigration, which are also prevalent in public debate, are addressed in several albums, from the point of view of the construction of racist stereotypes in the workplace (*Chantier interdit au public*) or on television (*La banlieue du 20h*), and from that of the experience of racial ascriptions and racialized people's forms of agency in the face of these ascriptions (*La petite mosquée dans la cité*, *Vacances au bled*). Many of the albums adopt the angle of sociology of work, making hierarchical relationships visible in very different worlds, from mass retail (*Encaisser*) or professional football (*L'amour du maillot*) to the production of a mainstream television series (*Plus belle la série*) (Table 1).

Table 1: List of Published Albums

Albums	**Comics authors**	**Sociologist authors**	**Original book/Ph. D. thesis**
Chantier interdit au public (2016)	Claire Braud	Nicolas Jounin	*Chantier interdit au public. Enquête parmi les travailleurs du bâtiment*. Éditions La Découverte (2008)
La fabrique pornographique (2016)	Lisa Mandel	Matthieu Trachman	*Le travail pornographique, enquête sur la production des fantasmes*. Éditions La Découverte (2013)
Turbulences (2016)	Baptiste Virot and Anne Lambert	Anne Lambert	Unpublished work
Séducteurs de rue (2016)	Léon Maret	Mélanie Gourarier	*Séduire les femmes pour s'apprécier entre hommes : une socio-anthropologie des sociabilités masculines hétérosexuelles au sein de la Communauté de la séduction en France*. PhD, EHESS (2012)
La banlieue du 20 heures (2016)	Helkerava	Jérôme Berthaut	*La banlieue du « 20 heures ». Ethnographie de la production d'un lieu commun journalistique*. Éditions Agone (2013)
Encaisser ! (2016)	Anne Simon	Marlène Benquet	*Encaisser ! Enquête en immersion dans la grande distribution.* Éditions La Découverte (2013)
Sous la blouse (2017)	Marion Mousse	Emmanuelle Zolesio	*Chirurgiens au féminin. Des femmes dans un métier d'hommes*. Presses universitaires de Rennes (2012)
Plus belle la série (2017)	Émilie Harel et Paul-André Landes	Muriel Mille	*Produire des fictions à la chaîne : sociologie du travail de fabrication d'un feuilleton télévisé*. PhD, EHESS (2013)
La petite mosquée dans la cité (2018)	Kim Consigny	Solenne Jouanneau	*Les imams en France. Une autorité religieuse sous contrôle*. Éditions Agone (2013)
Vacances au bled (2018)	Singeon	Jennifer Bidet	*Les vacances au bled de descendants d'immigrés algériens : Trajectoires, pratiques, appartenance*. PhD, Université Lyon 2 (2013)
L'amour du maillot. Une saison en ligue 2 (2020)	Hélène Georges	Frédéric Rasera	*Des footballeurs au travail. Au cœur d'un club professionnel*. Éditions Agone (2016)
Au tribunal des couples (2020)	Baptiste Virot	Collectif Onze	*Au tribunal des couples : Enquête sur des affaires familiales*. Éditions Odile Jacob (2013)

2 Transposing Sociological Books into Comics: Imagining a New Way of Representing Social Facts

Adaptation implies significant transformations in sociological writing. It also sheds light on some of the modes of description and demonstration that we routinely adopt as sociologists.

Its rhetorical logic and usual structure must be reconstructed in order to be translated in fiction conventions and in a graphic language. The shift from scientific results (with academic standards in the administration of evidence) to *Sociorama* graphic fiction (addressed to a large readership) provides new resources for sociological writing but also places new constraints on it (for examples see Nocerino, 2016).

2.1 From Analytical Writing to Character-Centered Plot

First, the adaptation in fiction imposes to turn the analytical content of sociological writings into a plot centered on a few characters. In scientific publications, academics usually present their results thematically through chapters in which they respond to the hypotheses articulated in the introduction and highlight the main aspects and contributions of their investigations. These works link up a variety of approaches and materials (contributions from existing literature; socio-genesis of an institution or of practices; reflexivity on field research practices). Assembling data and formats is thus especially useful in putting the collected material into perspective. However, the transition to graphic fiction has often appeared to be incompatible with any detailed presentation of the general past or present context of the social world under investigation or of the social structure within which the characters exist.

The comic artists of the *Sociorama* collection faced the challenge of rendering the study's outcomes through a coherent and relatively long story (164 pages in manga-type formats). Their proposals for plots and storyboard were based on elementary scriptwriting conventions: the stories follow a chronological thread and feature one or two main characters, surrounded by a small number of secondary characters. The presentation of the protagonists' lived experiences and personal reflections had to enable readers to grasp the social logics that the survey had brought to light. By putting research into fiction, sociological analysis was presented in a story that had to match the rhythms of the respondents' lives. This is a second major effect: the plot must recreate social temporality (not just linear) where scientific publications may go through different times and moment in the same chapter.

Even sociologists on the scientific committee considered that several page-long sequences in the storyboards, which left out the main characters or broke with the chronological thread, were digressions and, as such, detrimental to the story's clarity. Even the use of flashbacks as narrative devices was generally avoided, with the exception of an account of the supermarket chain's creation in *Encaisser*. Creating plots entirely turned toward characters' temporality made it impossible to render the historicity of configurations and of the makeup of social groups represented in these stories, along with explanatory logics regarding protagonists' long-term trajectories. Dialogues, especially between juniors and seniors, were used as devices to provide a lot of the information, and certain analyses were transposed by writing in interviewees' reflexivity. However, these dialogues need to be handled with care as they can weigh plot development down, and authors might write them in the form of unlikely conversations that make it easier for readers to understand the issues at stake — as they put the sociologist's explanations in the mouths of characters — but that would never actually take place in the observed reality.

In most of these comics, sequences of the story align with the beat of daily life in order to relate the typical day of a cashier, for instance, or a construction worker, from the moment they are hired by a temporary employment agency in the morning, to the time they leave work in the evening. Throughout the pages, the stories also unfold in such a way as to reflect the experience of weeks, months, or even years passing by and to enable the script to show, for example,

the upward or downward mobility of characters within an organization (the ways in which journalists are promoted in a television newsroom or a footballer is gradually downgraded at the end of his career in a professional team). Sociological processes thus inform the narrative framework, but the use of fiction implies presenting them *at the level of characters*, from the point of view and positions of the protagonists embodied in the social universe represented.

This led to a pitfall that sociologists of the collection had to avoid: the temptation to draw opportunistically from the material of the investigation so as to feed the narrative and the presentation of characters by choosing the funniest or most surprising anecdotes and episodes, rather than more sociologically relevant situations and features. There is a tension between the triviality of the social world, its routines and repetitions, and the usual structuration of the hero's journey in fiction, with its revelations, challenges, twists, and so on. The main difficulty in adaptation lies in transposing the sociological enigma (the research question), which must reveal a social fact, into a creatively relevant narrative feature. Without consulting one another, the authors of the *Sociorama* collection have often ended up opting for the same scriptwriting approach: to write a *bildungsroman* about a novice entering a new world or confronting a social experience that is new to them. These "newbies" — and, along with them, readers — discover the backstage of social scenes, the spatial division of tasks, an organization of labor, routines, and so on. Their dialogues with insider characters are an opportunity to render the meaning given to actions and articulate various categories of respondents' vernacular representations, norms, values, and so on. The plot thus sheds light on a socialization process, which is often professional as several of the adapted surveys examined workplaces.[14] Some albums are based on a "change of scenery" effect, which is sometimes quite literal, as in the case of *Vacances au bled*, which recounts the experience of a young French-born woman's first trip to visit her Algerian immigrant father's country of birth and family.

Occasionally, the narrative device that makes social routines explicit is an extraordinary event that disrupts behaviors and the ordering of social activities. For example, in *La petite mosquée dans la cité*, the imam's position is both highlighted and simultaneously threatened after the announcement that local authorities plan to shut down his prayer room — an announcement that actuates internal conflicts among the group of faithful and external struggles with local authorities; or a family court judge retiring and being replaced by a young magistrate reveals, through the differences in the assessment of divorce cases, how justice contributes to reproducing an unequal social order (*Au tribunal des couples*).

2.2 Enhancing the Description of Social Worlds with Unexploited Data

For comic artists, focusing the story on everyday life means portraying the protagonists in the various social scenes of their lives (with family, colleagues, friends, etc.) and, more generally, in everyday situations and interactions (getting up in the morning, moving around, shopping, taking care of children, etc.), which are seldom observed and rarely discussed in any depth in sociological work. Comic artists' concern with presenting complete characters from a narrative point of view prompted the sociologists to draw on material that is usually excluded from their scientific articles and books. Due to the logic of specialization into thematic areas, resulting from the subdivision of teaching and laboratories, they very often disregard large parts of their data that fall outside the direct scope of their main research questions. Putting characters' daily lives into pictures helps to decompartmentalize the objects of research and to reintegrate the

14. Unsurprisingly, this account, based on the process of socialization of the main character in a new social world, also mimics the process of socialization of the sociologist itself during the fieldwork.

activities and social relations observed into the general sociological perspective of studies on social structures.

For example, the authors of monographs on workplaces may deliberately exclude data pertaining to people's "private life" (marital life and family, social circles, and lifestyle) but that are useful to give characters substance. Researchers' lack of sensitivity to certain aspects of their respondents' social experience, or difficulties in accessing this data in the field, have sometimes prevented them from providing comic artists with satisfactory answers — to the extent that parts of the characters' lives had to be invented in ways that seemed likely to the sociologists. This is the important limit of this attempt at the sociological reconstruction of reality. Moreover, as indicated in the first section, this is in line with the prudential choice to select only ethnographic surveys for adaptation in order to avoid completely uncontrollable reconstruction effects as much as possible.

In practical terms, the graphic illustration also shows the layout of places and protagonists' physical features, all of which can be used as fine indicators, for example, of the belonging to a social class, as in *Plus belle la série*, where the lifestyles of the scriptwriters of the mainstream television series appear to be out of touch with those of their audience (which is presumed to be mostly working class). To validate the artist's work, the sociologist's gaze must not only focus on the representation of a broader range of spaces and activities than are mentioned in the academic accounts but also scrutinize and confirm the features attributed to the characters and which thus highlight social characteristics (Figure 2). Drawings reinforce the attention paid to *hexis*, the details in clothing, and the expression of emotions, especially since these dimensions are more difficult to represent in the textual form of a sociological analysis. For instance, the frustration of a novice imam when he is referred back to his position as an assistant to the main imam, who takes over the direction of prayer in the mosque, is conclusively rendered in two boxes and a few pencil strokes — where it takes several pages of ethnographic description of the principles of imams' legitimacy in France to render verbally.

2.3 Graphic Innovations in Service of Contextualization

With Lisa Mandel's help, comic artists sought to come up with graphic solutions relevant to the story and that could render essential elements of analysis. The bubbles drawn above characters illustrate their ulterior motives and thus the conventions and forms of self-censorship that weigh on social subjects in certain interactions — for example, within their family or at work. Dreamworld sequences and illustrations of the characters' dreams depict social realities far removed from their everyday lives. For instance, the nightmares of a supermarket chain's human resources manager are haunted by monsters who represent the chain's shareholders, defining employees' working conditions and fates without ever having met them (Figure 3). This narrative device shows how domination can be wielded from a distance far beyond the interactions that sociologists could record.

Finally, comics as a medium afford new writing devices for sociology. Graphic transposition brings new demonstrative resources to scientific argumentation: the composition of the boxes and their juxtaposition on the pages; the range of frame types (much like close-ups or panoramic shots in photographs); and the possibility of creating repetition effects through drawing and of guiding readers' attention to particular points. It is an apt medium to capture and show the repetitive daily routine of court hearings and football team training sessions, the pace of work at the supermarket checkout, the frenzy of a newsroom just before a show is aired, or the parallel lives of different categories of airline personnel (Figure 4, above). It

Figure 2: La fabrique pornographique, Trachman/Mandel ©CASTERMAN (above left); Plus belle la série, Mille/Landes/Harel ©CASTERMAN (above right); L'amour du Maillot, Rasera/Georges ©CASTERMAN (below)

Three examples of reconstruction of the life styles of the protagonists: the daily routine and the apartment of a single security guard (above left, La fabrique pornographique, *2016, p. 8), the interior and materialization of the cultural capital of a young screenwriter (above right,* Plus belle la série, *2017, p. 38), and the comparison of two Christmas scenes in soccer-players families to depict social differentiation in a same professional group (below,* L'amour du maillot, *2020, pp. 80–81).*

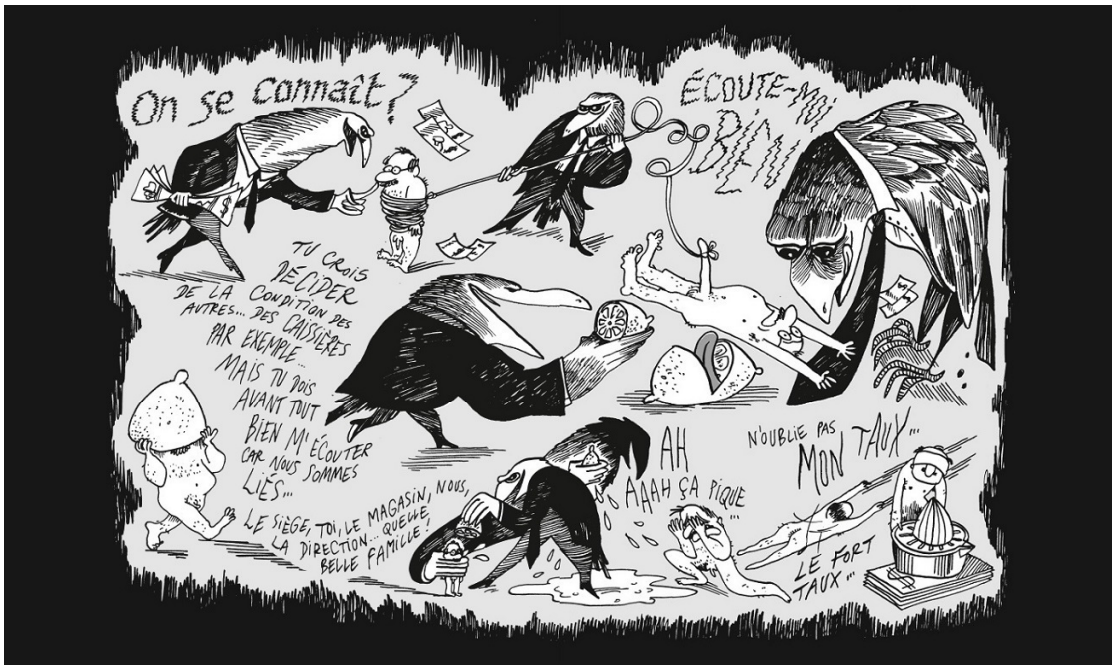

Figure 3: Encaisser, Benquet/Simon ©CASTERMAN (above left)
Graphic imagination allows to show how domination can be wielded from a distance: *the nightmares of a supermarket chain's human resources manager are haunted by the chain's shareholders* (Encaisser, *2016, pp. 66–67)*.

also allows the use of analogies or metaphorical evocations through drawing, which would not be conceivable in social science writing — for instance, by representing an angry construction site foreman in the guise of an elephant, which could signify his ascendancy over the workers (Figure 4, below).

Text is not the only way of rendering academic research. Diagrams, graphs, and tables are all modes of presentation of data (especially statistical data) that support the understanding of research results. Written argumentation is based on distinctions between different levels of reading (dividing the text into parts; referencing back to boxed texts, footnotes, and appendices; setting excerpts from interviews and field diaries aside from the main text), which make it possible to identify and prioritize the data presented. Taking care not to break the narrative thread, the comic artists often chose to insert explanatory boxes here and there, which featured similarly to what they would in sociological writings (Figure 5, right). In *La Banlieue du 20 heures*, each character that drives the plot and is central in rendering the investigation is presented upon their first appearance in a still frame, as they would be in a TV series' opening credits (Figure 5, left). These presentations feature a descriptive sheet with both humorous anecdotes invented by the artist and a list of social specifications deemed relevant to the character. The process is similar to how sociologists can summarize the main characteristics of their interviewees.

It is often necessary to insert detailed charts explaining statuses, positions in the organization or during a career (within the health care system, for example), and regulations so as to signify the weight of protagonists' relationships, constraints, and struggles, both in sociological writing and in graphic fictions. However, comics as a medium also afford the freedom to use even lighter explanatory snippets in the form of annotations and arrows inserted directly in drawings. In some instances, the difficulty of transposing these complex and overly space-

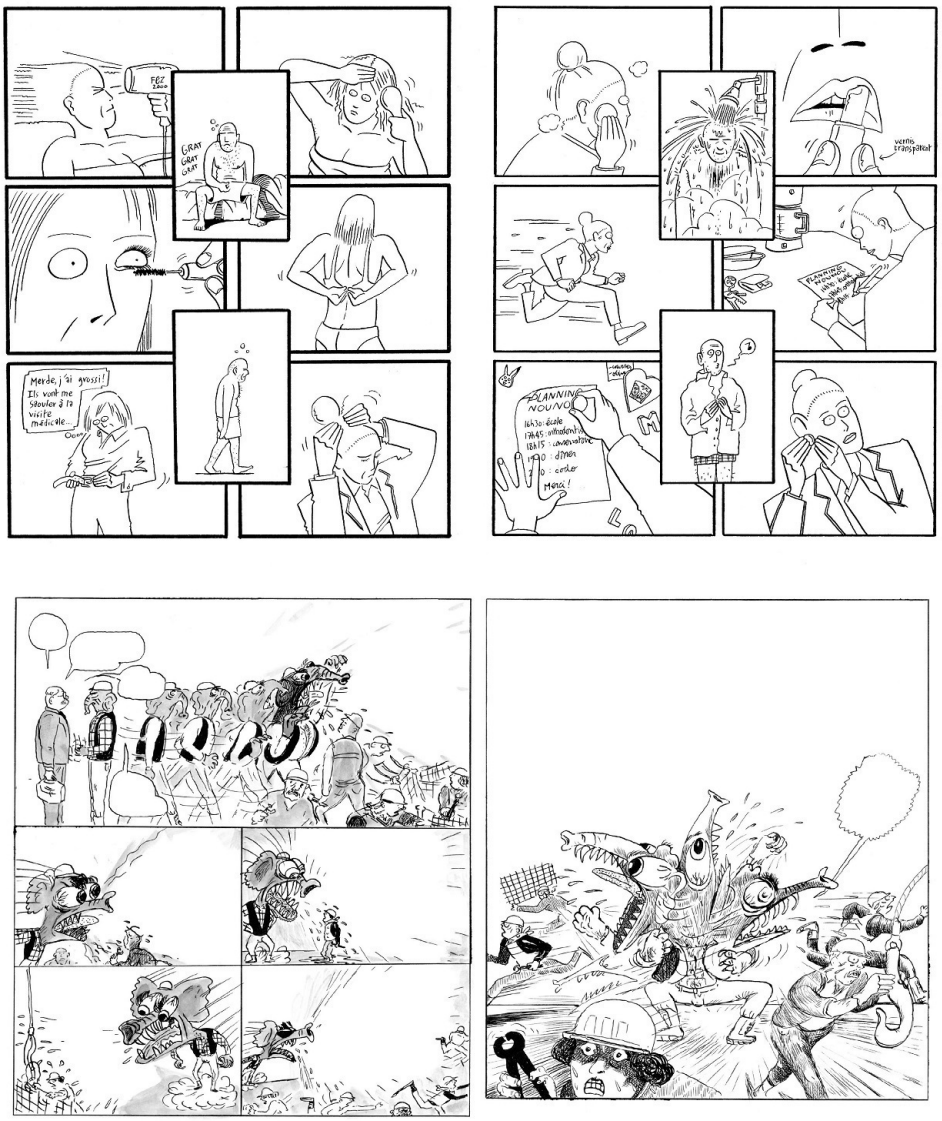

Figure 4: Turbulences, Lambert/Virot ©CASTERMAN (above); Chantier interdit au public, Jounin/Braud ©CASTERMAN (below)

Graphic transposition brings new illustrative resources to scientific argumentation such as the possibility of creating repetition effects to show the parallel and repetitive daily routine (above, Turbulences, *2016, pp. 15–16) or the ascendancy over the workers (below,* Chantier interdit au public, *2016, pp. 76–77).*

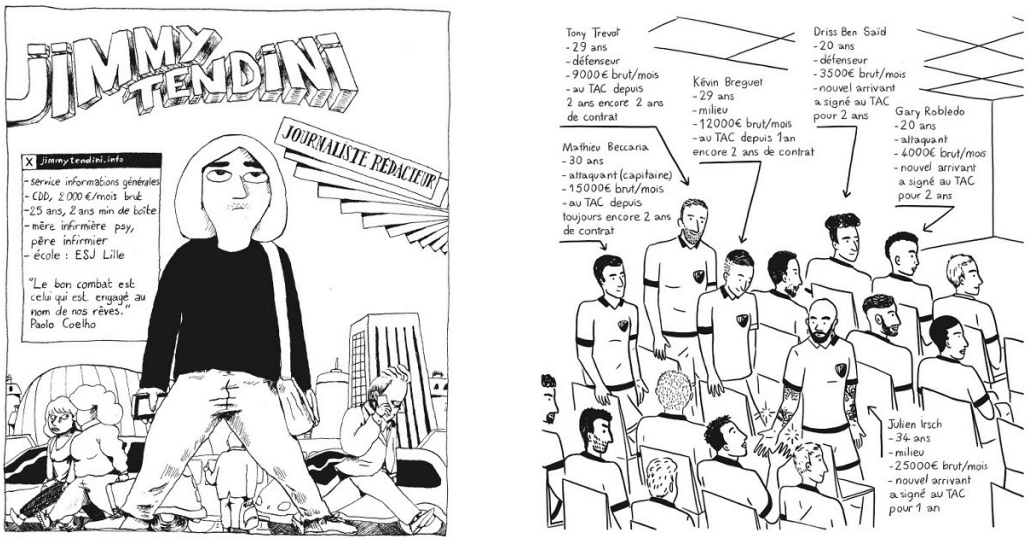

Figure 5: La banlieue du 20 heures, Berthaut/Helkarava ©CASTERMAN (left); L'amour du Maillot, Rasera/Georges ©CASTERMAN (right)
The comic artists often chose to insert social specifications into boxes that featured similarly to what they would in sociological writings (left, La Banlieue du 20 heures, *2016, p. 6), or explanatory snippets and annotations inserted directly in drawings (right,* L'amour du maillot, *2020, pp. 10–11).*

consuming contextual elements into comics led artists to resort to written passages (Figure 6). This is the case, for instance, of *L'amour du maillot*, where the football championship's operations are explained through a text supported by a few illustrations, or in *Seducteurs de rue*, with several pages organized as glossaries. Although Sociorama tries to make the traces of academic writing disappear as much as possible in its adaptations, these graphic solutions are ultimately the most obvious signs of the sociological frameworks hidden under the stories.

3 Distortions Inducted by Fictionalization on Sociological Discourse

Graphic inventions enriched the representation of social worlds and sociological processes and aimed at widening the audience of sociological analysis. However, drawing sociologically grounded fictions also led to creating important distortions on sociological discourses and misunderstandings in the readership. First, turning sociological surveys into fiction by imagining realistic characters raised the problem of dealing with stereotypes and clichés. Secondly, making the sociologist fieldwork and conceptual architecture disappear, in order to leave the reader to immerse him- or herself in the story, risks undermining the sociological intentions of the original survey. When investigations are transposed into drawn fictions, sociological knowledge and reasoning may be altered.

3.1 Creating Characters: From Ideal Type to Stereotype

One of the main difficulties in the transition from sociological text to drawn fiction emerged in the process of inventing the fiction's characters. The comic artists and sociologists sought to create characters that embodied a social world as well as possible. However, they had to feature

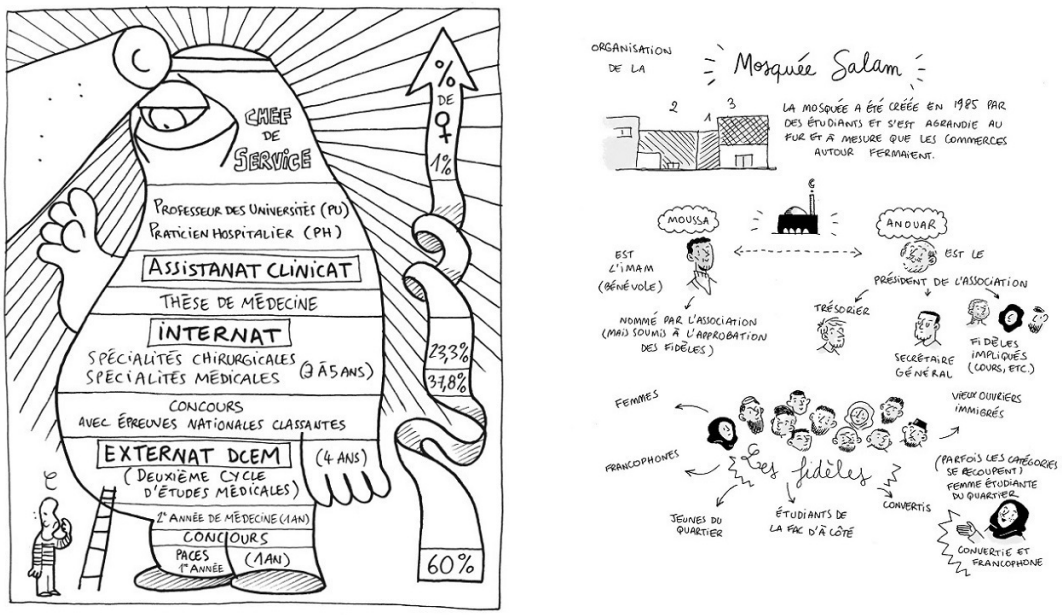

Figure 6: Sous la blouse, Zolesio/Mousse ©CASTERMAN (left); L'amour du Maillot, Rasera/Georges ©CASTERMAN (right)

The difficulty of transposing complex and overly space-consuming contextual elements into comics led artists to resort to written passages. In instance to sum up steps in medical careers (left, Sous la blouse, *2017, p. 5), or the organizational structure of a mosque (right,* La petite mosquée dans la cité, *2018, p. 23).*

in rather small numbers to fit the needs of narration, which entails boiling the complex trajectories and positions that one encounters in a sociological survey down to simpler representations.

In some respects, comics create a space to design characters that embody sociologists' ideal types; in other words, sociological constructs emphasize certain features of social reality and differentiate behavior or categories of people based on a limited number of criteria, without claiming to fully encompass real-world complexity. Numerous comic artists do not necessarily seek to create physically or behaviorally realistic characters. For instance, in *Sociorama*, they endeavor to draw characters that are easily recognizable, either by a physical feature (such as the big-eared foreman in *Chantier interdit au public*) or by a precise social characteristic that is relevant in context (like the supermarket manager's suit and briefcase in *Encaisser*). If the sociologist aims to show how workplace hierarchy is articulated to race relations, the characters must be distinguished accordingly (using their surname or skin color, for example).

Precisely, from sociologists' point of view, ideal types never occur as such in reality; they are an intellectual construct, an abstraction designed to serve analysis. Transposing them into characters therefore leads to many translation problems. The reality effect produced by narrativization transforms an ideal type into an archetype, which means that the character of the foreman, for instance, can then be perceived as representing foremen *in general*. Whereas sociology relies on tendency or probability (there are more stewardesses than stewards), drawn fiction requires characters to feature in small numbers ("we need a main character who is a stewardess") and therefore requires probabilistic tendencies to be shrunk into a single, necessarily reductive embodiment. The challenge then lies in defining characters in such a way that they correspond to likely social characteristics, without stereotyping them in an oversimplified way.

Any realistic fiction is bound to raise this type of question: should characters be designed as typical of a more general population? Also, what does *typical* mean? Should they embody the characteristics of the statistical majority? What is a character's representativeness? What part of reality are they meant to embody? For example, as women are in the minority among airline pilots, if we stick to probabilities, it may seem evident that the main character, a pilot, should be a man. However, what about all the other social characteristics that define the character? What about his physical appearance (e.g., skin color, type of clothing or hair style, body shape) or the attributes of his lifestyle? Does he travel by motorbike, car, or public transport? Is he a married father or single? These questions also arise in sociological writing: when referring to a respondent, one may provide their age, gender, level of education, profession, marital and family status, social origins, type of housing, and so on. However, sociologists select whichever characteristics are directly useful to the analysis: they cannot and *should not* provide a description of the person that encompasses all of their social details. Similarly, the medium of comics requires authors to select visible characteristics that seem important and significant and to let go of features that are not central to the analysis.

The aforementioned tension between sociological verisimilitude and the reproduction of stereotypes also appears in the representation of characters' bodies and the artistic choices that it involves. Sociologists are well aware that the shape of bodies, clothing, and physical attitudes are not random or unrelated to individuals' social characteristics. However, to what extent should realism in drawn representations be valued over the artist's style and creative freedom? Upon reading the storyboard for *Vacances au bled*, Jennifer Bidet reacted to the way Singeon had represented a secondary character, Selim's mother. This woman was represented with a body similar to those of other female characters in the book: young and slim. What the sociologist had in mind was the image of the actual mother of the young respondent who had inspired Selim's character and who was older and plumper. In the ensuing conversation, Singeon

explained that it was an unchallenged assumption he had picked up during his training at the school of fine arts: while students were taught to represent a contrasted range of bodies, they were never encouraged to correlate body types with social characteristics (Figure 7). Here, two professional cultures — two types of viewpoint — are brought face to face: on the one hand, the search for a personal artistic style, which is both unencumbered by concerns about realism and curtailed by unchallenged assumptions imparted by artistic training and the aesthetic canons of art; and on the other hand, an attachment to realism and a concern with highlighting forms of differentiation and social inequalities, along with careful attention to ethnocentrism and the relativity of aesthetic criteria. How should one decide? Singeon welcomed the remark as legitimate and amended the character's design for the final version. However, once this was said and done, the question remained unanswered: once again, how is a sociologist legitimate in this kind of intervention? What does this amendment bring to the book's plot development and sociological argument? On the one hand, the issues at stake are not only sociological but also political and feminist, as it is a matter of not reducing all female characters to a single mode of representation under a single body model. Conversely, this intervention could also result in reducing the representation of Algerian immigrant mothers to a single model of femininity, one that differs from French standards of beauty.

Figure 7: Vacances au bled, Bidet/Singeon ©CASTERMAN
To what extent should realism in drawn representations be valued over the artist's creative freedom? When the author of the comic represents a female body similar to the aesthetic canons of art, the sociologist could be concerned with highlighting forms of differentiation and social inequalities (Comparison between first synopsis and final version; Vacances au bled, *2020, p. 50).*

In writing *Sous la blouse*, an exploration of the place of women in the medical profession, comic artist Marion Mousse met with resistance from the collection's sociologists on the topic of a female doctor's personal life, when he pitched the idea that a plumber could be the doctor's one-night stand. His aim was precisely to move away from homogamy, which he saw as a cliché,

and have some fun with the parallels between the jobs of surgeons and plumbers. Deeming it an unlikely choice of sexual partner, due to his occupation, the sociologists elected to edit it out of the script. While this reaction may seem self-evident at first glance, it does raise questions in retrospect. How important is the occupation of a character's one-night stand? Are we not being overly rigid about probabilistic tendencies toward homogamy, to which exceptions do exist — as with any probabilistic tendency? To what extent is it detrimental to slip seemingly unlikely details into the narrative? Certainly, portraying couples of doctors makes possible to address the question of social reproduction and to draw parallels between inequalities in the workplace and at home. However, this was not the issue in these scenes: the one-night stand was above all a pretext for the main character to make the tensions she was experiencing in the professional sphere explicit.

This tension also shows up in settings design. Here again, should faithful representations be the goal, or should room be made for the artists to build their worlds? In *La banlieue du 20h*, the sociologist's challenge was to show how a negative image of working-class neighborhoods is manufactured by the media. Just like the original survey, the comic book focuses on the work of journalists and not on the reality of social relations within these neighborhoods. However, it was necessary to depict these neighborhoods in order to represent the work of journalists. As an artist, Helkarava often portrays urban spaces as dirty and scary places, without ever claiming that these representations are realistic. Jérôme Berthaut, the sociologist who authored the survey, argues that this visual representation runs the risk of reinforcing the same broad-stroked and degrading representations of the "*banlieues*" that his work tends to deconstruct. Sociologists have all the more concerns about adapting their work as the balance between fiction and sociological realism in the reading contract is ambiguous.

In some of the comics, characters were largely inspired by actual respondents and thus reflected a type of writing oriented toward case analysis rather than ideal type construction. In sociological writing, analyzing a sufficiently contrasted array of individual cases allows authors to account for the differences observed within a population. Case-based writing in sociology also involves making certain choices and therefore does not claim to describe the infinite diversity of real populations. However, these choices are more generally justified and reintegrated into a wider realm of possibilities: cases are only put forward because they are representative of a general circumstance or emblematic of a population.[15] Conversely, sociologists sometimes choose to analyze the most sociologically improbable cases in detail because they also reveal social mechanisms,[16] and it is the sociologist's duty to situate these cases within a broader context.

In *Sociorama*, it is a matter of creating a character that combines the characteristics, opinions, and situations of several real people. Where the original research shows, for instance, heterogeneity in the paths that lead one to become a scriptwriter for a soap opera, the comic book portrays a scriptwriter in whom all the important information about scriptwriters in general is concentrated — at the risk of turning her into *the* scriptwriter (i.e., into a sort of archetype, a typical scriptwriter). Also, the chosen guidelines for this character's design pose a very real risk of sliding off into a stereotype: from the choice of a case integrating the characteristics of a whole group, to a caricature representing an entire population.

15. For example, in Beaud (2018), Stéphane Beaud studies a family of Algerian origin, which he presents as "ordinary" because it presents characteristics that are shared by a majority of families of Algerian descent in France.

16. In Weber (2005), Florence Weber uses "borderline cases" to understand the general workings of kinship in contemporary France.

3.2 Invisibilization of Sociologists and Blurring of Sociological Conceptual Background

The collection's choice to lean into fiction meant that it could both avoid a didactic approach and enable the reader, free of the researcher's mediation, to be immersed directly in the social world described. This meant excluding the figure of the sociologist. However, reflexivity is a core imperative in the sociological approach. In writing sociological literature and delivering evidence, passages discussing the conditions of investigation and analyzing the relationships built in the field are both mandatory and codified. Doing away with the figure of the sociologist means above all that the conditions of data collection cannot be articulated. When the figure of the sociologist is sidelined, sociological analysis and its underlying concepts are erased along with it.

The collection was based on a choice to show aspects of the social sphere without mediating them with explanations. While we did find ways to integrate the depicted interactions within broader structures, these details pertained to historical and statistical contextualization rather than sociological analysis per se. At no point in the albums are concepts defined or explanatory theory articulated. The approach is therefore in some respects similar to direct cinema,[17] which presents images without commentary, and leaves it to viewers to interpret them. Also, much like documentaries, the making of *Sociorama*'s comics involved many tradeoffs when it came to selecting sociological investigations, choosing subjects, finding an angle of approach, framing and editing,[18] designing fictional characters, and inventing the situations in which they find themselves. In both cases, the authors offer neither a specific discourse nor any direct analysis to their audience. At no point are the concepts of gender or structural racism defined: gender inequalities are embodied by characters in the pornographic film industry or hospital hierarchies, and racial ascriptions are made visible in the organization of work on building sites or the conditions under which news coverage of working-class neighborhoods is produced. Similarly, while the socialization process of the particular type of masculinity promoted by dating coaches is shown, the term itself is never used. To point out how unlikely this kind of protest is, the cashiers' strike in one supermarket is not compared to other strikes in other labor contexts. As the sociologists refrain from providing analyses and commentary on the scenes represented and the fragments of social reality they show, armed with the discipline's concepts and theories, readers are left to their own devices to decipher the comics' sociological subtext.

In the first *Sociorama* special edition *Les nouvelles de la jungle*, Lisa Mandel's narration provides an account of sociologist Yasmine Bouagga's random encounters with individual volunteers or refugees by following her through her survey of Calais's refugee camps. These people were therefore not portrayed as *the* typical volunteer or migrant but rather as part of a larger group of people, whom the sociologist was able to interview through a series of steps and encounters. In the same way, in the second *Sociorama* special edition *Prézizidentielles*, the pages entitled "Les éclairages de la docteure Pagis" ("Dr. Pagis elucidates") allow the sociologist Julie Pagis to deliver her sociological interpretation of scenes of children commenting on political news, as drawn by Lisa Mandel. These two special issues are an enlightening counterexample from the rest of the collection. Here, the division of labor between comic artist and sociologist, as well as between fiction and science, is clearer: sociology's place in the script is more clearly delineated because it is explicit.[19]

17. For example, see Frederick Wiseman's documentary films.

18. On the link between photography and truth in sociology, see Becker (2007).

19. As in *Riche pourquoi pas moi* (Dargaud), rather than drawing a rendition of an investigative approach by representing sociologists in their field, comic artist Marion Montaigne cast Monique Pinçon-Charlot and

In *Sociorama*, the sociologists do not communicate their message directly as characters who speak. They may therefore seek to intervene on the entirety of what is represented and thus rein in comic artists' creativity. As the albums are presented as an adaptation of their survey, they may wish to exercise control over the entire comic book. Actually, all of the sociologists involved in the process have sought to edit the sociological discourse of the albums, especially what they perceive as sociological inconsistencies, as all of them are concerned with preserving their discipline's reputation. Because the comic-ization process in Sociorama involves a reconstruction of reality (through the creation of characters and their lifestyle, or relations not directly consigned by sociologists during fieldwork), there is a recurring question that is raised in the discussions between sociologist authors, artists, and members of the scientific committee throughout the adaptation process: could this scene have taken place in this way in my field?

To respond to the desire for authenticity, the temptation to try to introduce signifying details in each box of the comic is strong. However, how far can realism go in a comic book of *Sociorama*'s format? The search for absolute realism can lead authors to produce an illusion of reality that remains largely implicit. As a coauthor of the comic book, the sociologist who led the survey could have realistic references inserted in each panel, or even each box, as a veiled reference to their survey. Any given setting, dialogue, or body shape could reflect elements that they had observed in the field and, in their eyes at least, contribute to the realism of the drawn representation. However, can readers actually grasp these reality effects? Also, how would it help them to understand a sociological argument that remains implicit in the album?

The stereo-typification effects evoked above can lead to misunderstandings, as emerged in the following comment about *Chantier interdit au public*, by two young readers in the context of an economic and social sciences course in a high school, in Bordeaux:

> "Here is a comic book which, once again, generalizes immigration by showing the daily lives of only two men. [...] *Chantier interdit au public* caricatures immigrants not only through the life that it attributes to them but also by through the way in which it represents them: Black men, with big white eyes and big white teeth" [our translation].

When these two young readers read this comic as a caricatured and racist portrayal of migrants, the authors' aim is actually to highlight how the construction industry is organized by (racist) rules that prevent Black workers from escaping subaltern jobs. The two main characters, both Black men, are not meant to encompass the variety of migrant stories, but they have been created to point discriminations on work sites.

While knowing that the story is a fiction, how would readers distinguish sociological realism from the artist's creative fancy? At a presentation of her comic book in a high school, a student repeatedly asked Jennifer Bidet, "Do the characters in the comic book exist or not?" However, she was not content with the sociologist's answer about compromises between fiction and realism. Her insistence shows that her entire reading of the album was dominated by this issue (real or fictional?), which overrode any other content the book seeks to communicate.

However, we have attended to several presentations made by first-year sociology students about the albums of the collection. These presentations took place in a methodology class and reveal how the sociological content of the collection can be understood by apprentice sociologists. In these cases, the balance between fiction and *sociologically based* content does not

Michel Pinçon as comical characters in a story that is deliberately treated as nonrealistic. The sociologists' characters contribute here and there to the story in ways that are both eccentric and scholarly so as to present major concepts at play in descriptions of the *grande bourgeoisie*.

seem to be as problematic for these readers. Several factors can explain this: certainly the academic context (specifically a sociology course at the university), the training received during the semester (a little but sufficient sociological knowledge), and the texts read and commented in class (in socioeconomics and sociology of work). Unlike the high school students mentioned before, some of them were able to link scenes from the comic strip with basic notions and concepts but also to their personal work experiences: some of them were cashiers in a supermarket to finance their student life and were able to discuss cashiers' working conditions reported in *Encaisser!*. However, one student explicitly admits that the tutorial content helps her see and understand sociological discourse in *Sociorama* comics and take a step back from fiction. Educational support ultimately seems necessary (at a minimum) to unravel what the comic-ization has blurred.

Another level of reception and criticism came finally from our colleagues through the scientific recensions published in the academic field.[20] If colleagues always pay tribute to the intent of popularizing sociological works, they share the same criticism about the lack of sociological explicit references in the albums. Some of them would have to appreciate a complementary bibliography at the end of the albums in order to guide the reader in his/her interest in going into the questions raised in depth.[21] Other ones are not convinced by the idea that the reader is supposed to rebuild the sociological discourse from information disseminated in the albums.[22] Some went further in the criticism: to them, the blurring of the theoretical frame but also the comical mood of some adaptations led to the loss of the critical discourse originally present in the sociological survey adapted.[23]

4 Conclusion

By choosing to tell sociologically grounded graphic stories, the *Sociorama* series has sought to invite a broader audience than the usual readership of sociology publications into social worlds as diverse as professional football, family justice, or a television series' production crew. Adaptation work disrupted and challenged the inherent assumptions of academic sociological writing. As narration requires the materiality of social agents' relationship to time to be rendered, this caused the authors to decompartmentalize thematic specialties and spheres of social life — for example, between work and private life. However, describing social workings from the bottom up, through the lens of each individual's life and face-to-face interactions, does not mean that the social structures underpinning them should disappear. The comic artists therefore applied their graphic skills to integrate elements of sociological contextualization into the narrative.

While its ability to immerse readers in the social worlds described was a strong point, drawn fiction as presented in the collection also has its drawbacks. Inventing characters who bring to-

20. *Lectures* is an OpenEdition journal that publishes recensions of recent sociological books. The journal published recensions of 5 (out of 12) albums of the *Sociorama* collection.

21. Kevin Diter, "Baptiste Virot, Anne Lambert, *Turbulences*", *Lectures*, Les comptes rendus, 20 juillet 2016. https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.21166. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/21166

22. Michael Perret, "Helkarava, *La banlieue du 20 heures*", *Lectures*, Les comptes rendus, 18 novembre 2016. https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.21748. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/21748

23. Alexandra Roux, "Léon Maret, Mélanie Gourarier, *Séducteurs de rue*", *Lectures*, Les comptes rendus, 24 mai 2016. https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.20862. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/20862; Anne-Charlotte Millepied, "Lisa Mandel, Mathieu Trachman, *La fabrique pornographique*", *Lectures*, Les comptes rendus, 03 mars 2016. https://doi.org/10.4000/lectures.2027. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/20279

gether a whole set of sociologically significant characteristics entails a risk of producing stereotypes or representations of the social worlds depicted that are ultimately predictable caricatures. Moreover, erasing the figure of the sociologist as an investigator also means removing it as the conveyor of an analytical discourse on the world described. In direct documentary cinema, the absence of voiceovers is compensated for by the implicit documentary contract, according to which everything that is filmed has actually happened in reality. In fiction, even if the book is presented as a "sociological comic story,"[24] the reading contract is not quite as clear. If everything is made up, what is to be believed? What is to be understood? How should these stories be read?

From these reflections stems the understanding that these comic books have not entirely fulfilled their dual objective of scientific dissemination and editorial success. In 2019, given the collection's sales figures, Casterman decided to drop both *Sociorama* and the production process based on scientific committee supervision. On the other hand, the albums have been well received in schools and universities,[25] which goes to show this medium's potential when it comes to diversifying pathways to sociological knowledge and reasoning (Guillaud & Mengneau, 2019). However, in these settings, readers are guided in their discovery of the albums by teaching devices that afford them a better understanding of the sociological discourse presented. The collection's success in educational contexts thus demonstrates the need for mediation and support in reading so as to highlight the sociological dimension of the — often underlying — arguments conveyed by the albums. While this is an important lesson for the collection's sociologists to take away, these endeavors were never meant to be ends rather than means. They were not intended to replace a more academic literature but simply to arouse enough curiosity in readers that they might one day read "real" sociology books.

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24. This phrasing was used on the covers of the last four albums: "Un récit sociologique en BD".

25. This is evidenced by the numerous invitations the authors of *Sociorama* comics have received from high schools and the significant number of university libraries that have acquired the albums.

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EthnoGRAPHIC: An Interview

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Abstract

The interview focuses on the book series EthnoGRAPHIC (University of Toronto Press) and the graphic novel *Lissa. A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship and Revolution*, the first book of the series. Four points arise from the interview with authors Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, and with the filmmaker Francesco Dragone, who documented their research process. First, the problem of funding multimedia and innovative research projects, aimed to find new ways of communicating social research. Second, the question to what extent such projects are recognized and legitimated within the Academia. Third, the audience potentially interested in reading (ethno)graphic novels and, relatedly, their usability in teaching social sciences. Finally, the concerns and practicalities in putting together different narrative forms. This effort of combining several ways of representing social reality, also concerns the organization of the research itself as well as conducting fieldwork and the capability of thinking "graphically" from scratch instead of adapting textual data collected during the research.

Keywords: Graphic Novels; Collaborative Ethnography; Research Process; Medical Anthropology; Teaching Anthropology.

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Eduardo Barberis & Barbara Grüning (Q): *We'd like to know the origin of your project*, Lissa (2017), *and also of the book series* ethnoGRAPHIC. *Which project was born earlier:* Lissa *or the book series?*

Sherine Hamdy (SH): They were actually born simultaneously. I had written a piece, a blog post about how I began using graphic novels for teaching medical anthropology, and the editor at University of Toronto press, Anne Brackenbury, saw that. She gave me a call and she said "You know, I've been thinking about doing a series that brings together anthropology with graphic novels. Would you be interested in something like that?" Coleman [Nye] and I had already been working on a way to bring our research together so that was sort of the first birth of this project. As soon as Coleman finished her dissertation, we started working on the writing part — what we call "the script", that is the dialogue — and then we presented our vision for it at a Graphic Medicine conference in California. We were lucky to get funding for it and then Francesco Dragone, filmmaker, joined the team as our videographer/filmmaker. We got funding to go to Egypt and that's how it started.

Lissa was the first book in the series and then after *Lissa* came out I became the series editor along with Marc Parenteau, who is a comic artist that we met when we first did our presentation on Graphic Medicine, and so he gives us his evaluation on the submissions from the perspective of a visual editor/practitioner. We give feedback on the story together.

Q: *Where did you get funding for a project like* Lissa *?*

SH: A lot of the funding was from where we were at Brown University from the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs and we also got external funding from the Henry Luce Foundation within a program called "Religion in International Affairs".

Q: *Did you have any specific reference in mind when starting your project? For example Brad Evans in this issue (2021), when he reflects on his* Portraits of Violence *(2016), maintains that it is not possible to work on a graphic novel on violence without knowing* Maus *by Spiegelman (1986). Is there any previous work that grounded yours?*

Coleman Nye (CN): Both of us were teaching medical anthropology classes and both of us have been teaching graphic novels in our medical anthropology classes. We had found them to be beautiful and effective at conveying embodied experiences of illness for patients, communicating the multiple different layers of communication and cultural dynamics at play in clinical encounters. At that time graphic medicine was really taking off: using comics to teach medicine in medical practice and to convey illness experiences. Both of us were really inspired by the works coming out in graphic illness memoirs and graphic medicine.

SH: I think *Maus* and *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2000) are the two central works that really brought scholarly attention to graphic novels as a way to communicate really difficult topics. Of course, Joe Sacco's works on Palestine, too (2003). Especially *Persepolis* and *Maus* have had a very strong influence in graphic medicine, and I think for Coleman and me, because we were teaching medical anthropology. We were finding that there was so much that was memoir based — which is great because memoirs are personal and very moving — but we thought: how can we bring in our social perspective? How can we make this a larger story about social structure, about structural violence? What would that look like when our only models had been memoirs? So, *Lissa* was kind of a new formulation.

Q: Lissa *is a multimedia project, because it's not just a research and a graphic novel, but a*

film. What kind of audience did you want to reach and engage?

Francesco Dragone (FD): I can speak for the idea of filming the whole process. When I was contacted by Sherine, it was almost like: "We're doing something completely new, we don't know where we're going and so let's try to make an archival effort at least to be able to document this process, so that the rest of the series can rely on this as an opening path." And then the idea shifted a little bit, I believe, becoming almost like a multimedia, multi-layered effort. When we started to film the process, it became apparent that it was important to incorporate some of the graphic novel into the documentary, and on top of that also the archival effort made by the people living the revolution in Egypt. So we went back in time exploring this archival evidence, making it so much more powerful and impactful, having access to something that happened five years before we were actually able to go to Egypt.

To answer the question about the audience, I would say that the first thing that came to mind was getting closer to the readers, because the film is another layer of the story but, most of all what I got in the last couple of years by people that saw the documentary alongside the book was actually to engage in a different level of conversation with the students. The young characters are the first layer of interaction, just because they recognize each other when they see other kids going through school and exploring a different world. So Sarula [Bao, illustrator] and Caroline [Brewer, illustrator], which are the other two protagonists of the documentary together with Sherine and Coleman, are there and it's very neat to see that almost Anna and Layla [*Lissa*'s fictional protagonists] — even though they don't exist — are also the protagonists of the documentary. They kind of joined forces all of a sudden.

SH: And I have to say that it was all Francesco, that was all his amazing idea to think: "How can I document fictional characters?" Because we really did feel like when we were in Egypt, that they were with us, like we were seeing everything through their lenses. We knew their story so well and I think that was one of the most brilliant parts of the documentary, the way he was able to bring that feeling.

Q: *As for the book series, is there a specific audience/readership you had in mind, or is it more project-specific?*

SH: Anne Brackenbury again, who was the editor at Toronto University Press and came up with the idea for the series, had been running a Teaching Anthropology blog. So I think it was always an idea for the classroom — how to teach anthropology for students at undergraduate or maybe at a graduate level.

CN: Anne Brackenbury's daughter is a high school student, and she ended up reading *Lissa* as well and enjoyed it. So, I think one of the cool things about the graphic novel format is that it's really visually accessible. Because we wrote it also in the format of a novel it's also just a compelling story and so even my stepdad read it. My stepdad knows nothing about anthropological theory... he just appreciated that it was a powerful story, and he learned a lot about medical inequalities. I think the beautiful thing is that there are multiple layers that you can read into the graphic novel: there's the story, there's lots of information you can take away from the story that can appeal to all readers, with different ages and backgrounds.

But then I think there's something else, where you have a grasp of anthropological theory: there are different insights that you can bring with you: for example, here is how political violence or structural violence is lived. You can see anthropological concepts actually illustrated, coming to life.

Also, for the artists' side there's all this symbolism in the book: what is the role of the cats, for example? What is the role of the eye?

So, there are lots of different layers because of the combination of image and text that can make it differently accessible for a wide range of audiences.

SH: Because it brings people in at so many different levels, I think that was part of why for us filming was also very crucial. I recently taught it in a medical anthropology class and I showed the film. Students said to me: "I read the book and I enjoyed it — I liked it and I understood it but it wasn't until I saw the film that I thought — 'Wow! You did so much work!' "

CN: For students, watching the film lets them realize that Sarula and Caroline [*Lissa*'s illustrators] were also undergraduate students at the time. They like to watch people who are basically their peers going on this trip and doing anthropology for the first time, and then translating that into visual language. I think it's exciting and inspiring for students to see people their age doing this incredible work.

Q: *When we talk about graphic novels, we talk about a content that has to be translated in comics language, and this implies also a question of style, of aesthetic features. How much such design features are important for you — but also for the readership — to provide an interpretation of different meanings of social and graphic research?*

SH: It's important, but at the time we had already picked the artists before we had any idea of what the pictures would look like! We were somehow locked in, and then we were pleasantly surprised because we liked their artwork.

But since then, in my role as series editor, I've gotten a lot of submissions and now I appreciate how important the aesthetic dimension is, because I get submissions where I just immediately like or don't like the art. Sometimes the style really turns me off, and I don't even know necessarily the words to describe it. Then Marc Parenteau, the visual editor, helps me — for example: "It's because these dark lines are very aggressive and don't match the story". In understanding which style is good there's a lot of art, and we were lucky that our artists were very well trained in their illustration program — to learn how to match their style with the mood, the tempo and all of these different things.

CN: You can really see that in Francesco's documentary as well. You can see us all sitting in a hotel room in Cairo and having this conversation. There's Sarula asking questions like: "Well, what is your character like?", and we discuss different ways to think about characters' personality, or "How would you visually represent that or visually convey that?". For example, she pointed out that there's a lot of graphic violence that we might want to simplify and make a little bit more cartoony, because it could be too explicit if you visually depict graphic violence.

SH: in that scene of the documentary, when the illustrators are explaining to us this point, they said: we have to know what the whole arc of the character is before we design the character.

So, for example, in reference to the story of Anna: she was burdened as a child with this very heavy load — her mother's illness and then her mother's death — and she was put in an adult role so early. The way that Sarula shows that is by making her hands and her feet too big for her body — that's the way she used to show this adult role that she's been thrust into at too young an age.

Q: *We'd like to explore a bit more the relation between the cartoonist and the social scientist. Collecting the different experiences on making social science graphic novels, we saw an array of different levels of autonomy and coordination between illustrators and researchers, and different degrees of awareness about each other's job. How did it work for you in the making of* Lissa *— in the production process, so to say?*

CN: When we started, we were really separated. Sherine and I wrote the story and then

we gave the first draft to Sarula and Caroline and they started to thumbnail, that is to draw tiny sketches of each of the pages. Then, we looked at the pages together and started to have conversations around it.

Nevertheless, it wasn't really until we got to Cairo and all of us were together where we really started to work together to translate across our different disciplines. For example, they had to teach us what visual language means and how you can convey ideas via symbolism — and then we had to show them how we do our work. In this respect, Sherine did incredible work, for instance bringing us into interviews with doctors who had been on the ground providing care to injured protesters. Here the illustrators started to see the anthropological process with us, and to learn firsthand from people who had been there. They also met local Egyptian cartoon artists, spent more time looking at Egyptian graffiti and so they became part of the anthropological process with us.

So, we collaboratively went through the script together to really think through the kind of visual narrative that we wanted to tell, the important components of the story. Francesco did a beautiful job documenting this process as well

FD: From my perspective we understood while we were in Cairo the importance... for example Coleman was referring to the places, walking through the actual neighborhood so... That made a lot of sense, because when you need to place a character in a space it's impossible to imagine that just through photos, or a narrative told by someone. You need to experience that and so being there. Not only do you know the pollution in the air in Cairo, the situation, the pressure, the military and all that, but also seeing one neighborhood against another neighborhood, you know, one is more refined and rich and clean and the other one where everyone else is just living. So, these contrasts really came to life for Sarula and Caroline and for all of us while we were in Cairo. So, it was like a fundamental piece.

Q: *It was a kind of knowledge transmission that you need to have through experiences, but at the same time you need to know how a social scientist or an anthropologist thinks and how "graphic novels' language functions", so to say.*

SH: Exactly, and when I was in Beirut — I think for a conference — and I was telling Lina Ghaibeh, who's a well-known comic artist, and she's the chair of graphic design at the American University of Beirut... so I was telling her and her husband, who is also a very famous cartoonist, about our idea, and they said: "What! You are working with American students on a story that takes place in Egypt!??" and we said: "Yeah!" and they said: "But what about all the visual references?" and I said: "Oh well we know those, we're watching movies" and they said: "No, no, no! You have to take them to Egypt!". I didn't think it would be feasible before, because we had a short timeline and we didn't have the money, but it all worked out in the end, and we really needed to have gone! I know that a number of anthropologists are working now in their fieldsites with artists, but we didn't do that: we had completed our research before doing the graphic novel, and then we built the graphic novel based upon the insights from our research, and then wrote a story to piece it together. But I like that a number of anthropologists now are starting from the ground up, where they're undertaking research from the beginning in collaboration with local artists to try to undertake the research collaboratively, with the aim of making a graphic novel, and I think that looks very different if you start from that stage.

Q: *Turning back to the book series, how does the programming work? Do you receive submissions, or do you invite people to submit? Is there a market interest? And how much are scholars interested in publishing a graphic novel — in the frame of this "publish or perish" game, that may*

rank publishing a graphic novel quite low in academia.

SH: We do get a lot of submissions. When I give talks about *Lissa*, I always encourage people to think about, to think of their work in that way, but all of our submissions have been unsolicited. The second graphic novel after *Lissa* is called *Gringo Love*(Carrier-Moisan & Santos, 2020) and it's about sex workers in Brazil. Actually, before that, Lochlann Jain, a professor at Stanford, produced one called *Things that Art* (2019), which is not really a comic in the sense of a story told through panels, but more of a juxtaposition of images with text. And then the next one we have, I'm very excited about, it's called *Light in Dark Times* (Waterston & Holland, 2020), a very cool story. Alisse Waterston was the president of the American Anthropology Association and she was giving her inaugural lecture, and it was right after the election of Trump, and so she was talking about how to find light in these times that look so stark. And there was an anthropologist in the audience, Charlotte Corden, who happens to be a good artist, and she was just doodling while Alisse was giving her lecture. Then she went up to her hotel room and just stayed up all night drawing, and the next morning she met Alisse and said: "I have to show you what I've been doing!" And that was the birth of that project and they completed it really fast! I was impressed.

And just to the "publish or perish" point... it definitely puts people in a difficult position, I think, especially for young scholars because there's just a big question mark off what is the weight and what is the value of a graphic novel in academic metrics and so... if we get submissions from young scholars early in their careers, they often have big ambitions, and they don't have a good idea of what it takes to get there. So, I think it's easier for senior established scholars to be able to pull something like this off, but you know I hope we continue to get submissions from everybody.

Q: *This is very interesting. I think the point is to what extent this kind of work is considered, so to say, "scientific". Maybe younger people fear that if they do something like that, their work is not scientific enough for the disciplinary community, for example. I don't know if you have this impression, if some of your colleagues are not interested in doing something like that, because it cannot be considered scientific, because it's in a different language.*

SH: Yeah precisely, that's the big concern. There are a lot of funding issues, I think, connected to that as well, like it's very hard to get funding for artists in the social sciences. So, the ways in which grant structures, also don't necessarily make it easy to produce graphic works or collaborative projects between artists and ethnographers.

CN: I think it depends on programs, too. I have a student right now who's defending her dissertation and the entire dissertation is a comic. But I don't know what's gonna happen in the academic job market for her, but I'm feeling hopeful. I think we are seeing a shift now in the social sciences and humanities toward more multimodal forms of scholarship, so I'm hopeful!

Q: *The articles in our section show that something is moving around — ERCComics,* Sociorama *— most are very recent publications, popularizing social sciences. What do you think about this market?*

SH: I just want to say, but not to discredit any work, but I think it feels very different when you have a completed work and then it's translated by professional artists. It's a completely different feel than having the artists who from the beginning document what they're learning, and I think, when you look at some of the *bandes dessinées* in *Sociorama*, that it feels like a translation to me, it's a different process.

Q: *So, do you think that the value-added of your work is basically that you have you to work together. Thus, the point is not only popularizing, but also constructing something with a goal.*

CN: We think it's really helpful for anthropologists — as we did venturing and having worked with this PhD student, who's making a comic. I think there's something pedagogical, for social scientists as well, to learn how to think visually and to really approach the comics form itself as an invitation to show rather than tell, like all the potentials that are embedded in the page. I think it's really exciting and I think it opens up a whole range of different possibilities for how we can draw connections and we can think. So, I just think that there's a lot we can learn from artists about how to convey ideas outside of text, it's exciting!

FD: it's difficult to explain but I felt like the anthropologists and the artists established a common table to open a conversation. So, it's really like not simplifying the knowledge of the ethnographic methods and the ethnographic research that has been done, but making it more accessible to a broader audience. So that's what happened there, in my opinion.

CN: We have different two-page spreads in the book , which are two full-page illustrations side by side, and we talk about how we're able to convey a whole bunch of interconnections globally between health and politics and economics and environment with no text, with all visual language and the kinds of connections that you can draw that would take many pages in an ethnographic monograph! and then you also give your readers an opportunity to fill in the gaps and for them to kind of meet you and do their own analytical work which I also think is a really generous reading practice.

Q: *Which difficulties do you see in continuing your projects, and also which are your hopes about?*

SH: I think finding funding has been the biggest difficulty. These projects also take much more time, I think, because of the multiple components, and so the publishing timelines are not always amenable to the kind of timeline that it takes to produce a good work. Plus the cost is higher.

CN: I think we live in an exciting moment, though. I'm junior faculty, and I don't have tenure yet, but I do feel very supported by my department for *Lissa*. I think because the academic series is at University of Toronto Press, it is validated within larger academic circles as scholarship. So, I feel confident that *Lissa* counts toward tenure and I think the more projects that we have like this, you know, the more we're going to produce the conditions to make it easier for junior faculty to do this kind of work, and to shift some of the expectations around what academic publishing can look like.

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The Sociological Image Nation

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Abstract

This article points to the origins of the comics format in nineteenth-century Geneva as a way to think through some of the fundamental questions posed by the use of comics production to report social scientific findings. Surveying the articles in this special issue, a case is built for the importance of transdisciplinary approaches in the field of sociology and elsewhere.

Keywords: Modernism; Research Creation; Autography; Narrativization; Transdisciplinarity.

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Misgivings about the cultural status of comics and graphic novels have been with us since the Swiss school master, Rodolphe Töpffer, began publishing his *littérature en estampes* in the 1830s. Töpffer, termed "Father of the Comic Strip" by the celebrated art historian David Kunzle, began experimenting with graphic literature in his role as a school master in Geneva. Influenced by the diagrammatic systems developed to support the teaching of pantomime and dramatic action by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Johan Jakob Engels, Töpffer's proto-graphic novels extrapolated the study of stage gesture into new narrative forms for the amusement of his students and, assuredly, the pleasure of the author. Lessing, who published *Laokoön oder Über die Grenzen Der Malerei und Poesie* (*Laocoön: or, The Limits of Poetry and Painting*) in 1767, had, more than a half century prior, decisively contributed to the Enlightenment separation of text and image into separate realms, one governed by time and the other by space. This distinction, flouted by Töpffer and his inheritors in the field of comics and graphic novels, has nonetheless persisted through the Modernist period and into the present day. Thierry Groensteen, himself one of the leading exponents of Töpffer's contributions to the pre-history of comics publishing and a leading theorist of the form, maintains that the text-image distinction derived from Lessing is one of the five "symbolic handicaps" that has served to reduce the cultural reputation of comics generally. While Groensteen's symbolic handicaps are contestable, it is true that, notwithstanding W.J.T. Mitchell's observation that images and words have always gone together, this distinction persists not only in the production of culture but in the more general organization of knowledge. Anxieties persist: what if, as Töpffer implicitly posited, comics and graphic novels are mere distractions for school children and not, in point of fact, a significant means of capturing, reporting, and conveying scientific knowledge?

Modernism's insistent need for the classifying knowledge into discrete categories gave rise to the social sciences as we know them, relegating heuristic and narratological exploration to the humanities. The humanities themselves have historically distinguished between creative and intellectual pursuits — departments of art and departments of art history; of creative writing and of English literature — and it has been the latter that has enjoyed a prioritized space of privilege within the academy even as the former captures the imagination of the public at large. While research creation exists uneasily within humanities disciplines, the social sciences, driven as they are by the need for empirical assuredness and rational logics, have found it difficult to incorporate elements of the imaginative and the fanciful.

In his 2005 book *Everything Bad is Good For You*, media theorist Steven Johnson develops a productive thought experiment. What, he wonders, would we make of books if their invention had come after the development of video games? Johnson ventriloquizes critics of an emerging literary form, decrying the fact that text understimulates the senses, that it activates only a small portion of the brain devoted to processing written language, and that books, with their consumption by the individual reader, are socially isolating in nature. Johnson's example nicely demonstrates that biases against new media derive from perceived differences with extant media (Johnson, 2006, p. 19). Following this logic, we might wonder: what we would make of the typical sociological journal article, with its well developed textual analysis, its graphs and charts and endnotes, if we had developed comics before text? How would the field of knowledge production differ if the word/image relationship had not been severed by an Enlightenment appetite for characteristic methods but had developed harmoniously out of traditions like the medieval illuminated manuscript? A sociology rooted in comics would presumably denounce textual approaches for lacking integrative values, for their linear undermining of multimodal thinking, and for the way that they privilege certain learning styles over others. In our thought experiment, a sociology accustomed to the integration of word and image would inevitably

see a turn to the exclusive domain of textuality as a retreat. Yet, in our reality, do we see an expansion of scientific communication in multimodal terms as an advance?

Today we recognize that this is not merely a thought experiment, but an actual experiment in the true sense of the term. The scholars whose essays appear in this special issue are genuinely embarking on new directions in social science communication with a true sense of discovery — they have proposed experiments in the graphical integration of comics and sociology without a strong sense of precisely how these experiments will work, what will be their outcomes, and how they will be received. To read the essays in this volume is to be struck by the genuine sense of exploration that structures these inquires. While they are able to draw on previous exemplars — notably in the field of autography and life writing (Art Spiegelman's *Maus* [1996], Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* [2006], Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* [2000], and the reportorial work of Joe Sacco are the commonly cited touchstones) — these are not perfectly aligned. Notably, graphic memoirists are not (with the very notable exception figures like Nick Sousanis and Lynda Barry) working academicians, and their highly personal work is not structured by dispassionate scientific inquiry. The graphic memoirist has a responsibility to their individualized understanding of the past, but the graphic sociologist must necessarily serve the additional master of scientific rationality. Fascinatingly, the trepidations induced by this responsibility is discussed at length by the authors appearing here ("Academia is a world of words," note Giselinde Kuipers and Fiammetta Ghedini [2021]), who consistently rehearse their awareness of the novelty of their approach, as well as the frictions that arise from collaborating with professional and non-professional graphic novelists.

Comics is an art form chosen here not by chance. It is one that carries the weight of historical disdain. Dismissed by cultural mandarins in the early-decades of the twentieth-century as a form of sub-literature degrading the taste of young readers, comics were — in the United States, across Europe, and in Japan — the subject of extended contestation. Challenged by teachers, librarians, and community organizations, world-wide efforts to regulate and control the circulation and consumption of comic books was the norm in the mid-twentieth-century period. These efforts to contain and control comic books left them as one of the most denigrated of our popular cultural forms. Despite important advances in the cultural reputation of comics since the 1980s, in particular stemming from the so-called graphic novel movement led by Spiegelman and his contemporaries, the status of the form is still tentative. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, sociologists turning to work with cartoonists have a great deal to gain when they offer new avenues for communication and court audiences who might eschew the essayistic form, but, at the same time, it is clear that they also court risk. In wedding the seriousness of sociology to the frivolousness of comics, the risk is not that comics will be taken seriously, but that the sociologist will be reduced to the role of jester.

These concerns are explicitly given voice in the introductory paragraphs of Brad Evans' essay, "Portraits of Violence" (2021). I was particularly struck by the first of the many examples that he chooses to mobilize in exploring issues involving the hierarchization of forms is telling. "Could," Evans wonders, "an illustrated version of *Othello*, for example, really capture the drama and intensity a more literal reading of Shakespeare might offer as the reader is sat alone with its words?" (pp. 242–243). For me, a comics version of *Othello* always immediately recalls British artist David Hughes' edition of the play, the English version of which was produced in Germany by Alibaba Verlag (1998) because British publishing houses were "bluntly disinterested" in the idea of producing comics at that time, no matter how prodigious the repu-

tation of the artist.[1] Yet, Evans' concern that the visual production of Shakespeare's work might supersede the "images of thought" produced by the text alone fails to account for the fact that Shakespeare himself wrote *Othello* for live performance — a mode that by necessity dictates an impression — and that, for the playwright, there was no notion of a reader "sat alone with its words." Quite the contrary, and as Evans hints at, the very separation of text from image in book publishing was a deliberate institutional strategy. William Blake, to borrow another example from this same essay, conceptualized his poetry as working in close collaboration with his paintings, despite the fact that — far too frequently — his poetry is not taught alongside his etchings and engravings as constituted equal elements. The engagement of writers with the visual arts has a centuries long tradition, but, unfortunately, so too does the drive to place these undertakings in separate silos; the English Department rarely sits alongside the Department of Art History, no matter how aligned their interests and methods might seem to outsiders.

While these separations and anxieties persist as the background of many of the essays presented here, we must also acknowledge that this issue is a study of success. The past decade has generated a number of remarkable transdisciplinary efforts to think about new forms of knowledge dissemination, and this special issue brings together researchers involved in several of the most notable institutional endeavours, each arising in a different locale yet seeking similar outcomes. The ethnoGRAPHIC book series, launched by the University of Toronto Press in 2017 under the joint supervision of series editors Sherine Hamdy and Marc Parenteau, has, to date, released five volumes that combine comics with ethnographic field research in support of a "more imaginative and collaborative ethnography."[2] *Sociorama*, a collaboration between a team of French sociologists, the cartoonist Lisa Mandel, and the venerable Tournai-based comic book publisher Casterman (who produced Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin* beginning in the 1930s), has resulted in fourteen volumes in which sociological research is communicated through the comics form for a non-specialist audience that might otherwise never engage with it. Finally, ERCcOMICS, funded by the European Research Council, a collaborative effort between the Sorbonne and the professional organization La Bande Destinée, has produced sixteen webcomics on a variety of scientific concepts. Despite the significant institutional differences between these projects — published by a scholarly press, published by a comics-specialist press, presented online — and despite the differences in their remits and the scope of their projects, it is notable that the central points of concern across all of them are common: the question of the narrativization of non-narrative research findings, and the issue of the use of stereotypes.

The issue of narrativization is a foremost issue in these projects. As Kuipers and Ghedini note, "making the research into a narrative was the most dramatic intervention" (2021, p. 159) for ERCcOMICS. Similarly, driven by their contribution to this issues, Schiemer and Duffner (2021a & 2021b) describe a determination to create a narrative symmetry from a story that draws on potentially existing genre tropes, not the least of which was a desire to introduce a strong protagonist-antagonist relationship that would generate action. The papers in this issue describe a wide range of approaches to story-telling, from the protagonist-investigator who gradually uncovers the complex truth of a social problem to the battle among subjects who seek to demonstrate the situatedness of positions. As the examples included here so ably demonstrate, there is no fixed solution to the narrative question, just as there is no ideal form of the

1. Alibaba Verlag, Literatur und Kunst. *David Hughes Shakespeare's Othello*. Available at: http://www.alibaba-verlag.de/LitKunst/othello_english.htm

2. Ethnographic. https://utorontopress.com/ca/books/by-series/ethnographic

scholarly essay. As each of the authors describe, one of the most common discoveries in this approach is the necessity of dramatic through-lines. The rise and fall of action, inciting events, narrative turns, and issues around story resolution are all real and present concerns familiar to cartoonists but all too often absent in work produced by scholars. It is not surprising that Berthaut, Bidet and Thura (2021) report that "accuracy with regard to the sociological subject matter and narrative concerns sometimes clashed" (p. 269) (indeed, the most surprising element may be the use of the word "sometimes" rather than "always"...).

The struggle, all too easy to imagine, between scientific and narratological concerns is common in multidisciplinary projects where conventions are frequently at odds, but the essays in this volume point to a different tension that is particular to comics. Several of the essays dwell on the issue of visual stereotype, a central concern of both scholars and practitioners of comics. Berthaut, Bidet and Thura (2021) express their concern surrounding the tension between sociological verisimilitude and reproduction of stereotypes, while Schiemer and Duffner note that some of their key concepts "could not even be translated into a suitable picture" (p. 198). Here the sociologists discover an issue as old as the art of cartooning itself — comics is an art of simplification that traffics in types more easily than in particularities and specificities. Indeed, if we return to the case of Rodolphe Töpffer we discover that not only he was the first to collect comics stories in printed books, but he was also the first to reflect deeply on the problems and possibilities offered by the newly emerging art form. In his 1845 *Essai de Physiognomonie*, published the year before his death, Töpffer outlined a dozen arguments about the nature of storytelling and meaning making in comics. Among the findings that he highlighted was the important role that extremely subtle design choices play in shaping the way that we read characters. He famously noted that the simple curve of the line designating a character's nose might signify — through stereotype — the full complexity of personality type. This reductive element of comics need not be a handicap — Spiegelman's *Maus*, one will recall, features characters exclusively depicted with the spare, cartoonish heads of mice but is no less compelling as a record of trauma because of it — but it is, nonetheless, an element to be struggled with. The power of visual shorthand — of stereotype — paradoxically allows comics to create complexity through simplicity, but for the sociologist trained to avoid reductionism wherever possible embracing this reality is a leap of faith.

Ultimately, what are we to make of the desire to disseminate sociological research through one of the most historically denigrated of cultural forms? An epistemology of the comic would entail our recognition that visualization has always played a central role in empirical research and in the social scientific essay form. Shifting our attention from the incorporation of charts and graphs towards a more fulsome redefinition of data visualization as visual narrative isn't, as these contributions demonstrate, as big a leap as some might imagine. The historical dominance of the essay form as the best and only form for the dissemination of new knowledge is no less arbitrary than is the historical separation of word and image into separate disciplines. A more progressive transdisciplinary epistemology will seek to uncenter not only the distinction between research methods, but those that structure research communication. The essays in this special issue draw on the experience of some of the most notable efforts in this regard to demonstrate the perils and possibilities of thinking in new ways about how we report the work that we do.

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Social Sciences/Comics: A Commentary on Sociologica's Exploration of Comics

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Abstract

The writings collected in issue 15(1) of *Sociologica* take diverse approaches to the relationships between social sciences and comics. This commentary identifies several of the themes that bring these pieces together and make some suggestions for how the ideas and approaches sketched out in these pieces might be developed further in the future. The commentary explores how the ideas set forth in the articles overlap with concerns found in the field of Comics Studies and what the lessons learned by Comics Studies might have to offer to the field of social sciences.

Keywords: Comics Studies; Social Science; Accessibility; Dissemination; Translation; Adaptation; Impact; Institutions.

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The writings collected in this issue of *Sociologica* take diverse approaches to the relationships between social sciences and comics. In this commentary, I identify several of the themes that bring these pieces together and make some suggestions for how the ideas and approaches sketched out in these pieces might be developed further in the future. I write not as a social scientist and lay no claim to expertise in that field (I leave that to the authors of the articles); rather my perspective here is that of a comics scholar. I am therefore interested, in reading these articles, in how the ideas they set forth overlap with concerns found in the field of Comics Studies and what the lessons learned by Comics Studies might have to offer to the field of social sciences.

1 Accessibility and Dissemination

Perhaps the most obvious theme unifying the work collected here is that of accessibility. All of the articles touch on this theme to some extent, with most framing the accessibility of comics as one of the form's primary benefits for social scientists since it allows theory to connect with new audiences. This is a common idea around the use of comics as a mode of communication, and it makes sense in an academic context because it allows us to make claims around widening the dissemination of academic works. Kuipers and Ghedini (2021) sum up the broad thrust of such claims in their assertion that: "Traditional forms of academic publishing — papers, articles, books, talks — are ill-suited for sharing research insights with the people who care most about the topic" (p. 144). Framed in this way, comics become the solution to a problem: the impenetrability or incommunicability of academic discourses, particularly in terms of non-academic stakeholders. It is notable, however, that this argument tends to be used in a relatively broad way: comics are accessible, and therefore using comics will make the subject matter communicated therein accessible. Yet this position elides numerous other complexities. It assumes, for example, that comics *are* accessible: as the reader of more complex or difficult works like abstract comics or even continuity-heavy superhero comics can attest, this is not universally true. Here we might draw a comparison to other media and ask whether we can really substantiate this type of claim therein. For example, Kuipers and Ghedini note that "Academia is a world of words" (p. 152), but if we turn our attention to the literary we can see that there are some written modes that we consider "accessible", from children's and young adult literature to tabloid newspaper reporting, and others that are regarded as difficult, whether that is a postmodern novel, a piece of government policy or, perhaps, traditional academic writing. It is not the form itself that makes these modes (in)accessible, it is the way in which its practitioners use it. Comics *can* be accessible, and thanks to a longstanding cultural association with childhood it is assumed that they will be, but this is not an automatic rationale for the use of the medium.

Moreover, the idea that comics will broaden the dissemination of a work assumes that comics do have large audiences, or that they will appeal to audiences. While it is certainly true that in the Japanese and Franco-Belgian contexts there are substantial readerships for graphic literatures including comics, it is less clear how true this is in the English speaking world, where (with some notable exceptions) comics are often understood as something to be grown out of, or as a particular genre that one reads or doesn't (as opposed to, for example, the novel, where the assumption is that they are read and the question is which genre one reads, not whether one reads them at all). Even where comics *are* widely read, however, there is complexity around how these works will find their audiences: if readers prefer a thriller to the latest piece of academic research, by what logic would that readership prefer an academic comic to the latest thriller comic? There may be a case that producing research in the form of comics can help that re-

search appeal to comics readers, and perhaps to those that would have read the social science theory anyway (whether by choice or by instruction), but beyond that the idea becomes a little murkier. Just as comics are not automatically accessible, they do not offer automatic dissemination, as Berthaut, Bidet and Thura's article (2021) makes clear in its acknowledgment that it was *Sociorama*'s sales figures that led to its cancellation by Casterman in 2019.

This is not to say that comics cannot offer accessibility or dissemination to social science research and theory. It is only an observation that, if the starting position is the need or desire to make social science research more accessible or boost its readership, comics do not represent an automatic response. Instead, it becomes necessary to ask what specific affordances and features of comics are particularly well suited to the dissemination of social science research, and which of those affordances are required in a given case. Schiemer, Duffer and Ayers start to get to this type of consideration in their piece when they ask "how theory can be visualized." (2021a & 2021b).

2 Translation and Adaptation

This brings us to the second key theme emerging out of the pieces in the collection: the related notions of translation and adaptation. Several of the articles describe the work undertaken as a process of translating social science research into the language of comics, or as one of adapting a specific work or set of works into comics form (as we see in the discussion of *Sociorama*, for example). The articles by Kuipers & Ghedini and Berthaut, Bidet, & Thura seem to work well as a pair in this regard, since each presents slightly different aspects of the problem of translation: the former places more emphasis on the philosophical problems of translating ideas into images and addressing a different sensory modality, while the latter discusses some of the broader elements of working processes across teams of researchers and creators. Ultimately, though, the articles in the collection seem rather pessimistic in their assessments of these translations/adaptations. Berthaut, Bidet, and Thura declare that the works in *Sociorama* did not succeed economically, but also that they did "not entirely [fulfil] their dual objective of scientific dissemination and editorial success." More tellingly, there are a number of articles that emphasise the incompleteness or lack evident in the works: comics seem here to be positioned not as social science *work*, but as a gateway to *real* social science. Berthaut, Bidet, and Thura assert, for example, that the texts in the *Sociorama* series "were not intended to replace more academic literature but simply to arouse enough curiosity in readers that they might, one day, perhaps, read 'real' sociology books" (p. 288), while Brad Evans (2021) concedes that his work with Sean Michael Wilson in *Portraits of Violence* (2016) has produced "an accompaniment and not a replacement for the original texts" and voices his hope that "upon reading the book, students then turn to the original sources." Ultimately, I would suggest that such assessments position the comic not as translation or adaptation, but as *advertisement* for social science research, that seeks to convert a tentative enquiry into a serious engagement.

Yet I would also argue that such positions underestimate the possibilities inherent in comics themselves. Before expanding on this, I should note that I am very wary of taking an evangelical approach to the study of the form or aligning myself to the notion that one should be uncritically supportive of comics (this is an attitude I have observed in some commentators). In fact, despite being a scholar of comics I am quite comfortable with the idea that like any form or medium, comics are limited in their capacities and are not always the most effective mode of communication for ideas. Comics cannot do or be everything. That said, comics undoubtedly *do* have certain capacities that are not well recognised in some of the articles presented here. For

example, when Brad Evans asks "Could an illustrated version of *Othello* [...] really capture the drama and intensity a more literal reading of Shakespeare might offer as the reader is sat alone with its words?" (pp. 242–243), he seems to be neglecting the fact that Shakespeare did not write books to be read alone, he wrote plays to be performed in a social context, and a comics presentation of *Othello* could therefore lay a reasonable claim to being a more fully realised performance than sitting alone with the text would be, since it can at least cast "actors" and set a "stage" before its readers. While comics' potential is not infinite, it is certainly broader than Evans acknowledges here.

It is Cancellieri and Peterle (2021) that come closest to realising this potential in their assertion that "comics represent a prolific research tool that go beyond dissemination, helping us to contribute in different ways to contemporary debates on assemblage thinking, agency and the spatial, affective and material turn" (p. 230). Although the authors do outline processes of translation elsewhere in their article, it is notable that they do not generally frame their argument around what is missing (i.e., the "real" social science) and instead assess how comics might be able to answer social science questions in new ways. The notion of "hybrid products that take seriously the encounter between images and words as well as between comics and ethnographic methods" (p. 215) leads them to outline innovative approaches to cartography, for example, that not only engage with the questions social sciences ask, but also interrogate the parameters of those disciplines. In so doing, they open up new spaces for knowledges and knowledge production at the same time, moving beyond research disseminated through practice, and into the realm of practice-based research in earnest.

3 Institutions and Impact

This approach seems to me to be the one most likely to answer some of the difficult questions presented in the interview with Hamdy and Nye, but which reflect anxieties to be found across the collection. When Barberis and Grüning (2021) ask, for example, "how much are scholars interested in publishing a graphic novel — in the frame of this 'publish or perish' game, that may rank publishing a graphic novel quite low in academia" (pp. 295–296), we see institutional and formal constraints on academic career progressions coming into play. Hamdy replies that:

> [...] it definitely puts people in a difficult position, I think, especially for young scholars because there's just a big question mark of what is the weight and what is the value of a graphic novel in academic metrics and so [...] I think it's easier for senior established scholars to be able to pull something like this off, but you know I hope we continue to get submissions from everybody (p. 296).

Nye similarly speaks to this point later in the interview, noting: "I have a student right now who's defending her dissertation and the entire dissertation is a comic. But I don't know what's gonna happen in the academic job market for her, but I'm feeling hopeful" (p. 296).

There are, I would suggest, at least two possible responses to this problem, but both require a more concerted engagement with the principles of comics than is afforded by a dissemination-based approach. The first is to consider the age-old doctoral viva question: what is the contribution to knowledge coming from the research? Although, in theory, this question is relatively straightforward, at least at the post-doctoral level and beyond, it bears consideration in order to explicate the way in which a contribution might be made. The second response would be to consider the research in terms of impact. While this is a rather nebulous term it has been used

(at the very least in the UK Higher Education context) as a way of thinking about (and measuring) the contributions that research makes to wider communities of stakeholders. This goes beyond simple dissemination: it is not enough to show that people are aware of the research, it must also be demonstrated that the research has in some way affected at least the contexts to which it relates. In both responses, we can consider the role of the comics form: either the contribution/impact comes from the form the research takes (in which case there is an intrinsic justification for producing the work in that form), or it does not (in which case there is no reason *not* to produce it in that form). In either case there is a solid rationale for producing research in comics.

In closing, I encourage sociologists to avoid the entanglements that have slowed the development of Comics Studies as a discipline. Rather than justifying the use of comics by reference to "serious" or "real" forms of work, engaging concertedly with the form has the potential to produce important new insights into the discipline and its practices. The articles in this collection reflect insightfully on some of the challenges posed by the visualisation of theory and research, and they also begin to point towards some of the ways in which theory and research might be *produced* through visualisation. In building on this work, it will be interesting to see how social sciences might follow in the footsteps of the now increasingly visible and developed fields of Graphic Medicine and Graphic Justice to produce new knowledge and insights through the particular modes of practice afforded by comics.

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Show and Tell

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Abstract

This short piece is a commentary on the collection of experimental interventions at the crossroads of sociology and comics, or comics-based research, published in the current issue of *Sociologica*. Starting from some of the most relevant aspects that both unite and distinguish the different approaches, it proposes a reflection on how comics, and more broadly drawings, can help expand the sociological imagination. It does so — through text, drawings and captions — focusing on the transition between concepts and images, or verbal and visual icons. The comments draw particular attention to these interventions' diverse but converging plea for visual literacy — tentatively renamed here imaginacy.

Keywords: Representation; Comics; Social Research; Drawing; Imaginacy.

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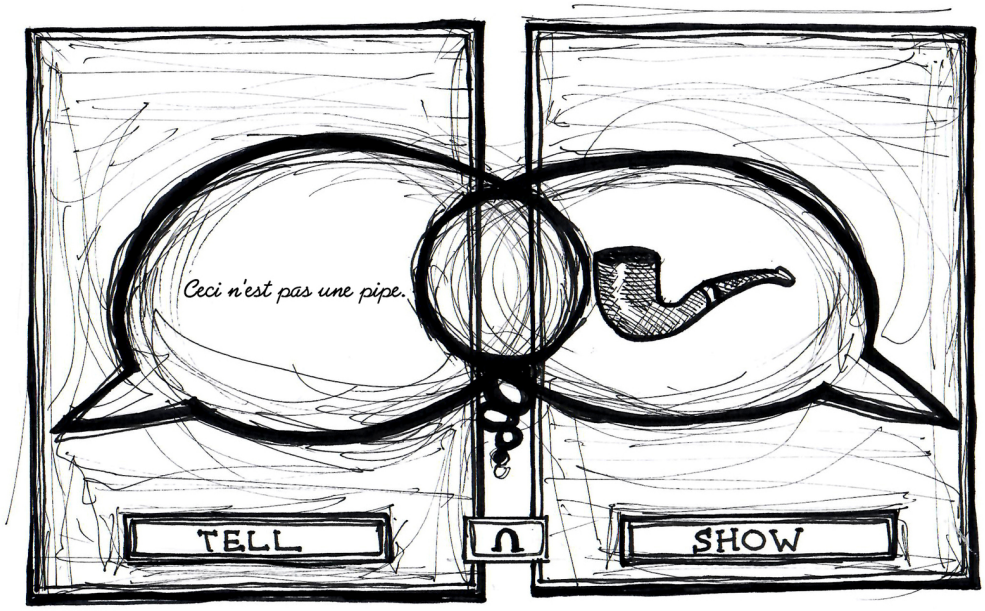

Figure 1: Show and Tell

> "Two principles, I believe, ruled Western painting from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. The first asserts the separation between plastic representation (which implies resemblance) and linguistic reference (which excludes it). By resemblance we demonstrate and speak across difference: The two systems can neither merge nor intersect. In one way or another, subordination is required" (Foucault, 1973, p. 32). Then Magritte comes along, and his pipe; Foucault is intrigued, Magritte writes him letters: I wish *this* would become a comic... Deconstructed as a comic the intersection (∩) between Show and Tell, building blocks of our primary education and training to enter the world of representation, is not quite empty. There's the gutter. The space between panels, 'gutter' in comics, is the space where everything happens: transitions of time, action, scene. The space where *this* becomes a pipe, or a not-a-pipe. The space of becoming, that tells *and* shows, but where one cannot stay — lying in the gutter."[1]

This challenging collection of experimental interventions at the crossroads of sociology and comics confronts bravely and directly the problem of transition between concepts and images, or verbal and visual icons, the first working through abstraction, the second through resemblance. A mighty problem for which it was appropriate to start with a quote by the author of *Les Mots et les Choses*, whom I will have to evoke again later on. First, though, transition is a good place to start. Transition between panels is what defines comics — "sequential art" according to Will Eisner's insider's definition (Eisner, 1983). Matters of transition — or better translation — animate all of the contributions in this section. Indeed, if we were to identify the intersection of keywords of these otherwise diverse experiments, that set would not be empty and it would contain the word translation. Some contributions are reflections on

1. I would like to thank Lorenzo Di Giacomo (lorenzoars.com) for the digital editing of my three drawings. Here, and at various points in my comments, I have in mind the essential *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (McCloud, 1993) — here specifically two chapters, "Show and Tell" and "Blood in the Gutter".

single initiatives, some are about whole programmes with an established history; monographs and anthologies; self-standing or part of wider projects. Some are concerned with comics as an innovative means for teaching, dissemination and communication, others explore forms of interaction between artists and sociologists, images and words, that start earlier in the process of research and conceptualization, up to the point where the sociologist and comic-artist are one and the same. It is indeed like charting a new territory and every contribution makes a specific advance in a slightly different direction, all challenging, energizing and much welcome. What they do share therefore may not be the direction or even the path, but the means of *transportation*. Transition, translation, or even, as Clifford Marcus (2017) writes in his preface to *Lissa*, the graphic novel launching the series *EthnoGraphic*, *transduction*. Marcus talks of the transduction of ethnography, where the transition is not just one of language but also of form, and not just as an addendum or illustration: "instructing anthropologists and academics more broadly in remaking their work into new forms" (*ibidem*, p. 11) in an opening intended to favour "public anthropology" (*ibidem*, p. 14).

This means all sorts of issues emerge beyond those involved in the translation between two equivalent languages. In the extra difficulty of the impossible symmetry between different forms of representation, the possibility of confronting sociological and anthropological themes that struggle within just one form also emerges. In that sense even comics are shown as just one possible form of the many that could be explored and combined, and sociology just one of the possible disciplines that stand to gain from such explorations. Indeed, several disciplines, it is remarked, are increasingly experimenting in this direction: this is an effervescence well captured in these contributions, some of which stretch back several years, claiming a lineage with earlier experiences that go back as far as the 1970s, especially in France and in history.

The combination of showing and telling makes it harder to hide the clash between them evoked by Foucault's opening quote. Symmetry is impossible and typically the two realms have either kept separate or combined in ways that are clearly the territory of one, with the other as inferior appendix (illustrations in books, captions for paintings).[2] The contributions proposed here make a valiant effort at finding a productive equilibrium: by using a medium that balances words and images they explore ways in which sociological ideas and findings can balance verbalization and visualization. A critical issue might be, though, that sociology is born verbal, so to speak, it never or rarely needs to be verbal*ized* because words (and sometimes numbers) are its native language. Rather than equal translation between two native languages then, what we observe here is a transfer to images, a process of adaptation. This operation is indeed also characterized as adaptation or, in the piece about *Sociorama*, the longest standing experiment of the group, comic-ization. That is, the adaptation of sociological qualitative research into fiction in graphic form. As the useful review of this aptly titled collection, the contribution by some of its creators here presented shines a light precisely on the adaptation process. What emerges out of the detailed description of the complex collaboration between sociologists and graphic artists is not so much a template to replicate but a manifold variability, even within a project like *Sociorama* with a strong editorial line and clear, common objectives. It is perhaps the recurring problems, often bravely reflected upon with sociological acumen, that strike most. For

2. Comics are true hybrids and suffer the stigma of all hybrids, especially in artistic fields where, despite everything, the romantic idea of the genius consumed by a single passion still holds. Marjane Satrapi — author of wonderful comics that should find space in libraries of sociology — told a *New York Times* interviewer that comic artists are not generally well recognized because "People either like to write or they like to draw. And we like to do both. We're like the bisexuals of the culture" https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/21/magazine/21wwwln-Q4-t.html

instance, the remark that due to graphic adaptation, gaps in the research emerged "to the extent that parts of the characters' lives had to be invented in ways that seemed likely to the sociologists" (Berthaut, Bidet & Thura, 2021). That seems a finding in itself: if we integrate comics earlier in the research project, that data can actually be collected. It also provides a demonstration, if we still needed one, that data needs first of all to be conceptualized — made thinkable and visible, even as missing — to then be collected.[3]

As these contributions show, first of all sociology needs to discover comics. Clearly, discovery has associated risks of appropriation (see Figure 2); however, the unique sociological value of certain comics or graphic novels, prior or in parallel to sociology's discovery, has inspired the productive explorations presented in this section.[4] After all, sociology does not have the monopoly of "telling about society" (Becker, 2007). This is not just with respect to comics — Becker for instance writes about Jane Austen's novels as social analysis — but to many other forms of expressive culture. The more this realization is integrated into current experiments, the less a new world needs to be discovered from scratch every time. We can instead concentrate on how our own world has expanded as a result, not so much by adding uncharted land, but a new *field of practice* with specific affordances (Kuttner et al., 2020).

3. As many of the contributors remark, there is of course a well-established tradition of including drawings, if not exactly comics, into anthropological research especially (for a particularly focused and self-reflexive example see Taussig, 2011). Recently visual methods are also increasingly experimental, often involving forms of elicitation, including comic-elicitation on the part of the respondents (Flowers, 2017) and even "painting with data" (Balmer, 2021). For an interesting counterpoint to the themes discussed here — not how images can visualize words, but how words bring forth images, see Mendelsund, 2014).

4. Key classics — Bechdel, McCloud, Satrapi, Sacco, Spiegelman — are all cited by the contributors. Clearly, others could have been mentioned. This is not the place to attempt a representative sample of a field that is wildly diverse and where national traditions are distinctive also in their role in public life (for Italy, for instance see Castaldi, 2017; Mandolini, 2020). To add at least a recent example, however, I would cite, for its perceptive combination of everyday life and institutionalized constraints, of private troubles and public issues, as well as an example of counter-appropriation of sociology by a comic-artist (a few feminist thinkers feature as *deus-ex-machina* characters) *La charge émotionnelle et autres trucs invisibles* (Emma, 2018).

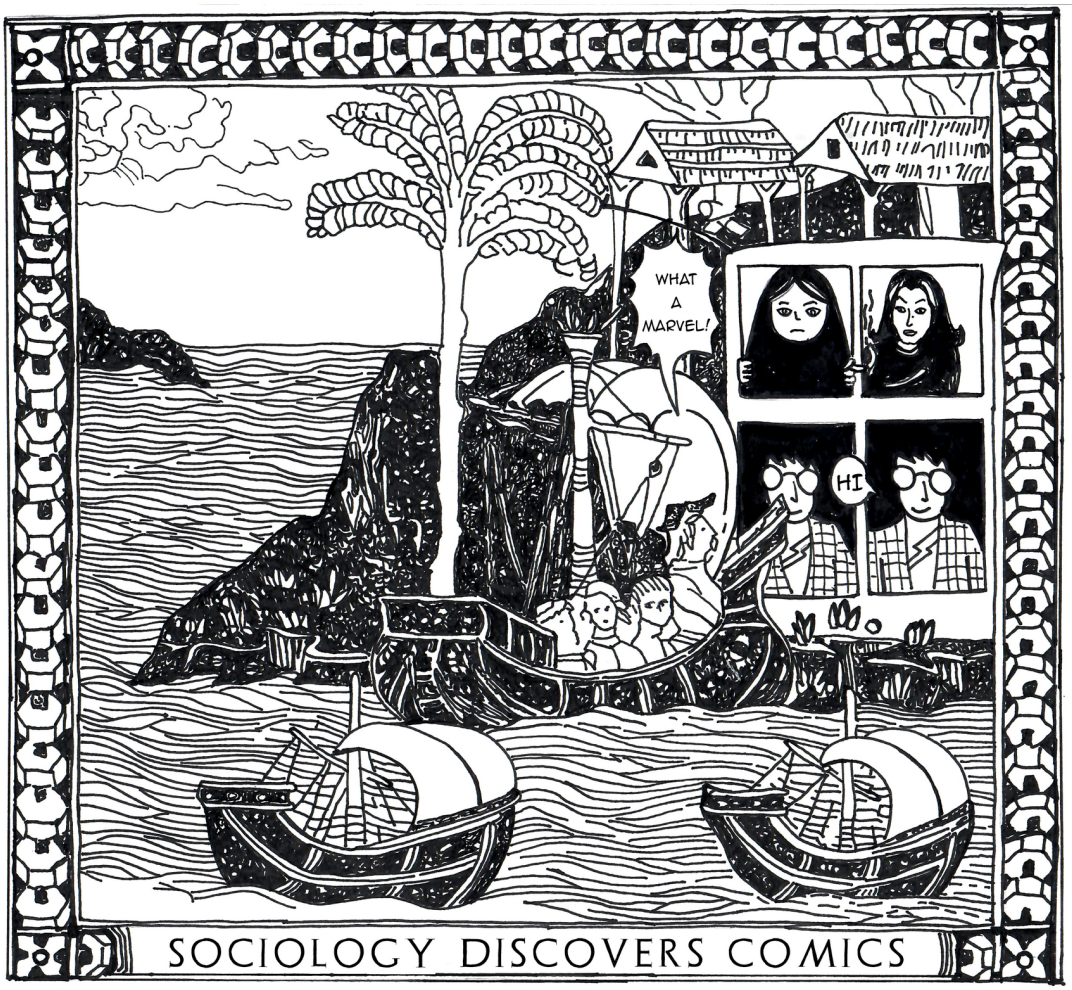

Figure 2: Sociology Discovers Comics

> Like a novel Columbus, the sociologist is finally landing somewhere unexpected, on Comics, discovering (un-covering) them to the world of research, theory and teaching, sociology's three *vessels* ready to be filled with the goods of this marvelous new land, where there is — surprise! — already sentient life.[5]

Depending on when and where the discovery of comics enters sociology a sort of typology might be established, to interpret both old and current experiments, and perhaps further directions. Cancellieri and Peterle (2021) talk of *comics-based research* (CBR), quoting the recent review of the emerging field by Kuttner and colleagues (2020). The anthology they curated, *Quartieri*, provides a prime example of the diverse field within a single volume, what *Ethno-Graphic* aims at across a series. In both cases, comics are used to do research work, are part of the data generation process. But it is also possible — and we have here represented — to think of what I might call *research-based comics*, where the co-creation remains somewhat looser, and

5. Representative of "life on Comics", two comic artists are portrayed through a rendition of their own drawings: Marjane Satrapi (2007), and Scott McCloud (1993). The overall picture cites (through a combination of tracing, adaptation and original inserts) one of the early representations of Columbus arriving in the "New World", contained in Giuliano Dati's illustrated publication of Columbus letter in 1493, in which Columbus said "Hispaniola is a marvel" (for a reproduction see http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a52282/).

the two worlds stay more separate. That is not to say this is a lesser enterprise, but one with a different equilibrium, leading also to a different emphasis on either dissemination or research. In that sense, looking at the cases presented in this section, *Sociorama* on a whole would seem to me to lie in the category of research-based comics, confirmed by its overall stronger emphasis on adaptation and dissemination. The same applies to the other anthology presented in the section, *Portraits of Violence* (Evans, 2021), and the web-comic *Beauty* (Kuipers & Ghedini, 2021).

Now, if we imagine these more as points on a continuum or spectrum rather than as discrete types, on the basis of gradually increasing entanglement and equivalence between visual and verbal, pictorial and discoursive, comics and research (however impossible our history tells us that is — see Foucault's quote and Figure 1 again) then we can imagine two further positions, one at each side of the ones already considered. At one extreme, where separation is clearer and division of labour too, we may put research (sociological or otherwise) on comics. This field of comics research clearly already exists. Sociology/research that has comics as its subject matter can be traced a long way back, to the official birth of the comic strip even. Kuttner et al. (2020) point to a 1944 article in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* (Sones, 1944), and in general to the early interest in the educational, or rather otherwise, potential of comics. We would proceed on the continuum to research-based comics, then comics-based research. Beyond the latter there might be a further step towards greater "fusion". We might call this "research comics" perhaps, for want of a better term. The idea of research comics may still just be an idea, but it emerges logically (or perhaps visually, having imagined the line of the continuum and the possible positions on it) from the experimentations shown here, already applied in some of their aspects, where comics are actually allowed to do research, in its various guises, from conceptualization to analysis. In this selection it is perhaps the incubating example of the screen play and commentary for *Theories of Creativity* that hints at this possibility, possibly more due to its topic than the approach, which is also intent on "translating theory into images" (Schiemer, Duffner & Ayers, 2021a; 2021b). In other words, comics are not only something to analyze, to display analysis, or to analyze with, but also a way to challenge and redraw the contours of what is up for analysis, to expand as well as to promote the sociological imagination (Kuipers & Ghedini, 2021). This is what my final comments and image are about.

Towards *Imaginacy*?

Evoking the sociological imagination means evoking the role of public sociology (or anthropology, as in Marcus cited above). One problem perhaps in our supposedly image-dominated society is when such predominance is combined, as it often is, with the permanence of the near exclusive monopoly of discourse and literacy (and numeracy) at the basis of our intellectual toolkits. We (especially "we" as a broad, general public, but not only) are thrown into a world of images, without instruments of analysis, like illiterates. A couple more quotations from these pieces stuck regarding this issue:

Portraits of Violence: "To be visually literate, they [our students] must learn to 'read' and 'write' visually rich communications" (Evans, 2021, p. 252).

EthnoGraphic: "we really started to work together to translate across our different disciplines. For example they [comic artists] really had to teach us [anthropologists] what visual language means and how you can convey ideas via symbolism" (Barberis et al., 2021, p. 295).

How will students and the general public more generally acquire such skills? And once the ethnographers are trained, will their readers get it too? Seeing and knowing are linked, but

the link can be the opposite of what we expect: one needs to see in order to gain knowledge; but one needs to know in order to see,[6] as the duck-rabbit illusion shows (Fig. 3). Is this a compelling argument for training — for all, not just innovative scholars — in visual codes and literacy? Or for what we might call imaginacy, precisely to complement literacy and numeracy with a term that recognizes the specificity of the visual and does not imply translation from verbal logic, a logic that often works against the grain of the visual?[7] I think it is. Perhaps even more ambitiously than they set out to, these interventions, through sociological comics, show a path towards imaginacy.

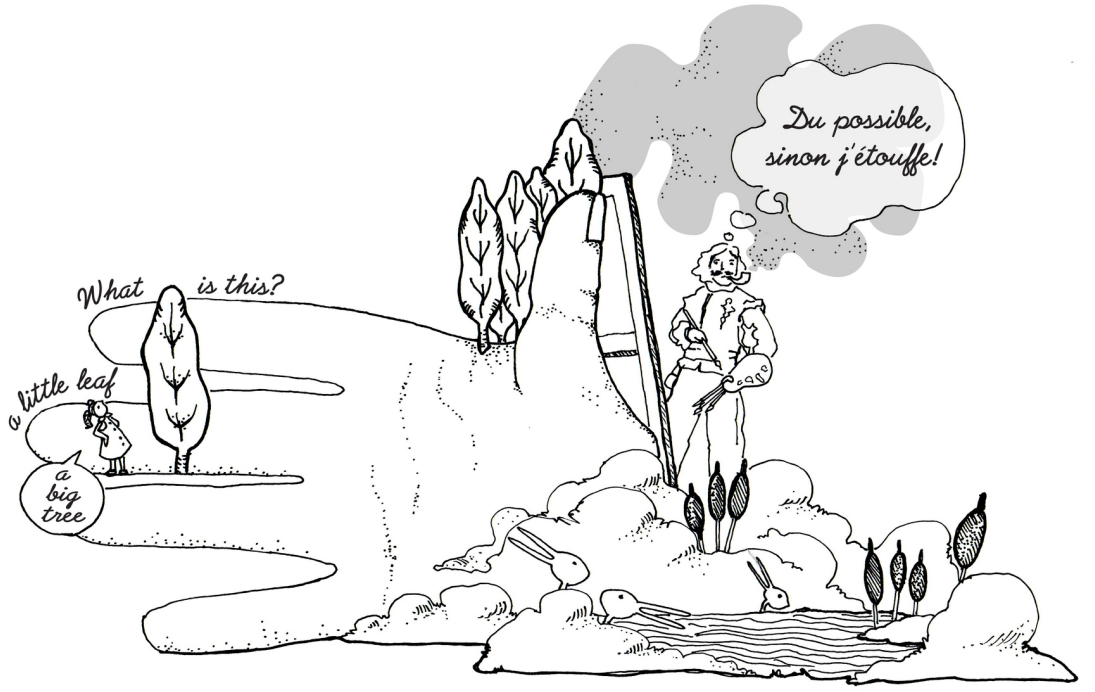

Figure 3: What is this?

> Velásquez stands a little back from his canvas, he felt like suffocating and stepped away from the impossible task. He's wishing for some *possible*. He left the *Meninas* inside and

6. Bourdieu forcefully showed this direction of correlation with respect to art perception: "In a sense one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*), or concepts, that is the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 2). We can perhaps extend this to all perception, whilst also allowing for the opposite direction and other "programmes".

7. Although there might be better alternatives than "imaginacy", this is why I'm not satisfied with "visual literacy" as an expression, whilst agreeing that there is a serious gap to fill in that sense. The omnipresence of a focus on translation is to me a confirmation of both the gap and the partiality (partial to literacy) of the solutions we have found so far. For instance, we do not need inverted commas or neologisms to convey a visual equivalent to "write", we have that word already: it is to *draw* (on "visual literacy" see Evans, 2021). On the dangers that visual overstimulation in our "civilization of the image" brings precisely to the faculty of human imagination in all its dimensions and to *Visibility*, see Italo Calvino's essay that goes by that title (Calvino, 1988). That inflation of images of a specific kind — say of animals, a common subject of cartoons and animation — might actually be the symptom of receding social relevance, is a theme insightfully explored by John Berger in *Why look at animals?* (Berger, 1980).

> is painting *en plein air*. This anachronism is the *possible* evoked by Deleuze as the realm of art.[8] The possible which juxtaposition offers, clearing the painter's lungs and imagination. A leaf on a hand is a tree by a little girl. A rabbit by a bush; a duck by a pond. If one knows that illusion one might be able to spot a duck-rabbit-fish jumping out of the water as well, (and then who knows what else?), and be free. The question might well be a simple "what is this?": but we are warned by the pipe and by the back of the canvas that images are treacherous, representation "a subtle system of feints" (Foucault, 1966, p. 3). From one perspective, it all suggests "this" may well be a trap. But also: there is plenty of *possible* as you step back; breathe.

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8. "Du possible, sinon j'étouffe" is the exclamation with which Deleuze on several occasions graphically portrays Kierkegaard's cry for alternative modes of existence and "arborescent possibility" associated with art (Bogue, 2007).

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