

PERFORMATIVE READINGS

WARJA LAVATER'S WORDLESS TALES

Daniele Colistra

Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria

Department of Architecture

daniele.colistra@unirc.it

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FOLDED STORIES

LEPORELLO

PICTOGRAM

SILENT BOOK

WARJA LAVATER

In this essay we will analyse the graphic work of Warja Lavater, author of numerous stories made exclusively with pictograms. From 1962 to 1982 the Swiss artist created 24 books, initially conceived as 'artist's books' but which were soon also used as a pedagogical tool. Lavater's illustrated books can be divided into two groups: 19 *Folded Stories*, published between 1962 and 1967 by *Basilius Presse*, and 5 *Imagineries*, taken from as many stories by Perrault and published by the Parisian publisher *Maeght* between 1965 and 1982. Regardless of the artistic value of these works, we will focus on the rela-

tionship between diegesis and image sequence, trying to understand the semantic effectiveness of this narrative mode. We will also try to evaluate whether the pictograms –considered individually and arranged in sequence– are able to favour the development of a 'spatial thought' or whether they should be understood exclusively as refined style exercises. We will then consider some applications in the pedagogical field and, finally, we will analyse in more detail the artist's first and last work, trying to evaluate the stylistic evolution and the different relationships between sign, symbol and content.

INTRODUCTION. THE ETERNAL DICHOTOMY BETWEEN WORD AND IMAGE

Western culture is closely related to the written word. The authority of an idea and the power associated with it have always been expressed in forms that only writing can guarantee. In the field of the figurative arts, obviously, images prevail over words, and there are few cases in which word and image are mutually enriched. Both have a common origin, namely mental ideas, which however do not have a tangible configuration; moreover, etymologically, vision, idea and image have the same root (Di Napoli, 2004). Any idea manifests itself in relation to an image, consisting in the mental reproduction of an object (concrete or abstract) capable of representing and identifying it: “the soul never thinks without images” (Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Book III, Chapter 7, Paragraph 3).

To communicate mental images, you need to give them a sensible form, translate them into material images: “thoughts want shape”, affirms Rudolf Arnheim in *Visual Thinking* (1969, p. 116). There are two categories of material images: the graphic (pictorial, photographic, etc.) and the verbal image. The latter is based on signs/sounds conventionally adopted by the script/language; its qualities are profoundly different from the geometric, chromatic, and spatial ones that characterize the graphic images.

The verbal images favour a poetic, creative interpretation, producing further new forms; graphic images, on the other hand, are objectively defined by shapes, sizes, colours, geometries. The action that shapes mental images –drawing or writing– does not consist in a simple translation: writing or drawing requires the realization of a creative project. Similarly, rethinking a text through images (and *vice versa*) is a highly creative activity. This principle, as we will see below, is the basis of all Warja Lavater’s work.

LOOKING FOR A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Warja Lavater was born in Winterthur in 1913 and grew up in a culturally stimulating environment, in which both the logical-rational and the creative-verbal components were present (his father was an engineer, his mother a writer). She spent her early childhood between Moscow and Athens, without following regular studies; she only went to school in 1921, having difficulties in mathematics and writing. In 1931 she enrolled in Graphic Art courses at the *Fachklasse für Grafik an der Kunstgewerbeschule Grafik* in Zurich; after the introductory year, she was admitted to Ernst Keller's course, from which she learned the basics of design. Keller has always started his lessons with 'the most important thing': drawing, as Lavater herself has often remembered¹. Ernst Keller's design method emphasized the value of graphics as communication rather than decoration and was based on ideas that defended the economy of forms, geometric grids, and the importance of visual structures. After a further period of study in Stockholm, Basel, and Paris, in 1937 she opened her studio in Zurich with Gottfried Honegger, who would become her husband in 1940 (Figure 1). She remained in Switzerland until 1958, working as an illustrator mainly for the children's newspaper *Jeunesse*, of which she was also editor in chief. In the first half of the 1950s she created a series of abstract etchings featuring urban life scenes in New York and Paris, simultaneously applying different engraving techniques learned in courses with Stanley William Hayter in New York and Johnny Friedlaender in Paris (in particular, lithography and linoleum block printing, as well as ink and watercolor). In 1958 she settled in New York for two years and began designing scientific illustrations for *Dell Publishing* visual series. At that time, she was fascinated by the folded books used by Chinatown calligraphers, appreciating the versatility of the format that stretches like an accordion. At the same time, she experimented with the overlap of textual

Fig. 1 Warja Lavater with Gottfried Honegger in 1937. Retrieved June, 13, 2022 from <<https://dallaslibrary2.org/blogs/bookedSolid/2020/02/warja-lavater-writing-pictures-and-drawing-books/>>.



and graphic codes, just as happens in road signs in which circles, rectangles, triangles, and lines reproduced in primary colours are immediately understandable by anyone. Around 1960 she began experiments with *Leporellos* (at first called *Sing-Song-Signs*), in which, as in a map, the meaning of each graphic is established by a legend. Back in Europe, she lived between Zurich and Paris. In 1962 she published his first book using exclusively pictograms (*Wilhelm Tell*) for the editions of the *Museum of Modern Art* and for the *Basilus Presse* in Basel. Also in 1962, Basilus published a series of *Leporellos* entitled *Folded Stories* in offset printing. The success of these works led her to intensify her research on symbolic illustration applied to fiction, creating another 14 volumes, of which 5 collected by the Parisian publisher *Adrien Maeght* in the *Imageries* series; other *Leporellos* have been published by *Basilus Presse* (Basel) and *Editions Schlegl* (Zurich). In the early 1970s, Lavater began experimenting



Fig. 2 Anonymous, *Friedrich Fischer as Leporello*, 1833, Engraving. Retrieved June, 13, 2022 from <<https://www.posterazzi.com/mozart-don-giovanni-nthe-bass-friedrich-fischer-as-leporello-cataloguing-the-conquests-of-don-giovanni-from-the-opera-of-the-same-name-by-wolfgang-amadeus-mozart-1756-1791-line-engraving-after-a-contemporary-drawing-1833-poster-print-by-grang/>>.

with paper, thanks to the collaboration with the paper mill of François Lafranca in Locarno and creating works that she herself called *livres sculptés*, as well as creating some works in Braille using different pieces of cloth to symbolize the characters and settings. In April 1995, the *Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique* of the *Center Pompidou* in Paris produced the audiovisual adaptations of six works². Supervised by Lavater herself, the presence of the narrator was categorically excluded in them, in accordance with the principle of an exclusively non-verbal narration. Her work as an illustrator, always faithful to the principle of telling stories using only abstract symbols, was promoted through numerous exhibitions around the world and will continue until her death in Zurich in 2007.

THE PHYSICAL MEDIUM OF THE TALE: THE *LEPORELLO*

The *Leporello* is a type of bookbinding that takes its name from Don Giovanni's servant in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera of the same name: *Leporello*, in fact, transcribed the names of his master's innumerable female conquests on a long strip of paper (Figure 2). This type of bookbinding corresponds to what the Japanese call Orihon. The idea of using this support was almost accidental.

I was in New York. I was walking through Chinatown. I saw small books, in a small format that you hold in your hand. They unfolded, like accordion-folded paper, and the pages were blank to write on. It was a kind of sculpture that you could put upright, for example. In a normal book, turning the page cuts the flow of time; there is the past and the future. The fold-out book is more linear: it is the flow of time in the horizontal; there can also be the vertical downwards and the vertical upwards: see the Japanese scrolls, which can be linked to the *volumina* of ancient Rome. But when a book is upright,

it moves away from its destination; it reveals its own world; it becomes sculpture. On the contrary, when it is spread on a wall, there is an obligation to put numbers to avoid confusion³ (Escarpit, 1988, p. 49).

For Lavater, therefore, the *Leporello* has the advantage of being “a book that can be transformed into a sculpture, standing on the ground, or hung, unfolded, on the wall” [my translation from French⁴] (Gromer, 1991, p. 42).

The artist defines *Leporellos* with different terms: *Folded Stories*, *Pictosonies*, *Sing-Song-Sings* and *Imageries*. The *Leporello* can capture the action and the passing of time just like a film: fluidity, movement, zoom-in and zoom-out, frame changes and entry/exit from the framed field are similar to what happens in a movie. The narration has above all a spatial value. Furthermore, every zoom-in almost always corresponds to a slowdown in time. In a nutshell, the *Leporello* represents an instrument in which the support interacts with the images depicted on it. Although the pages can be browsed separately, the unfolded *Leporello* constitutes an inseparable unit, endowed with further communicative value (Figure 3).

COMMUNICATION TOOLS: THE PICTOGRAM AND THE MAP

Warja Lavater's *Leporellos* are placed between graphics, painting, literature, and design; from the point of view of communication, they constitute a hybrid form that has not yet been fully studied. She does not consider herself an artist but rather a *Bildstellerin*, an ‘author of images’. She has always rejected the role of ‘illustrator’ of a text written by others; the task that she had set herself consists in rewriting the texts through an exclusively visual code, telling stories through visuality (Lavater, 1993).

The coding is not entrusted exclusively to the author of the illustrations: the images must be interpreted by the reader according to his own point of view, and therefore the

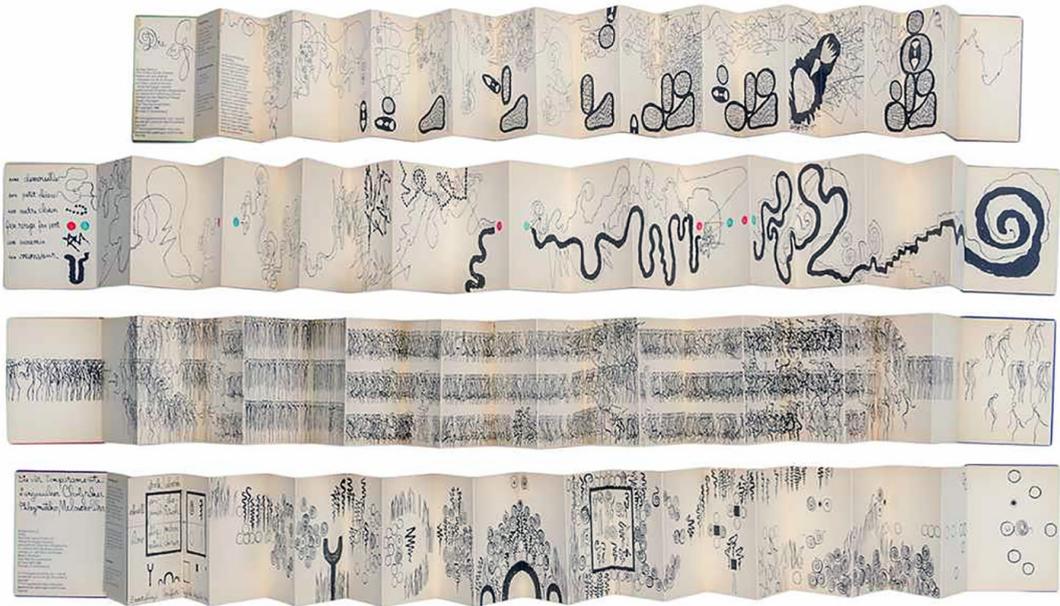


Fig. 3 Warja Lavater, *Die Grille und die Ameise* (1962), *Match* (1962), *Die Party* (1962), *La promenade en ville* (1962), litography. Retrieved June, 14, 2022 from <https://www.auction.fr/_en/lot/honegger-lavater-warja-die-grille-und-die-ameise-match-die-party-la-16479829>.

reader himself becomes a narrator who renews the orality of the story by adapting it to his own experience and sensitivity. The code is made up of elementary signs, easy to understand and that do not require special knowledge: it is a universal code that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. In 1988, Warja Lavater told Denise Escarpit: “When talking about my works, the term *abstract* is used. I absolutely reject this term. These are drawings that move, mix, separate: they are essentially concrete” [my translation from French⁵] (Escarpit, 1988, p. 50). And then:

The narrator goes back to being a poet. The imagination opens up to him and his spectators. [...] My goal is to ensure that writing becomes drawing and drawing becomes writing that must convey a message. I feel like a writer writing a book, not a painter. My writing is much freer. But it should be legible. If the result is bad, that’s a shame! If it’s good, so much the better! The main thing for me is not to illustrate, it is to tell [my translation from French⁶] (Escarpit, 1988, p. 49).

Reading, therefore, becomes a performative activity and invites the reader to find a place in the space of the story. Symbols take the place of figuration, which is completely absent. For example, *Little Red Riding Hood* is represented with a red disc wandering through a forest of green discs (the trees); she meets a black disc: the wolf (Figure 4).

Later, the wolf's size will increase significantly compared to that of the child at the time of devouring her (Figure 5). The increase in the size of the wolf corresponds to an intense moment as well as an acceleration of the pace of the story. The scene in which the hunter frees *Little Red Riding Hood* and his grandmother is equally intensely represented by a sort of disc of fire inside the wolf (Figure 6).

The point of view of the story is a zenithal view. This visualization mode places the reader outside the scene and, together with the constant need to interpret the symbols, further favours the active role compared to what would happen with a first-person view. Through this point of view, Warja Lavater also offers us the direction of the story. To the zenithal point of view, the artist associates a visual writing that is close to cartographic representation. These are real maps, on which paths, events, actions, and circumstances are present which—as already mentioned—suggest a spatial and temporal reading (Meunier, 2020; 2016). And just like in a map, the graphisms are spelled out in a legend, so that abstract images can be clearly deciphered. Lavater's cartographic writing has a lot to do with the chorematic writing that will be proposed in 1980 by Roger Brunet. The French geographer, trying to build spatial graphic models based on a structuralist approach to spaces, has devised a system of symbolic and simplified codification of geographical objects:

A choreme is an elementary structure of space which is represented by a graphic model. A model is always a simplification of reality, or more exactly, of the vision we have of this reality. This simplification is made for an operational purpose: action, prediction, or explanation (Brunet, 1980, p. 258).

Fig. 4 Warja Lavater. *Little Red Riding Hood walks in the forest; She meets the wolf.* Warja Lavater (1963). *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Maeght.

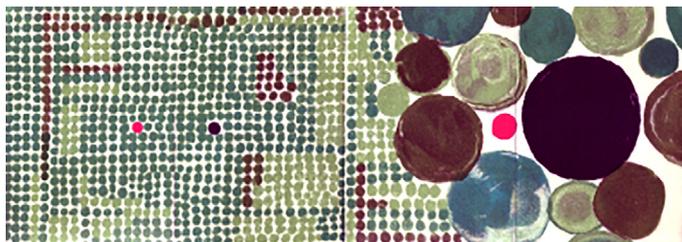


Fig. 5 Warja Lavater. *Little Red Riding Hood is in front of the wolf lying on the bed; The wolf devours Little Red Riding Hood.* Warja Lavater (1963). *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Maeght.

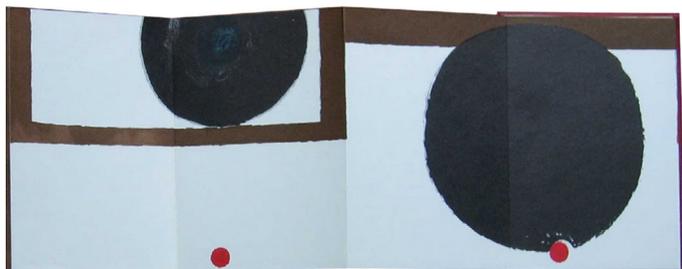


Fig. 6 Warja Lavater. *The hunter faces and kills the wolf.* Warja Lavater (1963). *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Maeght.



THE STRUCTURE OF THE NARRATIVE

Warja Lavater's graphic work is contemporary to the structuralist studies of the 1960s, according to which the narrative is analogous to a language and is endowed with a semantic structure based on three pairs of actants: subject/object, sender/receiver, and adjuvant/opponent. Each story, therefore, always maintains the same narrative scheme. Lavater constructs his 'spatial stories' precisely on these two structural elements: narrative scheme and couples of actants (Meunier, 2013). In the early seventies,

Paul Larivaille proposes a reinterpretation of the narrative scheme already studied by Vladimir Propp in Russian short stories (Larivaille, 1974). This narrative scheme—called quinary by Larivaille—consists of five phases, very similar to those of the Gustav Freytag's Pyramid theorized as early as 1863. These phases can easily be found in all the *Leporellos* made by Warja Lavater. They are:

1. Initial situation (setting, introduction of the characters);
2. Complication (event that creates imbalance, tension);
3. Action (character activities to solve the complication)⁷;
4. Resolution (definitive conclusion of the tensions);
5. Final situation (epilogue, happy ending).

As we have already said, Warja Lavater develops the space and time of history at the same time, based on the principle according to which there are four dimensions in a book: “the beginning, the end, space and time. The representation of time is related to the meaning of writing” [my translation from French⁸] (Escarpit, 1988, p. 51). The five-phase narrative scheme is always respected by Lavater and arranged on the longitudinal axis of the *Leporello*, which thus becomes the temporal axis but also the spatial axis and, therefore, confirms the space-time unity of the narrative.

The artist excludes any use of the text, forcing the reader to develop his own symbolic thought; accuracy, of course, is not a goal of this type of narrative, but rather the logic of interpretation. The story develops in a linear and objective way, without expressing any kind of judgment and without using rhetorical figures or implications. Previous knowledge of history favours the understanding of events, but it is not indispensable; on the contrary, it can also develop a creative interpretation. Reading usually takes place in three stages:

1. The general vision, which makes it possible to quickly identify the atmosphere, the context, the characters;
2. The interpretation of single events;
3. The giving of meaning to the story as a whole.

THE DEBUT AND THE LAST WORK EVOLUTION OF POETICS

Here it is not possible to analyze all the works of Lavater; we will try to briefly analyze the artist's first and last *Leporello*, to also outline the evolution of her poetics.

Wilhelm Tell is a folded single sheet lithograph printed in 1962 simultaneously by *Basilus Presse* and the *Museum of Modern Art* of New York City. The original drawing consists of a watercolor on a single sheet of Chinese paper measuring 9x193 cm, divided into 10 double pages plus legend, dedicated to the story of the Swiss hero. The legend, inserted in a pocket inside the hard cover, consists of 14 elements (Figure 7): 7 characters (Tell, Tell's son, Governor Gessler, knight, soldiers, citizens, bowing citizens), 4 objects (Gessler's hat, apple, crossbow and arrow, governor's castle, ship), 2 locations (lake waves, forest). The hero and his son are represented by blue dots; the 'opponents' (governor, knights, soldiers, fortress, boat) by dark angular shapes (rectangles and triangles). Citizens are orange and ochre dots; the crossbow and arrow are the only figurative elements. Let's see the development of the story.

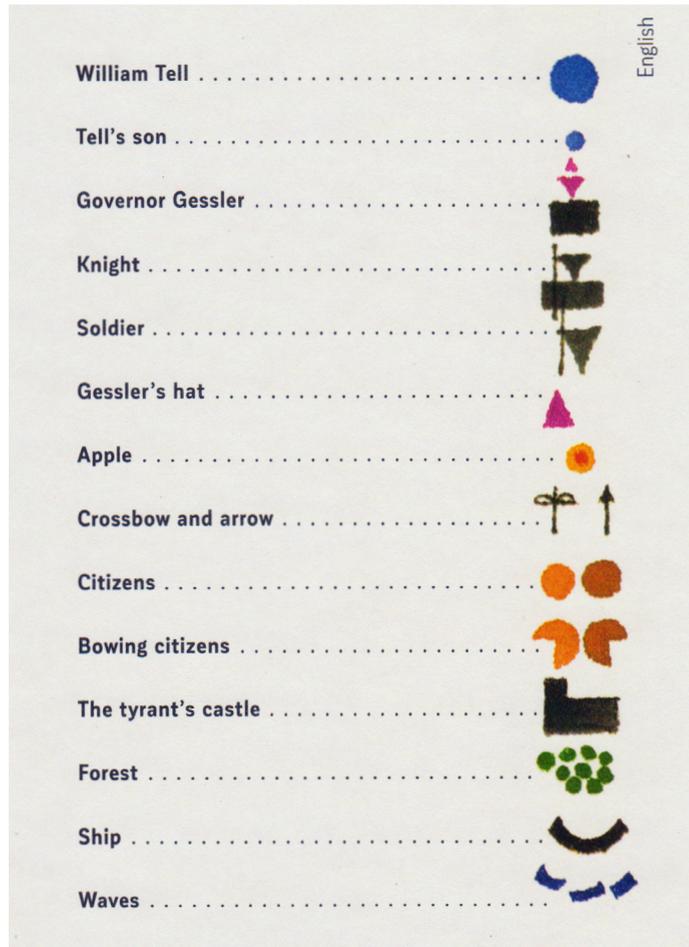
1. Pages 1, 2: Initial situation. The citizens of Altdorf, a town oppressed by imperial power, kneel in front of Governor Gessler's hat, threatened by soldiers. Tell and his son appear in the background (Figure 8);
2. Pages 3, 4: Complication 1. Tell and son refuse to kneel; Gessler arrives, escorted by knights;
3. Pages 5, 6: Action 1. In the presence of Gessler, Tell justifies his action (Figure 9);
4. Pages 7, 8: Complication 2. In exchange for his life, Gessler proposes to Tell that he should hit an apple resting on his son's head with the arrow;
5. Pages 9, 10: Action 2. Tell knocks the arrow on the crossbow in front of Gessler, the knights, the crowd, and the soldiers;

6. Pages 11, 12: Action 2a. Tell centers the apple and shows another arrow, declaring that he would use it to kill Gessler in case he fails to hit the target (Figure 10).
7. Pages 13, 14: Complication 3. Tell is arrested and taken by boat across Lake Lucerne to the *Küssnacht* prison; Gessler is also on the boat. A storm breaks out and Tell, a skilled helmsman, is freed and invited to steer the boat;
8. Pages 15, 16: Action 3. Tell leaps onto the shore and pushes the boat, now without a guide, into the waves (Figure 11);
9. Pages 17, 18: Resolution. Tell loads the crossbow, and with the second arrow kills Gessler, who is still on the boat (Figure 12);
10. Pages 19, 20: Epilogue. Tell returns to Altdorf among the cheering crowd. The soldiers rebel and destroy the fortress of Gessler, a symbol of the hated imperial power (Figure 13);

In this first work we can see many elements of Lavater's poetics, already described in the two preceding paragraphs. Each double page corresponds to a phase of the narration, which is graphically clearly separated from the previous and the next. The story develops in a linear way; there is a single space-time jump (the events on the boat) and a single split scene, which could have been condensed (action 2). In contrast, Complication 3 brings together Tell's arrest, his transfer to prison, the storm and his release.

La Belle au Bois Dormant is the last *Leporello* created by the artist, printed for *Maeght* editions 20 years after Tell. This work is also a watercolor reproduced in lithography; the dimensions are 15x351 cm, for a total of 22 double pages that include the legend and the colophon. The work is much larger than the previous one, although the story (narrative, characters, settings) is not particularly complex. The elements of the legend, which together with the colophon occupies the first four pages of the *Leporello*, are 13:7 characters (the king and queen, Belle newborn, the bad fairy, the good fairies, Belle grown up, the princes, the men

Fig. 7 Warja Lavater, *Legend*,
Warja Lavater (1962), *Wilhelm
Tell*, Basel: Basilius Presse.



and women of the castle), 3 objects (the spindle, the castle, the door) and three settings (the leafage, the roses, the centenary forest) (Figure 14). In this work there is no correspondence between the colors, shapes, and roles of the characters. Round shapes prevail; warm/cold colors do not correspond to the role of opponent/adjutant. There are no figurative elements (the spindle is represented with a cross). Belle is a pink dot that, after the intervention of the fairy godmother, is surrounded by a thick green circle and a thin pink circle (a protection that will save her life). The king and queen are identical to the citizens of the castle,

Fig. 8 Warja Lavater, *The citizens of Altdorf kneel in front of Governor Gessler's hat.* Warja Lavater (1962). *Wilhelm Tell*. Basel: Basilius Presse.

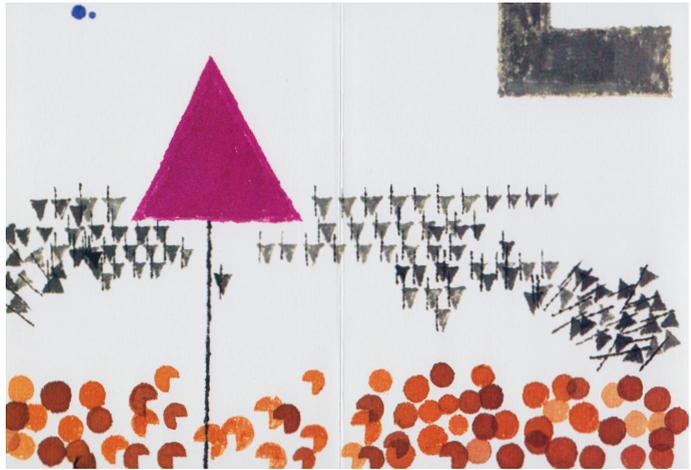


Fig. 9 Warja Lavater, *Tell and son refuse to kneel; Tell justifies his action.* Warja Lavater (1962). *Wilhelm Tell*. Basel: Basilius Presse.



Fig. 10 Warja Lavater, *Gessler proposes the challenge of the apple; Tell knocks the arrow; Tell centers the apple and shows the second arrow.* Warja Lavater (1962). *Wilhelm Tell*. Basel: Basilius Presse.



Fig. 11 Warja Lavater, *Tell is and taken by boat; Tell leaps onto the shore and pushes the boat into the waves.* Warja Lavater (1962). *Wilhelm Tell*. Basel: Basilius Presse.



Fig. 12 Warja Lavater, *Tell kills Gessler*. Warja Lavater (1962). Wilhelm Tell. Basel: Basilius Presse.



Fig. 13 Warja Lavater, *Tell returns to Altdorf and the soldiers destroy the fortress*. Warja Lavater (1962). Wilhelm Tell. Basel: Basilius Presse.



the only difference is the presence of a pink cross on the point that depicts the royals. The centenary forest is a pale green background that invades the entire space of the page and overlaps the other elements. This is the development of the story.

1. Pages 5, 6: Initial situation. The king and queen, who is pregnant, announce the imminent birth of the princess to the castellans. The bad fairy is alone in the forest (she is represented in the previous couple of pages, the same as in the colophon);

2. Pages 7, 8: Initial situation bis. The king and queen receive the seven good fairies, leaving the evil fairy out (Figure 15);
3. Pages 9, 10: Complication 1. The bad fairy breaks in and casts the curse: when the child is 18, she will be stung by a spindle and will die;
4. Pages 11, 12: Action 1. Belle is born and the fairy godmother, who cannot undo the curse, protects the child by transforming the prophecy of death into a sleep that can be interrupted by a kiss from a prince.
5. Pages 13, 14: Action 1a. The queen orders to destroy all the spindles in the castle;
6. Pages 15, 16: Interlocutory scene 1. Belle turns 18 and receives the homage of the castellans (Figure 16);
7. Pages 17, 18: Complication 2. Belle walks to the attic door while the unsuspecting parents are with the courtiers;
8. Pages 19, 20: Complication 2a. Belle enters the attic and meets the bad fairy with the spindle;
9. Pages 21, 22: Complication 2b. Belle pricks herself with the spindle and sinks into deathly sleep;
10. Pages 23, 24: Complication 2c. Everyone in the castle falls asleep, the bad fairy runs away, and roses invade the staircase leading to the attic where Belle lies (Figure 17);
11. Pages 25, 26: Interlocutory scene 2. Vegetation and roses engulf the castle; the first prince tries to get close, unsuccessfully;
12. Pages 27, 28: Interlocutory scene 3. A second prince tries to enter, without success. The vegetation is even more dense;
13. Pages 29, 30: Interlocutory scene 4. The third prince enters the scene (Figure 18);
14. Pages 31, 32: Action 2. The third prince approaches the castle, the greenery and roses open as he passes by;
15. Pages 33, 34: Action 2a. The prince climbs the stairs to the attic;
16. Pages 35, 36: Action 2b. The prince enters the attic and bows to Belle;

17. Pages 37, 38: Resolution. The prince kisses Belle and brings her back to life (Figure 19);
18. Pages 39, 40: Interlocutory scene 5. The prince breaks the cursed spindle and introduces himself to the awake royals and fairies;
19. Pages 41, 42: Epilogue. The prince marries Belle; the spindles are readmitted to the castle;
20. Pages 43, 44: Epilogue bis. The prince and Belle leave the castle and go into the forest, accompanied by the good fairies (Figure 20).

It is evident that in *La Belle au Bois Dormant* the narrative is developed differently than in *Tell*. There are five interlocutory scenes; three doubled scenes (initial situation, action 1, epilogue); a tripled scene (action 2); a fourfold scene (complication 2). All the interlocutory scenes are not strictly related to the development of the story but add elements important to the climax of the whole narrative. The homage of the castellans to Belle highlights the subjects' affection and devotion to the princess; the failed attempts of the first two princes emphasizes the difficulty of the enterprise; the entry of the third prince and the breaking of the spindle (absent in many versions of the fairy tale) have the same visual importance as the key scenes and enrich the story in an original way. Complication 2 (Belle pricks herself with the spindle) is even divided into 4 scenes. This fragmentation produces the same effect as slow motion in cinema: it dilates time, breaks down the fluidity of the action and emphasizes gestures, objects, actions, and situations that could go unnoticed, filling them with narrative pathos. The entrance of the third prince and the suspense before the final kiss recalls the narrative style of blockbuster films, but at the same time demonstrates the artist's mastery in managing the enormous expressive potential of this system of representation. The interlocutory scenes and those divided into several parts, therefore, have a very important function, break the rhythm of the story, and make it more varied through the alternation of tension and relaxation.

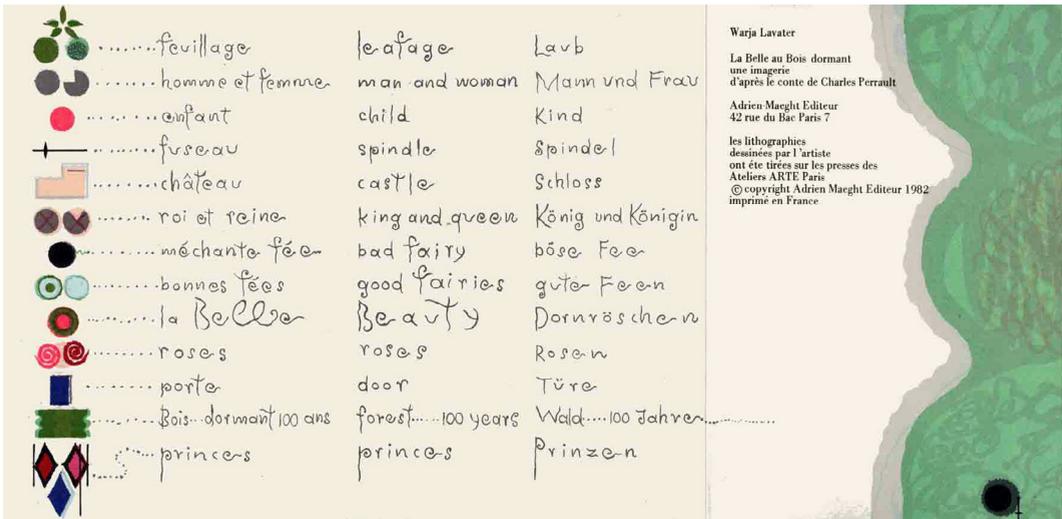


Fig. 14 Warja Lavater, *Legend and colophone*. Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur.

In this way, Warja Lavater further involves the reader's attention, who in some cases is forced to pause to decipher what is happening, in others he can allow himself a more relaxed reading as the same action is described from different points of view and, therefore, representation has a predominantly visual rather than narrative value.

Compared to *Tell*, characterized by a close and pressing narrative, here we find a much more extensive and refined style. The richness of expression allows all the virtuositities characteristic of Warja Lavater's style to be put into action: scale changes, time slowdowns and accelerations, zoom-in and zoom-out, emphasis on key scenes, demonstrating the higher level of mastery achieved by the artist in the most mature phase of her career.

PEDAGOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS

Lavater's works were often used for educational purposes. The *National Library* of France encouraged children to experiment with the expressive technique of the *Imagineris*⁹. Similarly, some professors from the University of



Fig. 15 Warja Lavater, *The royals announce the imminent birth of the princess; the royals receive the seven good fairies; leaving the evil fairy out.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (above).

Fig. 16 Warja Lavater, *The bad fairy breaks in and casts the curse; the fairy godmother protects the child; the queen orders to destroy the spindles; Belle receives the homage of the castellans.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (below).

Erfurt (Plath & Richter, 2006; 2014) have published two studies on the topic of teaching literacy and the development of creativity in children using *Blanche Neige* and *Jeannot la chance*.

Sometimes, the first approach to Lavater's works provokes irritation among adult readers. Younger children, on the other hand, almost always have positive reactions: they associate characters and actions freely and unknowingly, assign roles creatively and develop the plot of the fairy tale relying solely on the sequence of images. In the introduction to their study, Monika Plath, and Karin Richter (2014) define some practical suggestions. The goal is to enable school-age children to access complex stories. It is up to the teacher to develop ideas for development: in group work, in projects and especially in interdisciplinary lessons.

The two main elements on which to leverage –the description of the settings and the succession of events– can be organized freely, without relying on the sequence of the

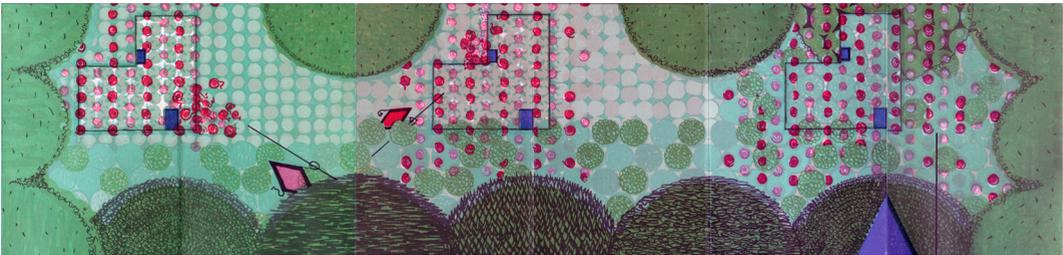


Fig. 17 Warja Lavater, *Belle walks to the attic door; Belle the bad fairy with the spindle; Belle pricks herself and sinks into deathly sleep; everyone in the castle falls asleep.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (above).

Fig. 18 Warja Lavater, *Vegetation engulf the castle; the first prince tries to get close; the second prince tries to enter; the third prince enters the scene.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (below).

story, which adults are familiar with since early childhood. For example, after discovering the first image, the child can proceed freely, leaving the content of the image unknown, or marking it with a term such as *Snow White*. The enigmatic and undefined images have a creative value because they allow the story to be developed with descriptions, references, and comments. The prerequisite, however, is that the tale is approximately familiar; this is not to be taken for granted, since pupils grow up in very different life contexts, so reading must be guided or otherwise assisted.

Practically, it is possible to delineate two activities (Duquesnoy, 2018). The first is based on discovering the meaning of the code; the second on the creation of a new code for a new story. In the first case, one could start by putting together several excerpts of one of the stories; then, let the pupils discover the illustrations, alone or in groups, letting them express what they see. In the next phase, the children can be stimulated to reconstruct the story by trial and error, providing them with clues or telling them the title of the story; then, ask to recreate the legend starting from the story itself. Or alternatively, mix images from multiple stories and ask the children to 'order' the illustrations consistently. The second activity is to recreate a new story. The work can take different

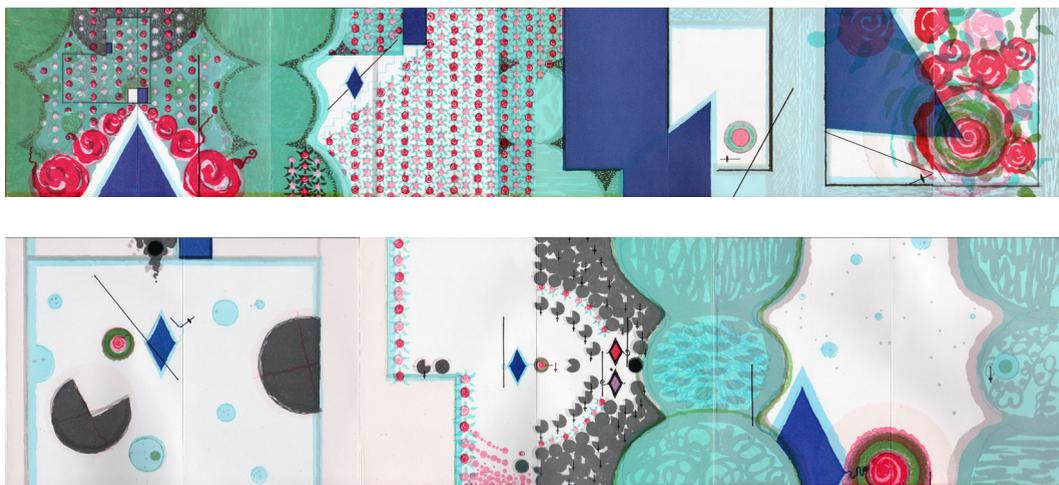


Fig. 19 Warja Lavater, *The third prince approaches the castle; the prince climbs the stairs; the prince enters the attic and bows to Belle; the prince kisses Belle and brings her back to life.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (above).

Fig. 20 Warja Lavater, *The prince breaks the cursed spindle introduces himself to the royals; the prince marries Belle; the prince and Belle leave the castle.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur.

forms: individual on a story, group on a story, the whole class in collaboration on one or more stories.

CONCLUSIONS

Sandra L. Beckett (2004) underlines the fact that Warja Lavater has expressed very contradictory positions on the public to whom her works are intended, which would suggest the 'ambivalent state of these'. In 1993, the artist stated that the "pictogram code" of his images was legible "regardless of time, nationality and age" (Lavater 1993, p. 186). However, many experts in children's literature find his works difficult to understand for an audience of children. Marion Durand and Gérard Bertrand (1975) expressed some reservations about the clarity of Lavater's 'visual code'. According to the authors, despite the rigorous definitions that the artist inserts in the legend, his images do not constitute the demonstration of a code. The concept of code, in fact, implies that the conveyed message can be decrypted exclusively by applying the rules established by it. Indeed, the developments of the narrative need, to be correctly understood, a previous knowledge: the fable to which the *Leporello* refers.

This pragmatic and experiential approach, certainly correct and acceptable, in our opinion does not question the value of Lavater's work. The Swiss artist has always intended his work not to accompany an already written story, but as a visual and completely new narrative. An 'open' narrative in which the content of the pictograms can be interpreted by the viewer according to their own point of view and regardless of the written story to which it refers.

NOTES

1 About the formative years, Lavater writes: "What we were learning was design, and so we began with the most important thing, drawing. Where do you put a sign in a rectangle? What is the standard solution to this exercise? Should the strongest element be the sign or the drawing? How can both be distinguished at a distance, yet integrated in a composition?" (Hollis, 2006, p. 114).

2 The six films are *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*, *Cendrillon*, *Le Petit Poucet*, *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, *Blanche Neige*, *Jeannot la chance*. With an average duration of about five minutes each, made digitally with the music of Pierre Charvet, the short films suggest a relationship between sound and image that leaves a lot of room for the child's imagination. These films contain all the dynamic elements of the animation (action of the characters, camera movements, sequence of scenography, entry and exit from the field of view, etc.). Using a sound synthesis software from IRCAM, Pierre Charvet has invented a sound vocabulary equivalent to the geometric 'codes' of Warja Lavater's original work, avoiding the use of melodic leitmotifs but at the same time without straying towards an exclusively timbral music that it would have emphasized the abstraction too much. The short films won the *Pixel-INA Prize* in the 'Art category', the *European Media Investment Prize*, and the mention of 'best soundtrack' at the *Imagine Film Festival* in Munich in 1995.

3 "J'étais à New York. Je me promenais dans Chinatown. J'ai rencontré des petits livres, dans un petit format que l'on tient dans la main. Ils se déplaient, comme du papier plié en accordéon, et les pages étaient blanches pour que l'on y écrive. Cela constituait une sorte de sculpture que l'on pouvait mettre debout par exemple. Dans un livre normal, tourner la page coupe l'écoulement du temps; il y a le passé et le futur. Le livre dépliant est plus linéaire: c'est l'écoulement du temps dans l'horizontal; il peut y avoir aussi le vertical vers le bas et le vertical vers le haut: voir les rouleaux japonais, que l'on peut relier aux volumina de la Rome antique. Mais quand un livre est debout, il s'éloigne de sa destination; il révèle son propre monde; il devient sculpture. Au contraire, quand on l'étale sur un mur, il y a obligation de mettre des numéros pour éviter la confusion" (Escarpit, 1988, p. 49).

4 "Un livre qu'on peut transformer en sculpture, debout, par terre, ou accrocher, déplié, au mur" (Gromer, 1991, p. 42).

5 “Quand on parle de mes albums, on parle de dessins abstraits. Je refuse absolument ce terme: ce sont des dessins qui bougent, se mêlent, se séparent de nouveau: c’est essentiellement concret” (Escarpit, 1988, p. 50).

6 “Le conteur redevient poète. L’imagination s’ouvre à lui et à ses spectateurs. [...] Mon but à moi, c’est de faire que l’écriture devienne dessin et que le dessin devienne écriture qui doit transmettre un message. Je me ressens comme un écrivain qui écrit un livre, et non comme un peintre. Mon écriture est beaucoup plus libre. Mais ça doit rester lisible. Si le résultat est laid, tant pis! S’il est beau, tant mieux! L’essentiel pour moi, ce n’est pas illustrer, c’est dire” (Escarpit, 1988, p. 49).

7 Christophe Meunier defines all the activities after the initial complication with the term ‘péripiétés’ (Meunier, 2013).

8 “Le début, la fin, l’espace et le temps. La représentation du temps est liée au sens de l’écriture” (Escarpit, 1988, p. 51).

9 See *Création graphique à la manière de Warja Lavater*. Retrieved June 7, 2022 from <<http://expositions.bnf.fr/contes/pedago/creation/index.htm>>.

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