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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

On the Compositional Relationship of Text and Image in Graphic Anthropology: The Promise of “Sequential” and “Unrestrained” Perspectives for Unsettling Representation

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ABSTRACT

Graphic anthropology has grown to become a distinctive subfield at the intersection of anthropology of drawing, visual anthropology, and multimodal approaches to social research. We assess this development and identify two emerging styles of graphic anthropological practice. While some anthropologists follow the representational language of comic books and graphic novels—known as sequential art—others evade sequential framing, arranging images and text in a variety of nonsequential combinations. We compare and evaluate the two styles and outline their common analytical aspiration to unsettle static textual representation. Such a representational unsettling, we argue, can be realized productively—not by accentuating the text-image dichotomy or by treating the emerging styles as mutually exclusive—but through benefiting from the hybrid (pictorial and textual) qualities of graphic anthropology, which shape each other in a coproductive relationship that defies typological boundaries.

1 | Introduction

We are writing in a productive and expansive moment for graphic anthropology. The latter has emerged as a new multimodal subfield, growing steadily while embracing a wide variety of practices. We detect an emerging confidence among practitioners in this subfield: a noticeable aspiration to use combinations of drawing and text—not merely as an auxiliary tool to written prose, but also to analyze, interpret, and make theory. We address these developments by interrogating two emerging “forms” of anthropological graphic representation: (a) a preference for a sequential arrangement of image and text that follows the framing and semiological language of comics and graphic novels, and (b) a contrasting inclination to avoid (or escape deliberately) from that framing. In what follows, we will analyze what such multimodal forms (styles, approaches) do *for*—and *to*—the relationship of text and image in anthropological representation. By comparing the two styles, we will highlight how these share a common

theoretical inspiration and respond to similar challenges with respect to the text-image composition.

Graphic anthropology, as we know it today, has grown in the second decade of the 21st century as a multimodal subfield that brings together text and image combinations derived from multiple media¹ and inspired by different representational genres.² This growth sprang from the fertile methodological grounds of creative and imaginative anthropological practices (Ingold and Hallam 2007; Elliott and Culhane 2017), live methods in sociology and urban ethnography (Back and Puwar 2012), sensory ethnography (Pink 2009, 2011), and the creative freedom of multimodal and digital media platforms (Collins et al. 2017; Chin 2017; Collins and Durrington 2018; Dattatreya and Marrero-Guillamón 2019; Grasseni et al. 2022; Westmoreland 2022a). Although we acknowledge that the rise of graphic anthropology has followed a long established tradition of fieldwork sketching and note-taking (Taussig 2009; Geismar 2014; Hendrickson 2025),

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we draw a distinction between primarily illustrative uses of ethnographic sketching in previous centuries and consciously multimodal applications of ethnographic drawing in more recent years: Many contemporary graphic anthropological interventions aspire to be not merely supporting illustrations, but integral parts of an argument or analysis.

A renewed attention to anthropological drawing in the early 21st century has solidified a foundational position for graphic anthropology. It signposts that drawing can enliven (and critically enrich) writing about social life by enabling the author (and the reader) to see (and feel) what is not explicitly captured by words (Ingold 2011a, 2011b; Taussig 2011; Causey 2017; Hendrickson 2019, 2025; Bonanno 2019; see also Berger 1972). Two anthropologists in particular—Tim Ingold (2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013) and Michael Taussig (2009, 2011)—have disseminated this message to wider interdisciplinary audiences. Although they write without reference to each other, they demonstrate persuasively how anthropological drawing—with its unsettling incompleteness—can subvert static and bounded representations of social life, as well as singular and authoritatively proclaimed authenticities.

Ingold's and Taussig's message about the anthropology-making affordances of drawing encourages us to think beyond the conceptual dichotomy of text and image—rooted in the unproductive conceptual split between language and image (Mitchell 1986; Barker and Nakassis 2020; Hoffmann-Dilloway 2022). Thinking beyond the binaries generated by that split, we envisage a coproductive relationship that enables image and text to reshape each other. This is obviously facilitated by a somewhat hybrid quality: the reliance of most graphic anthropological products on combinations of words and images, which is one of its defining characteristics. This synergetic relationship, we argue, allows the graphic components to unsettle textual ethnography by helping the latter to become a touch more visual, sensual, reflexive, impactful, and/or self-critical.

Starting from these initial observations, we assess the relationship of text and images, drawing from recent work in the subfield. To evaluate such multimodal work both textually and visually, we experiment with a new form of reviewing that we call “graphic paraphrasing.” This involves drawing that captures elements from original artwork—for example, comics, political cartooning, or graphic ethnographies—by redrawing afresh from such work, with acknowledgment (and close reference to) the original work. Graphic paraphrasing affords for graphic anthropology what rewording accomplishes in textual academic narratives: It enables scholarly analysis and comparison, generating possibilities for developing ideas into new directions. During the process of completing this article, redrawing the work of others helped us develop our thinking about graphic representational formats and see more clearly what diverging styles have in common: the potential to unsettle graphically static representation. We will further explain graphic paraphrasing in a later section and provide two short examples, redrawing elements from *Lissa* (Hamdy and Nye 2017) (a sequential graphic ethnography) and *The Inheritance* (Povinelli 2021) (an unrestrained, nonsequential image-rich monograph).

2 | “Graphic Anthropology”: A Term for a Subfield of Transformative Practice

The emerging “graphic” creativity in anthropology has been so far productively messy. It is difficult to circumscribe it in a narrow definition. During this transformative stage, more than one term has been used to refer to drawing-related engagements in anthropology: “fieldwork sketching,” a practice with a long history of redirecting attention to ethnographic details; “anthropological drawing,” a category that includes a set of practices, but also a new literature with theoretical insights; “anthropological comics,” a playful but limited label that relates only to outcomes that adhere to one genre (comics, or sequential art); “graphic ethnography,” a term used by social scientists (urban sociologists, human geographers, cultural anthropologists) when they attempt to establish a common methodological ground for the benefit of inclusivity;³ and finally, “graphic anthropology,” the term we opt for in this article.

Our preference for the term “graphic anthropology” invites further clarification. First and foremost, we see that graphic practice in anthropology has now come of age (Marcus 2017). We feel that it is time to accentuate its analytical and theoretical ambition. There is now fertile ground to expand our view of graphic anthropological experimentation beyond its methodological appreciation as a representational tool kit. Such a more encompassing, critical, and analytical vision resonates more closely with the expansion of multimodality beyond self-celebratory narratives that praise innovation in a superficial or uncritical manner (see also Takaragawa et al. 2019, 517; Alvarez Astacio et al. 2021, 422). Seeking a greater degree of analytical engagement, we subscribe to a more encompassing view of graphic anthropological practice, where “anthropology” is conceived as a transformative practice that includes but also expands beyond fieldwork and ethnography (Ingold 2011a, 2013, 2014).

There is a second, etymological argument for favoring “graphic anthropology” over “graphic ethnography.” We cannot fail to notice⁴ that the root verb “*grapho*” (engrave, inscribe, carve) is repeated in the latter construction twice! As Westmoreland notes, the original meaning of *grapho*—to scrape or mark a surface—entails several multimodal affordances, including both writing and drawing (2022b, 67, 72), the two constituent acts of graphic anthropological practice. Westmoreland (2022b) refers to these composite qualities as the “dual nature of *grapho*,” a concept we adopt in this article. On the one hand, *writing*—as comics scholars remind us (Eisner 1985, McCloud 1993)—can also be conceived pictorially as a form of drawing, an effect comic artists accentuate by comic lettering, which may depict emotions, moods, or sounds. On the other hand, *drawing*, seen from this dual perspective, can be seen as the act of inscribing life (see in Greek, *zographos*: a painter [from *zoe* life + *grapho*]).

The term “graphic anthropology”—here compared with “graphic ethnography”—alludes etymologically to a more synthetic, reflexive, and inherently multimodal production of meaning—where the “*grapho*” of “graphic” is as inherently multimodal as the “*grapho*” of ethnography (Westmoreland 2022b), but is also

supported etymologically by *logos* (reason, theory, saying something significant) a constituent part of “anthropo-logy.” “Graphic anthropology,” a term defended theoretically by Ingold (2010, 304; 2011a, 269), signals an analytical move beyond mere description to mark an antitotalizing, not-ever-finished relationship of “persons and other things” entangled in generative participatory transformation. In this article, we build on this Ingoldian message, thinking with—and eventually beyond—the textual-visual polarity, through the gray zone that separates and unites representational styles in (graphic anthropological) compositions.

3 | Textual-Visual Tensions in Graphic Anthropology

The academic interrogation of the interrelationship of text and image has a long and interdisciplinary history. We may trace its foundations in the philosophical treatment of esthetics as impossible/imperfect knowledge (Kant [1790] 2000) and the reclaiming (or making possible) of such knowledge in dialectical steps (Hegel [1835] 1998). That words and icons can represent aspects of reality is obvious, but questions arise regarding how much of that reality they can represent, how accurately, and what the affordances of each medium are. Such dilemmas are visible in debates about the merits of poetry versus painting (or pictures vs. language) in earlier centuries (see Mitchell 1986), or the replacement of words by mass-produced/reproduced visual images in much of 20th-century critical theory (Benjamin 1969; Berger 1972; Mitchell 1994). Contrasting interpretations about the primacy of either words or images in shaping the way we see the world have stimulated generations of philosophers concerned with esthetics (see Eagleton 1990) and encourage us to wonder: Are we thinking with images (hidden behind words and meaning)? Or is the image a sign “that pretends not to be a sign, masquerading as natural immediacy and presence” (Mitchell 1986, 43)?

Visual anthropologists have, in general, abstained from answering insolvable (chicken or the egg) questions, such as, what comes first in determining our thinking, images or words? In fact, contemporary visual anthropology seems to prioritize the horizontal equality of the two media. It is now widely acknowledged that critical and analytical interventions can be made *both* textually (that is, through the privileged mode of representation in anthropology) and through visual, auditory, and material productions; in fact, a great deal of additional (and not fully charted) perspectives emerge from the latter (Cox et al. 2016). In this respect, images can be viewed as analytical partners of text, or, to quote one of our favorite comic scholars, “equal partners in meaning making” (Sousanis 2015).

More recently, related arguments have been voiced by anthropologists writing about multimodality, where emphasis is placed on the “inventive rather than descriptive” qualities of mediating technologies (Dattatreya and Marrero-Guillamón 2019, 220), and a desire to evade “the dependence of ethnography on text” (Collins and Durrington 2018, 1). Freedom from conventional textual representation can reveal an array of productive contradictions and unrealized disciplinary constellations (Westmoreland 2022a, 173, 180), making available knowledge in “increasingly expansive ways” (Chin 2017, 541). The multimodal message, once

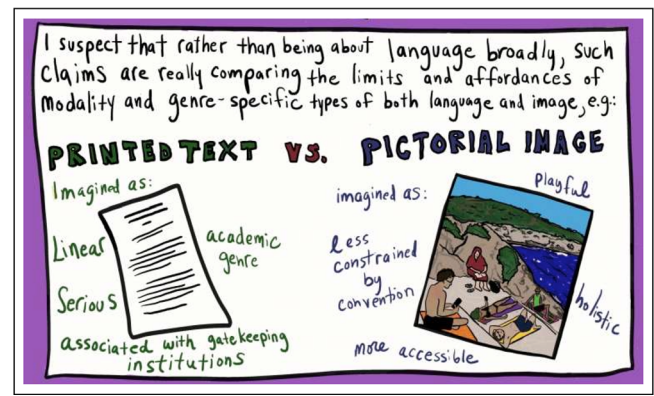


FIGURE 1 | Graphic from “Images of Language in Graphic Anthropology” (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2022). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

more, elevates nontextual analytical components, encouraging a horizontal, coproductive direction toward the relationship of text and image, which signposts the analytical affordances of images, but without downgrading the contribution of text.

A similar message is echoed by linguistic anthropologists who challenge the limiting—“structuralist”—binaries that set text and image in opposition (Nakassis 2016). They remind us that images—as well as the sensory and material dimensions of language—are not just nonlinguistic codes to be deciphered linguistically; language is far more than a tool for reference (Barker and Nakassis 2020; see also Hoffmann-Dilloway 2020). In fact, as Hoffmann-Dilloway (2022) emphasizes, graphic methods can help us move beyond the limits of language, reconceptualizing language in broader terms—for example, without presuming a clear limit of language that images exceed (Figure 1).

As we outlined above, contemporary approaches that highlight the synergetic relationship between text and image provide an emancipatory analytical foundation for graphic anthropology to productively unsettle the authority of textual interpretation. We also note that, despite the current turn toward the horizontal coproduction of representational media—which we enthusiastically follow—it is still possible to detect the resonances of what was, until recently—and for some, still is—an unequal relationship: the hegemony of text over images in the production of academic knowledge. This indicates a certain degree of *iconophobia* and a limiting view of anthropology as a discipline of words (see Taylor 1996; Pink 2009; Chio 2021). As Margaret Mead ([1973] 2003, 5) commented in 1973, anthropologists learned to rely on their informants’ words, and became reluctant “to let their pupils use the new [visual] tools.” We fear that terms such as “iconophobia”—although revealing the academic hegemony of text—may exacerbate the textual-image dichotomy, which we hope to unsettle in this article.

We would like to acknowledge, however, that visual anthropology, more than any other anthropological field, has led the critical interrogation of textuality, questioning the underprivileging of nontextual representation with determination (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005; see also El Guindi 2004; Banks and Ruby 2011; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015; Schäuble 2018; Chio 2021). Visual

representations of ethnographic realities are constrained and inhibited by the conventions of textuality: As Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005, 1) aptly put it, “the discursive pressure” of mainstream textual analysis still haunts those working with images. In the 20 years that have passed since Grimshaw and Ravetz made this observation, the relationship between text and image in anthropological representation remains a topic of debate; even more so with the rise of new multimodal practices and subfields.

So far, graphic anthropologists have not taken part in the related discussions, although their experience of working with both images and text offers a valuable perspective. In an academic world dominated by textual narratives, graphic anthropologists—very much like comics scholars (Gardner and Herman 2011, 6)—can find themselves in a defensive relationship. Despite an increasing use of alternative media (Collins et al. 2017), anthropologists continue to rely on written prose to communicate their analytical outputs. We believe that this practice mirrors two implicit biases: a treatment of graphic outputs as auxiliary to analytical narratives, and a commonsensical understanding of comics as lowbrow entertainment—not fully art, not fully literature either.

The first bias has a longer history that stretches back to ethnographic production during colonial times. Photography and ethnographic sketching have been affected by an overwhelming tendency to relegate visually enhanced outputs to a supportive role: as background illustrations of “cultural appearance rather than social depth” (Morton 2018a, 1; see also, Edwards 1994; Banks and Ruby 2011; Schäuble 2018). As such, photography and sketching have been appreciated and valued as media of illustration or popularization (primarily), not analytical tools. Graphic applications of ethnography, in particular, carried until recently the eerie aura of ethnological surveys where sketches and drawings were either simplified representations of more complex social realities or used as means to classify, categorize, and archive Others and Otherness. In fact, ethnographic sketching served as a form of visual documenting before it was partly replaced by photography (see Geismar 2014; Soukup 2014; Morton 2018b). Both media suffered from a rather utilitarian appreciation of their visual affordances: They were valued for illustrating knowledge conceptualized and expressed textually.

The second textual bias that affects graphic anthropology is rooted in the history of cartoons and comic books. Scholars of such media point out how comics have been consistently infantilized and denied inclusion in the upper echelons of art (Eisner 2008; Groensteen 2009b; Heer and Worcester 2009; Jared and Herman 2011; Beaty 2012). Interestingly, various high-end forms of art that combine images and words—often in sequence, or in panels that are reminiscent of comic books—attempt to dissociate themselves from the genre of comics to evade any related infantilizing connotations (Beaty 2012). It is not coincidental that the term “graphic novel” emerged in contradistinction to comic books (Beaty 2012; Kukkonen 2013; Baetens and Frey 2015; Stein and Thon 2015) to appeal to a predominantly adult readership. Our preference for the term “graphic anthropology” over genre-specific alternatives—“anthropological comics or cartoons”—relates to similar considerations.

We notice similar tensions emerging in relation to drawing, a medium that often receives an infantilizing treatment by association with its child-friendly characteristics (Soukup 2014; Spray 2021). What can be conceived as an affordance—drawing’s nonverbal *grapho*-popularity among children—burdens its credibility when compared to reasoning by words. Similar observations have been made regarding visual images in research about children (Varvantakis et al. 2019). However, while anthropologists encourage us to appreciate the creative power of inexpert drawings (see Taussig 2011; Causey 2017; Douglas-Jones 2021), publishers and journal editors remain justifiably concerned about professional standards in graphic production. Reliance on professional artists is expensive, while not all anthropologists can generate multilayered and analytical drawings. The scholarly appreciation of graphic anthropology—and other multimodal forms—remains at present an unresolved challenge, which has, however, received some attention by journal editors and research teams.⁵

4 | The Empowering Perspective From the Anthropology of Drawing

Let us entertain for now a position in principle: The predominance of text in social analysis can be subverted, which, in turn, inspires critical interventions against any residues of textual hegemony. Recent developments in the anthropology of drawing provide us with a sense of empowerment against the overwhelming dominance of text in the production of academic ideas. They also encourage us to appreciate that images do not have to be subordinated to words, where graphic components are relegated to merely auxiliary illustrations of what is written.

We treat as a starting point of the anthropological insurgency of drawing a book by Michael Taussig (2011), *I Swear I Saw This*. It has made a substantial contribution—not only in encouraging anthropologists to draw and share their imperfect drawings—but more importantly, to escape from the unrealistic expectation of realistic representation. We learn instead that anthropological drawings can provide much more than illustration and data: They can accentuate reality, reflect upon it experientially and dialectically, contain or stop time, stimulate thinking (in visual terms, but also in combination with text).

Taussig (2011), as much as Causey (2017) and Hendrickson (2019), who argue along comparable lines, encourage us to appreciate how drawing can shape what ethnographers see (or don’t see). In this respect, the practice of drawing is not merely enhancing the ethnographic outcome captured in the written text; it helps anthropologists think analytically about what would otherwise be easily missed (Newman 1998; Kuschnir 2016; Middleton 2020; Bonanno 2023) or prepare themselves for the challenges of writing (Douglas-Jones 2021). As a consequence of this, the practice of drawing ethnographically encourages ethnographers to think visually, and sometimes more creatively and productively. In fact, the realization that drawing amplifies analytically anthropological experiences is an emancipatory analytical proposition that has inspired much of graphic anthropology’s recent development.

There is a second analytical position that emerges from the recent literature on the anthropology of drawing: a commitment to unsettling (and/or breaking away from) singular and static views of what is (or ought to be) the social reality under ethnographic representation. Tim Ingold's work (see, indicatively, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) paved the way for appreciating the creative, dynamic, and fluid character of drawing—by hand, or by charting a fluid course through social life. Its power lies in providing a nonstatic, reanimated view of an unbounded reality that is never finalized (Ingold 2007, 2010).

Once more, the dynamic quality of drawing—as opposed to photography “taking” (Taussig 2011, 21–2) or attempting a realistic depiction through fine art (Ingold 2007, 2011a)—is leading graphic practitioners away from the pursuit of a singular authenticity. This direction contrasts sharply with past practices, when photography and ethnographic sketching attempted to capture an objective record of reality—an authenticating strategy that contributed to the foundation of anthropology as a science (Pinney 1992, 2011; Taussig 2009; Joseph 2015; Van Wolputte 2020). It took time for ethnographers to escape from such static understandings of authenticity, but when they did, drawing was seen as unsettling the authority of static representation (Taussig 2011).

Although Taussig and Ingold theorize “drawing” from the angle of different perspectives, they both substantiate an inspirational analytical position for graphic practice in anthropology: Drawing, through its inherent incompleteness, can unsettle fixed and bounded representations. This unsettling potential is enhanced by the modality of drawing and can be used with critical determination. It is not, however, solely the outcome (or dependent upon) the modality in question. Undoubtedly, purely textual interventions from experimental anthropologists have challenged successfully rigid and unreflexive forms of ethnographic representation—at least, since the 1980s. As we will outline in the sections that follow, graphic anthropology can provide perspectives that aid the representational reconciliation of text *and* image, ideally without prioritizing one over the other.

5 | Insights Into Sequential Art From the Comics and Graphic Novel Scholarship

The words “sequence” and “sequential” figure prominently in our attempts to describe the two approaches outlined in the previous section. Their separation—however tentative or typological—is structured by the representational affordances and limitations they entail, which present different possibilities for the coexistence of words and images in graphic anthropology. Before we focus on those, we would like to remind our anthropological readership that scholars studying comics have debated the definitional qualities of sequential image succession in their search for a comprehensive definition of comics (and by extension, comic books and graphic novels) (see Kunzle 1973; Groensteen 2007, 2009a; Beaty 2012; Domsch 2021). Central to such debates has been Will Eisner's (1985, 2008) understanding of comics as sequential art, where words and pictures depict a story through space and time, broken into sequenced segments or frames. Eisner (1985, 7–8) argued that comics exemplify a “form of reading” that relies on an image-word mix, a “cross-breeding

of illustration and prose.” This form of comics-specific “reading” contrasts with “watching” and “seeing”—the verbs used to relate to film or fine art, respectively.

Following in the footsteps of Eisner, McCloud (1993, 9) also relied on the notion of sequence to arrive at his deductive definition of comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an esthetic response to the viewer.” McCloud succeeds in capturing how graphic image sequencing differs from that of a film and other media. In his analysis, he follows an apagogical logic that frames the structural dimensions of sequential art as a unique medium of representation. His definition of comics focuses too much on the structure and medial properties of the medium, at the expense of meaning, situatedness, and culture—respects that are vital to anthropologists. This is why McCloud's definition, as much as that of Eisner's, has been criticized for being ahistorical (Meskin 2007; Beaty 2012; Domsch 2021).

Despite Eisner's and McCloud's contributions in raising appreciation for comics—as sequential art—their treatment of the relationship between words and images is entrapped in their essential properties. Sequential art, although undeniably unique, is understood as a crossbreed, a pictorial juxtaposition. Another comics scholar, Robert Harvey (2009), attempts to go beyond the resulting hybridity, arguing that pictures are indispensable for the plot of the comic narrative, which leads us to acknowledge that the work of pictures and words in constituting comics is actually inseparable. His emphasis on meaning challenges the essentialist duality of the image-word mix—in Eisner's terms—in favor of a more integrated view that focuses on the meaningful graphic outcome.

We see value in Harvey's (2009) antibinary position regarding word-and-image compositions. An anthropological take on hybridity encourages us to depart from composite binaries of essential types, in favor of a view of mixing as a new, ongoing, and independent form (Rosaldo 1995). Such an anthropologically infused view can be applied to understanding the relation of image and text in graphic anthropology. We will return to this thought in our conclusion.

6 | Sequential and Unrestrained Perspectives in Graphic Anthropology

Wise from the lessons acquired by the definitional dilemmas of scholars who study comics and graphic novels—in fact, most scholars agree that narrow definitions of such creative media are impossible—we turn our attention again to the graphic anthropological subfield. Its unprecedented growth, since the mid-2010s, has made noticeable an impressive variety of engagements. Some anthropologists draw—mostly spontaneously, without worrying about artistic proficiency—in the process of fieldwork or refining their ideas (see Hendrickson 2008, 2025; Taussig 2011; Causey 2017). Others work collaboratively with professional artists, who bring with them their training and expertise to generate polished graphic outcomes. There are, finally, a smaller number of anthropologists who draw publishable work without relying on professional artists, compensating for a lack of resources by putting into use their personal talent.

In this article, we have chosen to focus on two easily identifiable approaches—or graphic styles—which crosscut the variation outlined above. The two approaches are premised on the relationship—and arrangement—of images and text in page composition, not artistic competence. The first of the two is exemplified by anthropological outputs inspired by comic books and graphic novels. It follows the representational structure of such genres and employs some of their tools: speech/thought bubbles, reduced textual narrative, and a language of visual symbols employed by comics. Graphics in this stylistic arrangement are presented in consecutive frames that divide the page, and unfold in time, delivering a main narrative (often, in several pages). We refer to this unfolding as a “sequence,” and the style “*sequential*,” echoing Eisner (1985). It enables anthropologists to generate in-depth ethnographic compositions,⁶ which provide ethnographic material, sensory clues, social context, and insights drawn from the long-term fieldwork of their academic authors.

The graphic snapshot below presents some of the pros and cons of the sequential approach, which we offer with a disclaimer (Figure 2). The limitations we identify are not unsurpassable. Sequential artists who illustrate academic work often devise artful means that allow them to address academic concepts effectively (Westmoreland 2022b), even with academic references. See, for example, *Light in Dark Times*, a sequential graphic anthropological monograph dedicated to conceptual reflection from the angle of critical theory (Waterston and Corden 2020). Similarly, Deena Newman (2025), in her monograph *Diary of an Uncertain Psychic*, remains consistently analytical through an evocative sequential motif, which is rich in reflective imagery. She also provides reference to scholarly sources; for example, by alluding to academic genealogies in parenthetical frames or panels, supported by both text and images.

The second approach to graphic anthropological production is less prescriptive than the first. It can be understood as a generic orientation that attempts to break away from the “sequential” esthetic and structure, in particular, that of the comic book and the graphic novel. We refer to it as “*unrestrained*.” Graphics are arranged in all possible ways in relation to text; for example, as (1) illustrative panels that stand alone in parallel to a textual academic narrative, or (2) outside of borders, in various combinations reminiscent of a diary or a pastiche. Variation 1 does not break away from standard publishing conventions: Graphics accompany a text supportively, adding dimensions to it, very much as in this article. Variation 2 is more experimental in forging creative and unexpected synergies of words and images (often with images and words sharing the same page or weblog on more equal footing). In this variation, images and text may appear to share a publication space on more equal terms, helping each other out, but without one working necessarily as an illustration of the other.

To conceptualize visually the borderless articulation of image and text in variation 2, we present a page from one of Stacy Pigg’s (2022) graphics (Figure 3). This multilayered approach maximizes representational and analytical freedom for the graphic ethnographer. In this example, Pigg is not merely escaping from the stylistic conventions of sequential graphic art, but also from the add-on esthetic of inserting stand-alone illustrations into an academic text. Here, drawings and words work horizontally from a position of borderless equality, introducing multilayered depth.

7 | Paraphrasing Graphic Anthropology in Graphic Form

To introduce a multimodal element to our discussion of sequential and unrestrained graphic anthropological outputs, we employ an experimental technique. We refer to it, as mentioned in our introduction, as “graphic paraphrasing.” This involves redrawing and creatively synthesizing elements of another creator’s graphic work with an analytical—and critical-cum-self-reflexive—intention,⁷ and/or drawing afresh parts of previous images, photographs, fine art, or even diagrams with technical sources of information (see Chitra 2024). As with textual paraphrasing, the aim here is to assess, but also expand on another’s creation, generating a scholarly dialectic.

Graphic paraphrasing allows the reviewing author to enmesh herself with the ideas of the original author. By drawing—not copying, not reproducing mechanically—the work of others, we pay attention to a previously published visual narrative in a way reminiscent of how fieldwork sketching may draw attention to hidden aspects of social life (see Taussig 2011; Causey 2017; Hendrickson 2019, 2025). The resulting immediacy of such close engagement condenses the paraphrased narrative, bringing out non-explicit insights or opening the way for new observations that enable comparison, as it often happens with textual reviewing. For example, by drawing the two examples of graphic paraphrasing that follow, we realized that sequential and unrestrained styles had more in common than our initial category-making observations indicated. As we will further elaborate in our concluding sections, graphic anthropological productions from both styles share a proclivity to unsettle textual representation, discipline wordiness, or evade unidirectional representational linearity.

The first work graphically paraphrased—*Lissa*, by Hamdy and Nye (2017)—is presented in sequential form (Figure 4). While the serial succession of comic panels can be easily conflated with linearity—an issue we will further discuss later—sequential presentation in *Lissa* is multilayered and moves back and forward in time. In this respect, the monograph communicates a sense of unconstrained temporality reminiscent of nonsequential works. Graphic paraphrasing helped us appreciate this dimension.

We will now graphically paraphrase a second graphic anthropological monograph, *The Inheritance* (Povinelli 2022) (Figure 5). The author deliberately departs from the syntactic logic and constraints of the comic strip,⁸ building upon Peirce’s (1903) view of diagrams as icons of relations. Hand-drawn images, diagrams, maps, photographs, and textboxes unfold in a horizontal, non-hierarchical representational order, collaborating synergistically to generate a critical academic narrative. The text is powerful, but its wordiness is disciplined and constrained in textboxes, a characteristic that we also find in sequential anthropological work (cf. Newman 2025). Once more, by graphically paraphrasing this work, we learned that the two styles we compare cannot be separated in absolute terms.

Our experimentation with graphic paraphrasing opened the way for appreciating the mixing of different representational approaches, an awareness that, in turn, unsettled the finality

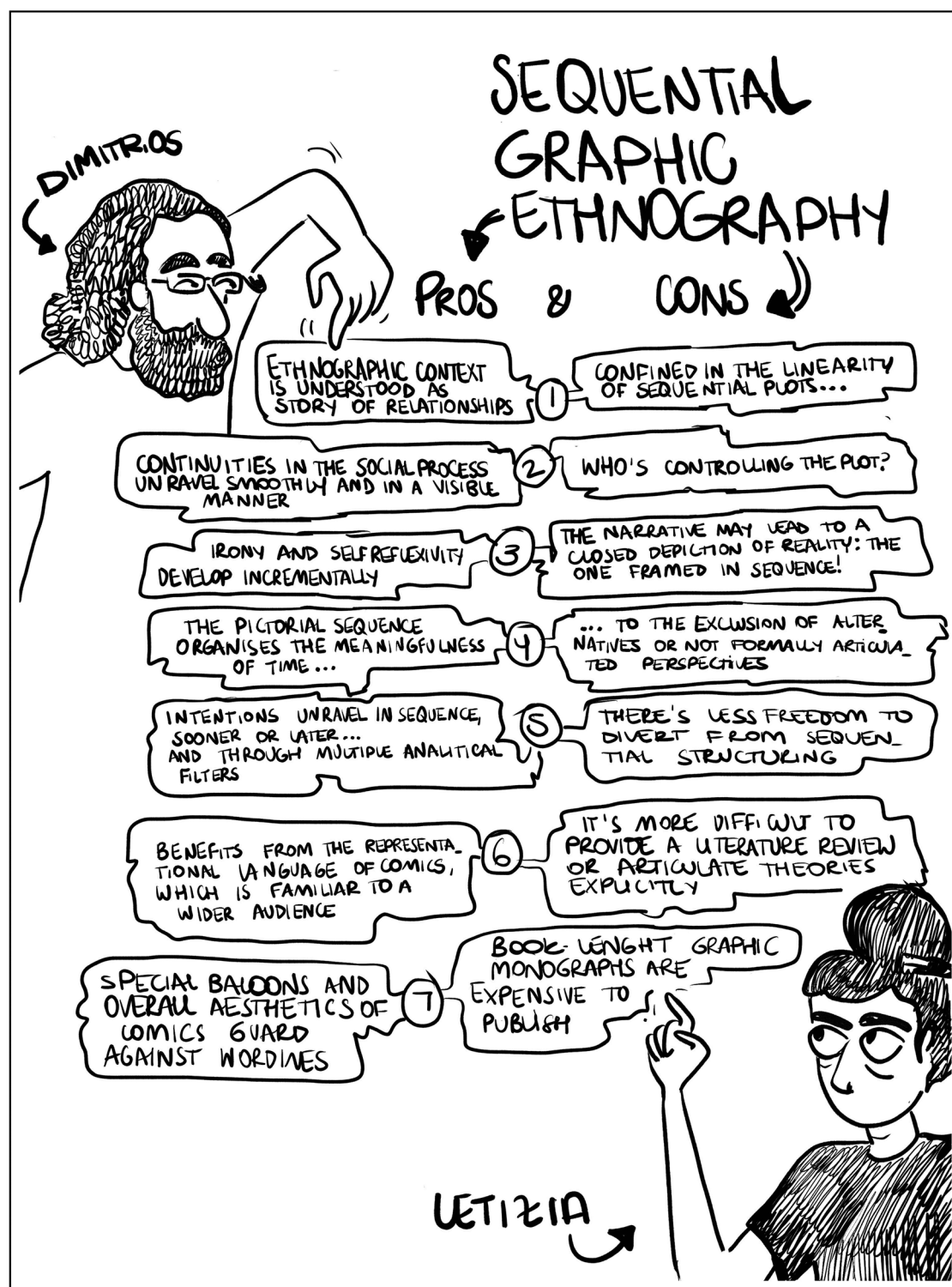


FIGURE 2 | Our first typological and limited attempt to evaluate the sequential approach.

of our own graphic styles—as we drew from the perspective of others. The experience corroborated the central argument in the anthropology of drawing regarding the productive unsettling of perspectives, which is also echoed by our overall position in this article. Additional advantages of redrawing the work of others

include a multimodal shifting of perspectives. This may, in turn, encourage empathetic attention to representational obstacles or contradictions that outline the trajectory of another creator. In this respect, graphic paraphrasing represents a form of drawing “with” and learning “through” the graphic practice of others.⁹

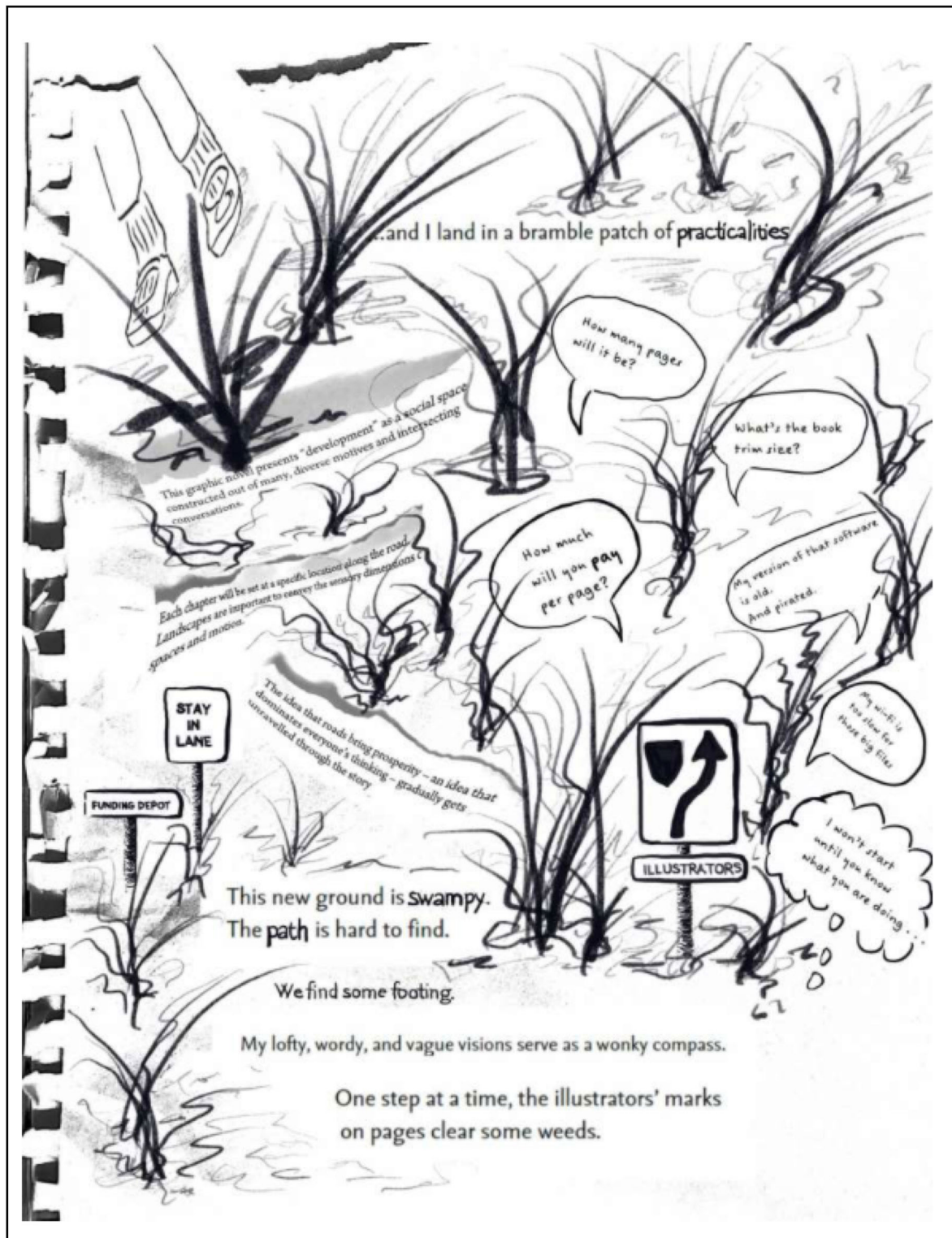


FIGURE 3 | Graphic by Stacy Pigg (2022), “Collaboration as Way Finding.” [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

8 | Text and Image in Sequential and Unrestrained Graphic Anthropology

Having paid closer attention to the details of graphic anthropological form through our exercise in graphic paraphrasing, we now return to our comparison of sequential and unrestrained graphic approaches as these have been employed so far by anthropolo-

gists. To sharpen our discussion analytically, we remain focused on a question we introduced in the previous sections: What does sequencing do to the relationship of text and image?

As we have already underlined, graphic anthropological outputs styled on comic books and graphic novels—the sequential approach—are best suited to capture the continuities of social life



FIGURE 4 | A graphic paraphrase of *Lissa* (Hamdy and Nye 2017).

and its fluidity, with the overall narrative arc unfolding across panels and pages. Dialogues develop within contexts and in a linear manner, often enabling a view of temporality that emerges from the sequential unfolding of local situational meanings. Eisner has underlined the time-managing properties of sequential art, a dimension independently recognized by scholars thinking about drawing (cf. Berger 1972; Taussig 2011). The linearity of

image succession in sequential graphic arrangements supports an immediate approach to visual storytelling, which may jump back and forth in time (thus, complicating time), but remains (in most cases) anchored on fixed timepoints. The narrative tools of comics—visual and textual—provide a readily recognizable representational language that can be read by significantly wider and diverse audiences.

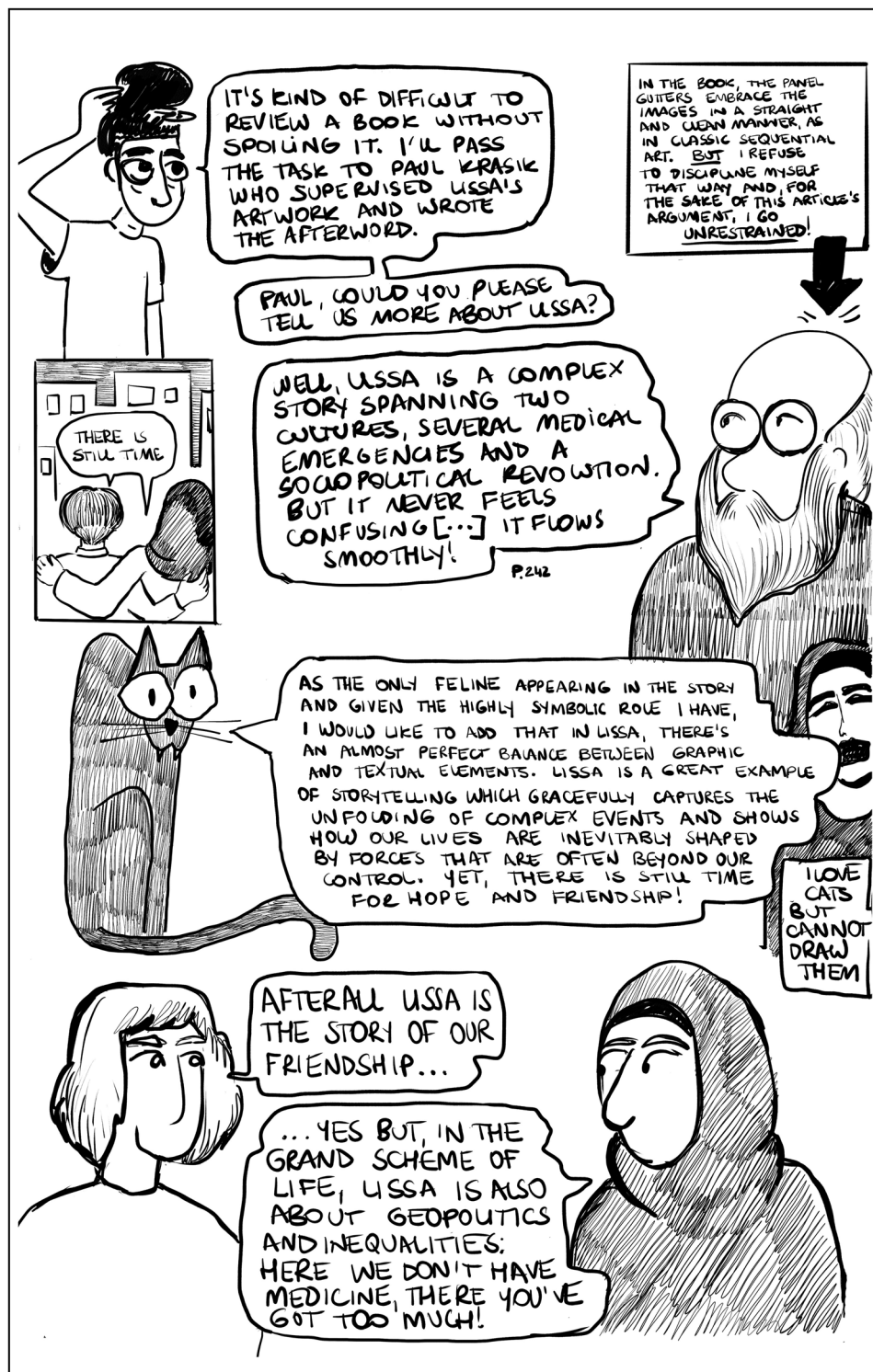


FIGURE 4 | (Continued)

As with photography and film, comics are not only based on cultural conventions of displaying, but are significantly affected by the sociocultural background of both the creator and the reader. Nevertheless, the ability to “read” visual representation is a socially acquired skill (Soukup 2014). As Gilbert and Kurtović (2022, 7) explain, sequential art is “openly reader-dependent” as it relies on “the collaboration of the readers to generate meaning.” Some readers are familiar with the sequential nature of comics,

informed by the experience of having read comics at some previous point in their lives. This familiarity—an embodied experience of reading sequential images—partly explains the success of sequential graphic approaches in popularizing anthropology (see also Gilbert 2019; Speck 2019), although admittedly the familiarity with particular styles of sequential art is learned and culturally specific.¹⁰

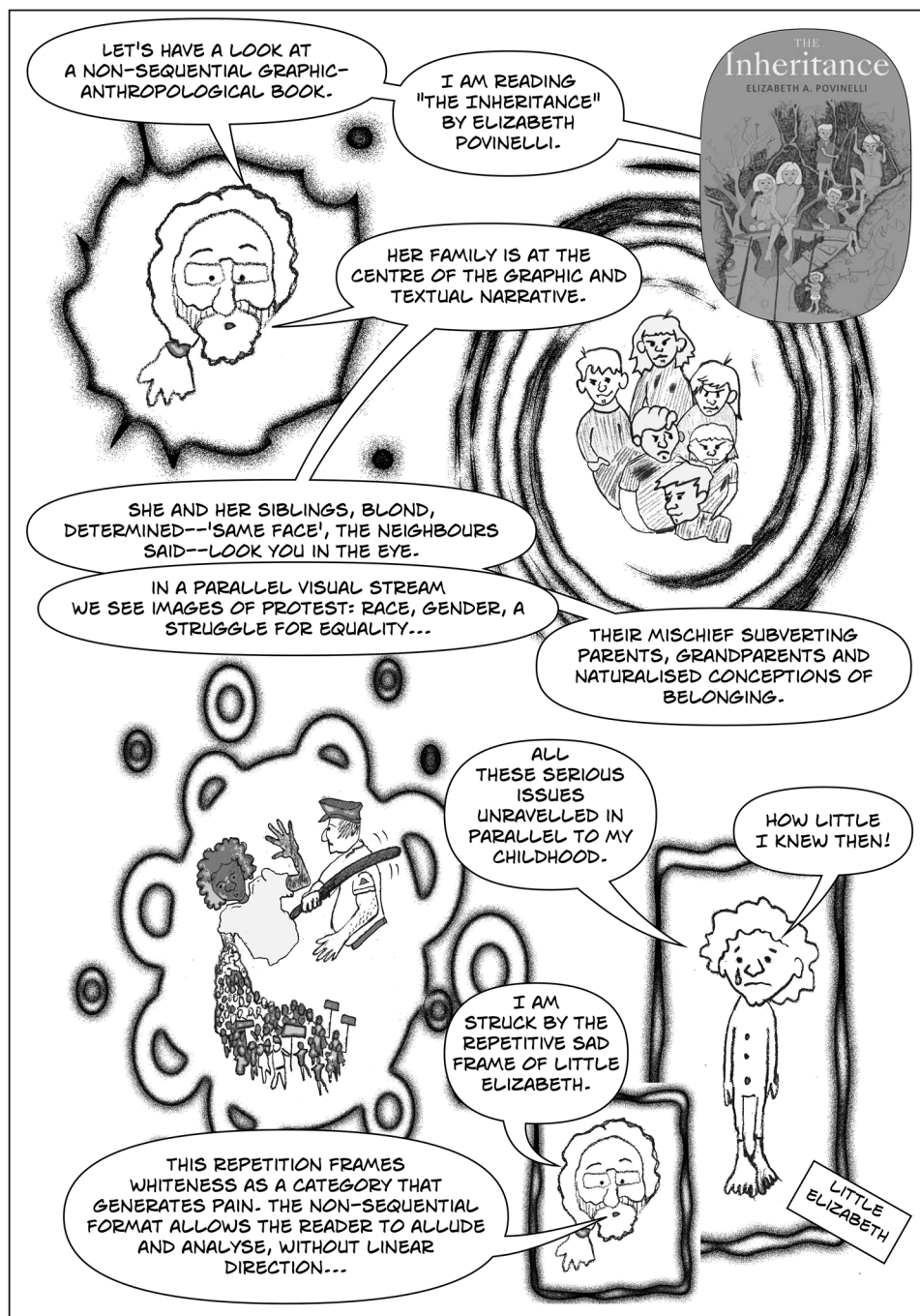


FIGURE 5 | A graphic paraphrase of *The Inheritance* (Povinelli 2022).

The length of sequential graphics allows generous space to display and disentangle contextual parameters, meaning, and temporality, which are all crucial for ethnographic exposition. The wordiness of the resulting accounts is managed by a disciplined structure inherited from comics (Van Wolputte 2022), where “much happens by showing rather than telling” (Chitra 2024, 36). Tools inherited from sequential art facilitate this process: speech and thought balloons, textboxes, and graphically treated lettering.¹¹ Although most creators of sequential graphics do not rely heavily on text, they do use text to explain and signpost elements that images cannot convey explicitly or concisely. The text itself, when handwritten or hand-drawn, can generate unique visual effects that capture the feeling of the plot (see Eisner 1985).

In sequential art, imagery enriches the written ethnographic composition with elements that cannot be easily conveyed by words. We notice that in most sequential ethnographic graphics, the textual and the visual components balance and compensate each other, generating a sense of flow, which is ideal to describe social processes.

The sequential form provides those anthropologists who follow it with a capacity to capture evocatively social change and time as an unfolding process. The sequence itself pushes words and images forward, communicating messages in favor of movement and against stasis. This dynamic approach remains, however, more or less constrained by the conventions, tools, fonts, gutters,

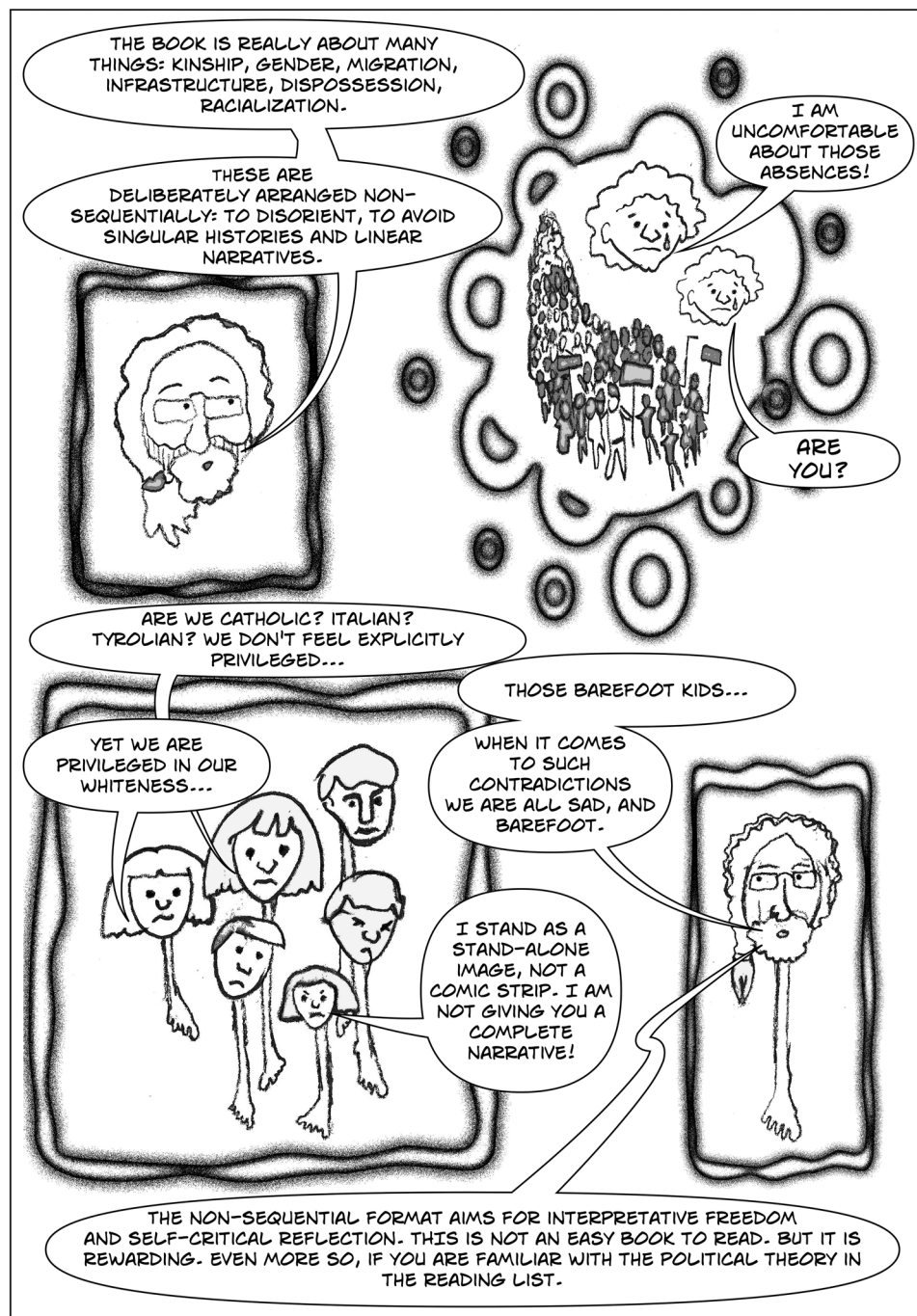


FIGURE 5 | (Continued)

and representational frames of sequential art. Although graphic creators discover through practice innovative and artistic tricks that enable them to escape from such constraints (Westmoreland 2022b), their very attempts to break free from sequential conventions indicate that the constraints pose a recurrent challenge.

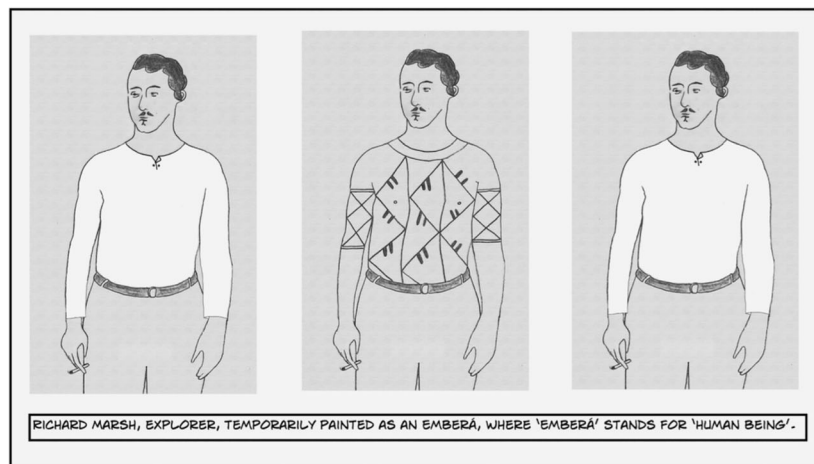
In contrast, unrestrained, nonsequential graphic orientations have the potential to break away—more easily and immediately—from the structured temporalities and traditional framing of sequential art (influenced by the semiological language of comics and graphic novels). In practice, there are limitless variations of nonsequential graphic anthropological expositions, many of

which do not employ the representational language of comic books. Those that do are most often “stand-alone” sketches that intervene subversively to unsettle written text momentarily, very much in the manner in which cartoons accompany newspaper reportage. Yet, arranging cartoon-like images to support (or speak to) a textual exposition is only one among myriad possibilities: all sorts of stand-alone images—fine art, multimedia installations (Haapio-Kirk 2022; Rumsby and Thomas 2022), digitally drawn photography (Theodossopoulos 2016, 2019)—can be juxtaposed to a textual ethnographic narrative, generating countless opportunities for graphic anthropology, including wordless graphics which reflect upon the textual narrative.

WE PRESENT THIS GRAPHIC AS IT STANDS IN RELATION TO THE PUBLISHED PAGE; IT COMPLIES TO THE RULES OF SEQUENTIAL ART, BUT IT IS USED NON-SEQUENTIALLY TO ARTICULATE AN ARGUMENT IN PARALLEL WITH A TEXTUAL NARRATIVE UNFOLDING IN THE PAGES OF THE BOOK. IT DEPICTS A COLONIAL EXPLORER, RICHARD MARSH, DRAWN FROM AN EARLY 20TH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPH, IN WHICH HE APPEARS BODY PAINTED, AS MANY CONTEMPORARY TOURISTS DO WHEN THEY VISIT EMBERÁ COMMUNITIES. THE GRAPHIC WORKS IN COLLABORATION WITH A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS THAT ATTEMPTS TO EXPOSE MARSH'S EXOTICIZING-CUM-PATRONIZING MOOD. THE IRONY OF SEQUENTIAL ART INDICATES THAT THE COLONIAL EXPLORER--DESPITE DRESSING 'INDIGENOUS'--REMAINS, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, A COLONIAL EXPLORER.

172

Exoticisation undressed



8.6 Marsh relieved of his Western clothes and body-painted in Emberá style

indeed a form of adoption 'into the tribe': the socialisation of the *kampuniá torro* (white, non-human Other) into Emberá society.

In the early-twenty-first century, body painting with *jagua* is – unsurprisingly – available as part of the Emberá tourist experience. The standard pattern of cultural presentations for tourists, as this is adopted by most Emberá communities in Panamá, presents an opportunity for the visitors to receive a '*jagua*-tattoo', which is usually a geometric Emberá *jagua* design applied on the guest's arms or legs. In this

FIGURE 6 | A stand-alone nonsequential graphic with a sequential intention (Theodossopoulos 2016, 172). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Stand-alone graphics support textual ethnography synergistically, adding complexity and analytical nuance. Their juxtaposition to textual narrative is often discreet: In many cases, it does not radically overturn the authority of text, although undoubtedly (almost all) stand-alone graphics can complicate visually written prose by contrast or association. When arranged analytically, they introduce irony, temporal or sensory dimensions, hidden details

within a social context, or a reflexive filter to pose and think about what is written (see Theodossopoulos 2020a; Bonanno 2024). Often, nonsequential, stand-alone graphics voice analytical opinions or political positions that resonate (or contradict) arguments expressed in the written prose. In most cases, however, such tactics of subversion work collaboratively to contribute to the textual-graphic partnership. In this respect, the graphics

may not divest the textual narrative from its authority, serving instead like a graphic Robin to a textual Batman. As a result, editors, typesetters, and reviewers often treat analytically inclined “stand-alone” graphics as mere illustrations.

As mentioned earlier, nonsequential graphic ethnography also includes borderless or pastiche-like variations of style. These often comprise more radical ethnographic experiments, which do not categorically separate the ethnographer’s written narrative from ethnographic drawing. For example, drawings and words can coevolve on the same page without panel borders. They may even touch one another or overlap, as with Stacy Pigg’s (2022) borderless articulation of image and text in the example we presented earlier. In other examples, drawings of people walk toward, stare into, or point to the accompanied text, following it as fellow travelers in a journey, or to facilitate the thinking process in the written text (see Pigg and Kunwar 2021; Chitra 2021).

Nonconventional borderless graphic ethnographic interventions seem to better communicate the unpredictable and rhizomic embeddedness of meaning in social life—or even break up established categories in new semantic combinations (see Jain 2019). The instability, elusiveness, and floating nature of social relationships seem to be best portrayed in sketches that are often presented in a raw and unedited form, in a deliberate attempt to communicate the fragility of interpretation. In so doing, ethnographers working within nonsequential representational frames sometimes choose to abstain from ascribing fixed meanings or precise captions to their representations.

Free from the disciplinary effect that curbs wordiness—an effect enforced by the comic book esthetic—nonsequential graphic ethnographic compositions can indulge in elaborate theoretical reflection. The textual component may explain the graphics, positioning visual elements within theoretical debates that have a history and come with a bibliography. Or alternatively, the graphics may explain the theory. The resulting combinations may succeed in communicating (more explicitly than with sequential graphics) a sense of emplacement in academic literature. In addition, the synergetic collaboration of text and images is embedded in a horizontal relationship, as we saw, for example, in Povinelli’s (2021) *The Inheritance*.

The plasticity and synthetic freedom of the unrestrained approach may lead the uninitiated reader to infer, from the preceding comparison, that we privilege this particular graphic style. Indeed, we cannot hide our admiration for the conceptual synergies that nonsequential graphic representation can engender. Its structural nonlinearity appeals to ideas regarding the unsettling of closure, which we outlined earlier. Interestingly, however, a similar movement against monodimensional linearity can be accomplished by sequential outcomes. As Groensteen (2007, 17–20), a comics scholar, has persuasively argued, sequential art should not be merely conceived as a linear series of independent and closed icons, but as a system of coexisting images in iconic solidarity.

Sousanis (2015) has more recently elaborated a similar message in his graphic book *Unflattening* using thought-provoking drawings. Although separated by gutters, different panels (arranged linearly) could be perceived simultaneously as a whole composition

by a reader who is looking at one (or several) graphic pages at once through a compositional all-at-once view (Sousanis 2015, 62–64; see also Westmoreland 2022b, 79–83). This observation encourages us to conclude that sequential and unrestrained graphic approaches—in anthropology and more generally—should not be conceived as discrete and impermeable categories. Sometimes, sequential graphic story lines are located within textual monographs in an organically unrestrained manner, along with stand-alone redrawn diagrams, maps, or “infographics” (see Chitra 2024). In other works, a predominantly sequential presentation may accommodate textual reviewing and/or depart from narrow paneling sequences (see Newman 2025).

To illustrate this complexity, we present one final image (Figure 6). It was published as a stand-alone graphic in an ethnographic monograph (Theodossopoulos 2016), but its visual composition is inherently sequential. Its movement across three different panels complies with the rules of sequential art. Yet, although sequential in form, the particular graphic was used in a nonsequential manner to articulate with a conventional textual narrative. The publisher, proofreader, and copyeditor treated (and thankfully accommodated) this graphic as an illustration, equivalent to a photograph.

9 | Conclusion

By the third decade of the 21st century, graphic anthropology has grown to become a vibrant frontier of multimodal innovation. The resulting creativity has been polymorphous and defies closed definitions. It is, in fact, a denial of closure—based on the proposition that drawing is inherently creative and unbounded (Ingold 2010, 2011a, 2013), and therefore unfinished and incomplete (Taussig 2011)—that has fueled experimentation in graphic anthropological forms. This message not merely inspired graphic creativity in anthropology but remains to this date a uniting thread that crosscuts the emerging variation of representational styles and practices. While we welcome the productive and unlimited “incompleteness” in the current explosion of graphic creativity, we feel compelled to abstain from self-celebratory narratives that set graphic anthropology in oppositional terms to singularly textual representation. Standard textual narratives can be as creative, multilayered, and critically unsettling (for example, toward closure) as graphic narratives, while images could be used in a flat and unexciting manner. Graphic anthropological productions can foreground ambivalence, disturb binaries and previous hegemonies of representational power; yet, to fully realize this potential, a critical and analytical predisposition is vital, as Alvarez Astacio et al. (2021) advocate in their ambivalent multimodal manifesto.

The growth of the subfield invites an evaluation of its graphic constituent elements—that is, primarily (but not exclusively) images and text, and their compositional arrangement. We framed our discussion on the observation that current graphic production in anthropology follows two general forms: sequential and unrestrained. By paying attention to the representational characteristics of both and by paraphrasing graphically indicative examples, we realized (while writing and revising this article) that the two graphic approaches have permeable boundaries. Sequential and nonsequential outputs are both

text-and-image hybrids: Their hybridity—seen anthropologically (Rosaldo 1995)—should not be conceived as the mixing of discrete categories in binary opposition, but as an original synthesis not reducible to its dynamic parts. In both sequential and unrestrained compositions, the dynamic parts are text and images in combination.

The two graphic styles we analyzed in this article—the sequential and the unrestrained—make an equal contribution in productively complicating and unsettling anthropological representation. Sequential graphic anthropology imposes a horizontal discipline on words and images, inviting them to collaborate in keeping the main narrative in motion—in fact, image and text are forced to accommodate each other to generate a sequential momentum. The sequential graphic form is intended to unfold, a disposition toward movement—and against stasis—that scholars of comics and graphic novels have signposted with the term “sequential art” (Eisner 1985, 2008; McCloud 1993). In this respect, sequential graphic ethnography is inescapably processual and continuously retemporalizing (see Hamdy and Nye 2017; Sopranzetti et al. 2019; Carrier-Moisa and Marie-Eve 2020; Newman 2025). The dialectic between panel frames can potentially generate dynamic interrelationships with multilayered depth: Comic frames speak to other frames, constraining and unconstraining representational identifications, offering opportunities for critique (Scherr 2015).

Nonsequential, unrestrained graphic experiments in anthropology, unimpeded by the framing and conventions of sequential art, invite contradiction and dialectical reflection (more effortlessly than sequential outputs). Here, the juxtaposition of images and words is explicit and often unpredictable: There is no one overarching language/style of representation, as with most sequential art. Although images and text talk to each other, they are not forced to collaborate in spatiotemporal terms (as per the representational structure of comics and graphic novels). The images often provoke the text, while the text takes care to critically elaborate. In the former case, image provocation can guard against author-indulged authority, allochry, or nostalgia. In the latter case, the text takes the auxiliary role of foregrounding the analytical power of the image, where text is serving (and semantically illustrates) the image (as we see in Povinelli 2021; see also Jain 2019; Pigg and Kunwar 2021). We see in this a reversal of the conventional textual-representational dynamics.

The comparison of sequential and unrestrained forms generates opportunities for seeing the relationship of image and text in anthropological production in a dialectical light. The opportunity here is to escape from binaries—such as text versus image, poetry versus painting, inanimate nature versus language (see Mitchell 1986)—while searching for synthetic forms that combine and maximize the affordances of both sequential and nonsequential graphics. Within graphic anthropology, the opposition of text and image is collapsed by the Ingoldian view of the continuum that unites drawing and handwriting (Ingold 2010, 2011a) and Westmoreland’s (2022b) attention to “the dual nature” of the term “*grapho*,” which traces the common origin of writing and drawing as acts of “inscribing” life. “graphic anthropo-logy” can thus be conceived as a reflection of its etymology: writing and drawing (both captured by the verb *grapho*) about people (*anthropoi*, in plural) in a meaningful manner (*logos*). The new subfield is

thus inherently and inescapably multimodal, in its sequential, unrestrained, and hybrid compositional forms.

By arguing in favor of the coproductive relationship of image and text that unites different graphic styles, we do not wish to hide from view important differences that shape graphic production in anthropology. Unrestrained approaches come with greater representational (nonlinear) freedom that could be disarmingly creative, conceptually multilayered, and more adaptable to the demands of the publishing infrastructure and scholarly accreditation. Sequential outputs can escape linearity too (Sousanis 2015; Westmoreland 2022b), but they need substantial print space to communicate their scholarship, which is not always noticed (or fully accredited) by academic reviewers. In addition, sequential outputs often require a heavy time and labor investment, and a rare combination of professional skills. How many anthropologists have serious training in cartooning, or a generous university allowance to hire professional artists?

Choice or preference of style is thus related to many considerations: the economy of labor and technical or artful skills, the constraints of the publishing infrastructure, or the topic under investigation. For example, if one encounters a local tradition of comics (or political cartooning) that is recognizable in a given fieldwork context, it makes anthropological sense to borrow elements from it and emulate it sequentially (Sherwood González 2022), or nonsequentially (Gilbert and Kurtović 2022; Theodosopoulos 2020b, 2022c). The decisive word in our comparison of styles is “or.” Text and image can force on each other a horizontal collaboration in motion (as with sequential graphic productions) or talk to each other critically, provocatively, and dialectically (as with unrestrained compositions). The intersection of the two styles has inspired us to think and reflect about the emerging subfield in a conscious effort to move beyond dichotomies: sequential and non-sequential representational forms, as image and text are less separable than they seem. Following this logic, the unrestrained style may thus be seen as a broadening gesture that collapses and multiplies the application of compositional forms and tools previously established by sequential art.

We have long departed from those times—in previous centuries—when ethnographic sketching served textual representation from an auxiliary role; as merely “a means to represent another object or illustrate a text” (Jain 2022). Anthropological drawing is now conceived not just as an alternative form of communicating, but as with all types of ethnography making, “a form of analysis that opens up new venues for thinking” (Van Wolputte 2022; see also Hendrickson 2008, 2025; Causey 2017; Douglas-Jones 2021; Gilbert and Kurtović 2022). In this creative juncture, graphic anthropology issues an invitation to think in terms of both text and image, welcome the analytical contradictions and affordances this possibility entails (Westmoreland 2022a), and think beyond the language versus image divide (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2022). “Words and pictures, long kept apart, are [now] allowed to cohabit” (Sousanis 2015, 64). We see this development not as a cause for celebration, but as an invitation for serious analytical work, constructive critical thinking, and forward-looking innovation.

Endnotes

- ¹“Text” could be minimal, and/or artistically rendered (e.g., comic lettering, handwritten); or it may take the form of copyedited academic prose that is, however, accompanied by drawn images arranged intentionally to communicate with the text. “Images” are mostly drawn (e.g., by hand or digitally), and if derived by the photographic lens, altered by drawing (and/or filters), or combined in a pastiche of material media, words and/or fine art. Graphic anthropological arrangements may also include (or artistically interface with) sound and/or video (see Haapio-Kirk 2022), objects and exhibitions (Martínez 2021), and participatory animation (D’Onofrio 2020; Morelli 2021).
- ²These genres include comics, graphic novels, political cartooning, zines, and multilayered multimodal installations with embedded media (such as sound, video, photography and text).
- ³See Westmoreland (2022b) and Theodossopoulos (2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023). The term is more widely used in Europe, where sociology is a larger discipline than anthropology and ethnographically inclined sociologists use the term “ethnography” to signal their anthropological credentials or orientation.
- ⁴Especially since “we”—both authors of this article—are fluent in Greek.
- ⁵In the current publishing regime, purely graphic outputs do not count as research items and require support by text. Bonanno (2019a) experienced this firsthand while publishing previously in *American Anthropologist*, while the editor of this journal corroborates this technical constraint (Elizabeth Chin, personal communication). New insights about the scholarly criteria of more-than-textual ethnography are expected to emerge in due time from the research program *Multimodal Appreciation*; see <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/multimodalappreciation/>.
- ⁶These include ethnographic monographs. See, for example, *ethnoGRAPHIC*, a monograph series by University of Toronto Press, which has made a great contribution to promoting the academic legitimacy of graphic anthropology.
- ⁷See, for example, how Theodossopoulos (2020b, 2022c) emulated the style of a renowned cartoonist who had criticized postwar austerity in the 1950s to produce a critical narrative of the recent austerity crisis. See also how Bonanno (2022) drew a graphic review of a graphic monograph *The King of Bangkok* (Sopranzetti et al. 2019). Both examples involve capturing graphically elements of previous image-rich productions.
- ⁸See Nick Earhart, “A history of distorted memories”: Elizabeth Povinelli talks about her graphic memoir ‘The Inheritance,’” *Airlight*, March 10, 2022, <https://airlightmagazine.org/etc/conversations/povinelli-inheritance/>.
- ⁹There are additional opportunities for using graphic paraphrasing in pedagogical exercises, as we learned from our own teaching practice. Drawing around the established motifs of others can build confidence in students reluctant to draw, gradually encouraging them to divert from established formats, synthesize, and/or enhance a comparative critical view against closure and finality in representation.
- ¹⁰It must be noted that the familiarity with sequential art crosscuts many Western contexts, but it is not universally applicable. For instance, manga (Japanese comics and graphic novels) are read from right to left and from top to bottom, in the same way as Japanese writing. Even though manga is nowadays widespread across the world, reading manga for the first time can prove a challenging task: Deciphering the dense overlap of text and images and the abundance of culturally specific symbols can prove difficult to Western readers not familiar with the cultural referents.
- ¹¹Lettering, when treated graphically and in the service of the story, functions as an extension of imagery and provides the mood, a narrative bridge and the implication of sounds (Eisner 1985, 10). Hand-produced or typeset lettering can convey emotions, a ghostly (eerie) feeling, violence, or agitation.

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