



SOCIOLOGY OF THE ARTS



The Social Genres of Comics

Impact and Innovation of Comics in Social Sciences

Edited by Veronica Moretti
Francesco Della Puppa

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Sociology of the Arts

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Conclusion

Francesco Della Puppa and Veronica Moretti

The social genres of comics represent a novel epistemological and methodological configuration within the field of social sciences, one that goes beyond a mere medial shift and instead necessitates a redefinition of the boundaries of scientific knowledge, its form, its publics, and its purposes.

The convergence between visual narrative and scientific representation, between panel and theory, between drawing and method, opens an unprecedented space of hybridity and experimentation that challenges both canonical research paradigms and entrenched hierarchies between expert knowledge and lived experience (Della Puppa & Moretti, 2024; Grüning & Scavarda, 2025). Addressing the impact and innovation of comics within social sciences does not simply mean highlighting the medium's potential for dissemination or its role in making complex concepts more accessible. Rather, its impact and innovation lie in the comic's capacity to intervene in knowledge production processes, to redefine the

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coordinates of scientific subjectivity, and to expand the epistemic scope of social inquiry. Comics, thus, are not merely a communication medium, but a cognitive and political device that acts upon both the object and the subject of research (Della Puppa & Moretti, 2024; Moretti, 2023). What renders comics socially and scientifically innovative is their inherently relational, dialogical, and performative nature.

The combination of text and image, word and sign, allows for the articulation of multiple temporalities, enabling the simultaneous representation of structures and experiences, the interweaving of the micro and the macro, the individual and the collective, the emotional and the cognitive (Della Puppa & Moretti, 2024; Moretti & Della Puppa, 2025). This multidimensionality translates into a unique ability to represent complex social phenomena, wherein sensorial, affective, spatial, and symbolic dimensions intersect. The integration of comics into research and public dissemination processes thus enables a form of “epistemic translation” that makes those elements which traditional scientific language often struggles to capture visible, thinkable, and communicable.

Yet the innovation that comics introduce into social sciences is not limited to representation. It also transforms the practices of knowledge production (Moretti, 2023). Where comics are employed as co-creative tools, as in participatory or collaborative research settings, they allow for the redistribution of epistemic authority among researchers, social actors, and artists. In this way, comics operate as catalysts for the democratization of knowledge, helping to reduce asymmetries between observer and observed, between the writer and the written. From this perspective, social sciences open themselves to a new research ethics that privileges listening, empathy, reciprocity, and accountability toward the contexts and subjectivities involved. Thereby the question of impact—central to current research policy discourse—acquires a deeper and more radical meaning. Impact is no longer merely about metrics or audiences, but becomes a question of transforming social relations, fostering collective agency, and shaping forms of common life. In this regard, comics enable social sciences to articulate a public and political dimension that is not ancillary, but constitutive (Della Puppa, 2023).

The methodological innovation, introduced by comics, also prompts a redefinition of disciplinary codes. The introduction of drawing as a mode of scholarly writing necessitates a rethinking of categories such as authorship, validity, citation, peer review, and archiving. It exposes research to a form of vulnerability that is also openness, to an exposure that entails a

willingness to be read, contested, and questioned by plural publics. Scholarly comics challenge canonical formats of academic production, problematizing the linearity of discourse, disrupting textual sequentiality to open up a polyphony of voices, perspectives, and registers. In doing so, they contribute to the deconstruction of epistemic authoritarianism often associated with orthodox forms of scientific writing (Grüning & Scavarda, 2025). Thus, comics allow social sciences to interrogate their own language, truth claims, and epistemological assumptions (Alam & Bué, 2024). They introduce a principle of uncertainty that is also a principle of openness, of shared inquiry, of situated and contextual truths.

However, this does not imply a disengaged relativism, on the contrary: it demands greater rigor, greater attentiveness to the positionality of the researcher, to the relationships established through the research process, and to the responsibility owed to the subjects and contexts involved. From this perspective, comics are not merely a language, but a posture: a form of attention, relation, and presence. This posture positions the researcher not only as an analyst, but also as author, narrator, and witness. The impact of comics within the social sciences lies precisely in their capacity to disrupt established epistemic postures, to reconfigure perspectives, and to render visible what is often marginalized or erased—making the invisible visible and the unspeakable articulable. This transformation also carries significant pedagogical and formative implications. The introduction of comics in educational contexts within the social sciences enables the development of more inclusive learning forms, more attuned to diverse cognitive styles and more open to creativity (Grüning & Scavarda, 2025). Comics become a formative device capable of combining analytical rigor and imagination, theoretical reflection and lived experience. They promote an embodied knowledge that engages the body, emotions, and imagination, and is thus more capable of producing lasting transformations in ways of thinking and acting.

At the same time, the use of comics in educational contexts raises crucial questions about the evaluation of knowledge, the hierarchy of languages, and the epistemic legitimacy of the image. In this sense, comics are also a space of conflict, a site of tension where symbolic struggles for the recognition and valorization of alternative forms of knowledge are played out. Therefore, to speak of the innovation of comics within social sciences is also to acknowledge their critical potential, their capacity to disarticulate the power structures that govern the production and circulation of knowledge. As a popular and accessible language, rooted in

material culture, comics unsettle the rhetorics of objectivity and neutrality, restoring to knowledge its situated, embodied, and political dimensions. Far from being a mere medium, comics emerge as a true social genre: an expressive form that conveys, structures, and transforms social relations.

As a social genre, comics do not merely represent the social, but actively produce, stage, and problematize it. Hence their capacity to innovate social sciences not only in terms of content or methodology but above all in terms of purpose: to conduct research not only to describe or explain the world but to transform it. In conclusion, we tried not merely to offer a thematic or applied exploration, but rather issue an invitation to radically rethink the relationship between science and narrative, between knowledge and society, between representation and transformation. Comics, as a social genre, constitute a bridge between worlds, a laboratory for methodological experimentation, and a critical tool for reimagining the social sciences in their public, democratic, and transformative function (Cohn, 2013). Impact and innovation are not just keywords: they are trajectories, processes, and openings that we have sought to map, demonstrating how comics can become at vital, accessible, and radical forms of social knowledge.

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