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on image, imagery
and imagination

Wordless Images

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edited by
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EDITORIAL

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The well-known adage that a picture communicates more than a thousand words is deeply rooted in history. When in the *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo da Vinci stages a heated dispute between a poet and a painter, the discussion reaches its epilogue with the statement of the absolute supremacy of the latter's art over the former's:

> Since we have concluded poetry to be in the highest degree of understanding to the blind and that painting does the same to the deaf, we will say as much more worth painting than poetry, as painting serves a better and nobler sense than poetry, which nobility is proved to be triple to the nobility of three other senses; for it is elected to be instead wanting to lose hearing and smelling and touch, than the sense of seeing; **>**

for he who loses seeing, loses the sight and beauty of the universe, and remains in the likeness of one who is shut up in life in burial, in which he has motion and life. [our translation from Italian] (Da Vinci, XVI AC/1947)

This epilogue is the definitive seal to a story built in a sequence of stages and progressively layered over time, which it seems significant to retrace in its salient moments. The oculocentric approach that characterizes Western thought has a very ancient tradition rooted in Greek culture, in which the same word 'idea' draws its semantic derivation from the verb ὁράω (to see). Vision becomes a dominant sense, transcending the boundaries of tangibility and taking on a global significance that affects thought and shapes the solid cultural matrix in which humanity is still immersed. According to Italo Calvino (1983/2002), the gradual rooting of the vision prevailing over the other senses can also be traced back to the cultural revolution induced by the printing press, which determines the reassuring habit of 'finding' a world in the two-dimensionality of the book page, inevitably flattening other sensory perceptions. Although this approach has also been questioned on several occasions by philosophical critics, as reconstructed by Juhani Pallasmaa (2007, pp. 28-31) through the listing of theoretical positions ranging from Descartes to Nietzsche, from Scheler to Merleau-Ponty, there is no doubt that the predominantly visual substance that in contemporary society permeates man's relationship with the world determines his nature as homo videns (Sartori, 1997).

The image has always accompanied the history of civilization by placing itself as a fundamental support of the ability

to learn and remember. The pairing of the image with the word, if not the radical replacement of the latter, constitutes the basis of learning languages (both visual and verbal). From Comenius to *Pokémon* (Farnè, 2019), images are irreplaceable in educational processes, as witnessed by a long-standing practice and validated by the studies of educational iconology, which are concerned with investigating and interpreting the meanings of figurative works beyond their artistic value, analyzing their role and the languages employed in learning contexts. These range from cave paintings, which take the form of images supporting oral narration as part of collective rituals addressed to entire social groups by taking on the value of "signs produced to convey information" [our translation from Italian] (Barbieri, 2011, p. 15), to the derivation of pictogrammatic writing from real-world objects, which become conventional signs capable of communicating and transferring knowledge (Hohenegger, 2006), all the way to the tales in images that mark artistic-iconographic production throughout the Middle Ages (Giallongo, 1995). The typology of the *Biblia Pauperum* is an illuminating example of this: the designation precisely identifies a volume, numerous variants of which made by xylographic reproduction circulated in Europe from the 13th century onward, entirely illustrated with the stories of Christ and accompanied by short texts correlating the events to the Old Testament. This type of narrative in images decisively shapes the artistic production of the 14th and 15th centuries precisely because of its communicative, educational and popularizing power, to the point that, by extension, the cycles of frescoes reproducing biblical stories that decorate the

walls of churches are called the same (think of Giotto's work, among others): a powerful tool for catechizing social strata lacking the cultural means to learn from texts or through educational paths reserved for the wealthy. In this sphere, the boundary between artistic and functional images is fuzzy: illustration becomes a graphic language capable of conveying precise contents and messages (Cicalò & Trizio, 2020). Later on, the advancement of printing techniques facilitates the production and circulation of images. That enables the widespread dissemination of knowledge within a society that gradually becomes more familiar with iconographic messages and the variety of styles and languages adopted in different contexts. The increasing use of illustration as a mode of transmission of scientific knowledge also leads to a broadening of the public interest in images, which draws information and communicates through them. This growing success of pictures functional to the communication of content finds fertile ground in properly educational circles: the *Orbis sensualium pictus*, which can be called the first illustrated subsidiary, dates back to the mid-17th century (Comenius, 1658) and is the progenitor of literature intended for schools in the context of which the adoption of illustrated books and dictionaries becomes systematic, making up a rich lexicography whose fortunes have never run out. In the vein of the taxonomic slant inaugurated in the Age of Enlightenment with Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*, illustrated vocabularies aimed at children and young people (but also at adults needing to learn a language, as exemplified by Sanabria, 1988) and encyclopedias enriched with pictures such as *Il tesoro del ragazzo italiano* (1939)

by Vincenzo Errante and Fernando Palazzi are next. In these editorial products, if the image still assumes an ancillary role concerning the text, the balance between the two components shifts sharply in favour of the images in the illustrated materials employed for practice in school learning, in which the drawing of the parts of the concrete world is placed side by side with the corresponding word: here the image is the protagonist in conveying the message, the text accompanies it preparing the child for the learning of verbal language, which is always and in any case acquired through the visual recognition of the 'word set'. The model is that of the spelling book, a catalogue of illustrations that, combined with the word that identifies the represented object and its initial letter, enables learning language while identifying, recognizing and naming the 'things' of the tangible world.

The juxtaposition of text and image completely disappears in silent books intended for children (Terrusi, 2017), which configure themselves as an autonomous sphere that has seen significant recent development. In this context, the image-word relationship continually redefines itself, and the desired universality of graphic language seems to be realized. These are silent images that, just like cave paintings, become 'animated' by the narrator's voice, stimulating the ability to construct a verbal narrative leaning on the figured tale. Many play-educational products share this same modality: from traditional illustrated games, such as *Gioco dell'Oca* [Game of the Goose] and its many variants, to figurines, a vehicle for learning knowledge through collecting and constructing visual repertoires (Farnè, 2019); from puzzles, in which the goal is the recomposition of an

image without words, to board games exclusively image-based and in this sense wordless (such as *Dixit, Imagine* or many others), that challenge the user by calling to the construction of a narrative based on the selected iconographic repertoire.

In these contexts, wordless images assume the role of a reflective tool, in which the interpretation of meanings is entrusted to the viewer, leaving open a multitude of reading possibilities, as in the case of the 'unreadable books' conceived in the 1940s by Bruno Munari, whose work also assumes reference value for the exploration of different modes of verbal-visual interaction such as the *Supplemento al dizionario italiano* [Supplement to the Italian Dictionary] (1963). In these examples, the viewer becomes an active subject in decoding and interpretation, exploring and adding a layer of meaning to the narrative.

In light of the above, the dichotomous 'artistic image' versus 'functional image' model presents a classificatory nature that often appears legitimate to overcome. Although the autonomous character of art images remains universally agreed upon, it constitutes part of their value and does not exhaust their meaning or role. One need only think of the complex relationship of mutual referentiality between word and image that becomes the hallmark of René Magritte's work (1929) and how the reading of that work triggers actions of verbal-visual interchange by calling into question 'things' as well (Castelli, 2017). The vast field of 'images that are not art' (Elkins, 2009) thus opens up a territory of exploration in which the collaborative or conversely exclusive role that different communicative systems can assume needs a proper evaluation.

The seemingly sharp distinction between words and images entails the necessity of taking sides in favour of one or another language (Belardi & Menchetelli, 2006), such that there are areas of expression and communication that remain reserved for one or the other coding system. The roles of images on the theoretical and scientific level have taken shape by the succession of different positions that, during the last decades, have progressively oriented visual studies by delineating an articulated genealogy of them (Luigini, 2020): from the 'linguistic turn' (Rorty, 1967) to the 'pictorial turn' (Mitchell, 1992) and the 'iconic turn' (Boehm, 1994), to the definition of "pan-linguistic intrusiveness" (Anceschi, 1992) and the historical courses and recourses of iconoclastic phenomena (Pinotti & Somaini, 2016, pp. 240-243). At the same time, the roles of images on the operational-functional level and their uses have also taken shape by attempts at taxonomical structuring, among which the most effective remains the river diagram proposed by Manfredo Massironi and emblematically introduced by the definition of "'drawing' and 'graphic communication' [as] any set of marks produced with any suitable instrument for the purpose of communication without words" (Massironi, 2002, p. 1). A diagram that, even in its actualized version in light of the contemporary scenario (Cicalò, 2020), retains its unquestionable validity. The many contexts in which images dispense with words are relatively heterogeneous; they all share an expressive capacity of the image, manifested through visual representations or interpretations endowed with varying degrees of immediacy or complexity, which allow —and simultaneously require— reflective reading.

Often the reasons for using predominantly or exclusively visual language can be traced back to the need to overcome linguistic and communicative limitations. An emblematic example is the development of the ISOTYPE system by Otto Neurath, Marie Reidemeister and Gerd Arntz in the context of the Gesellschafts-und Wirtschaftsmuseum (GeWiMu) in Vienna (Neurath, 1936): here, the goal of communicating in a nonexpert context is achieved through a visual language based on the interaction between pictograms and accompanied by minimal textual labels; a language to which current pictographic systems are deeply indebted (Menchetelli, 2013; Luigini & Moretti, 2018). A similar purpose can be found once again in those areas of public communication about social and health issues, where visual language lends itself to overcoming incommunicability due to the lack of shared idiom by facilitating the relationship between doctor and patient or acting as an effective mediator between educator and learner in the presence of learning or language expression deficits, as occurs in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Menchetelli, 2022).

In other situations, the deliberate use of wordless images links to an intent of communication immediacy or the performance of an informational task that minimizes verbal-visual interaction or even succeeds in freeing itself completely from verbal language. Many infographics adhere to this criterion, sometimes because of the need for extreme conciseness and economy of signs, sometimes because of a choice of communicative-narrative register, and sometimes because they entrust the reader with interpretation based on the comparison between configurations or graphic elements. Just in the

same way that many puzzles rebuses (historical example of synergy between images and words where the latter play a role of marginal complementarity) take shape in the absence of letters, and the solution relies on the visual comparison between two or more vignettes (Miola, 2020). In this context are examples that almost take on the value of lifestyle manuals, compendia for images that teach how to cook (Ferrara, 2019), how to perform daily tasks (Holmes, 2005), how to read epochal changes (Kolodny, 2015) or how to explore the culture and folk wisdom (Civaschi & Milesi, 2012, 2014; Civaschi, 2015).

At other times, finally, wordless images are necessary because showing is often more effective than verbally describing or because, as in assembly instructions, the operations to carry on depend on a visual relationship rather than a conceptual one.

Issue 7 of *IMG journal* collects case histories, critical studies, and iconographic and semiotic investigations that show the multiple communicative, expressive and reflective possibilities that certain types of images possess in the absence of words. The graphic and visual languages explored by the authors show a jagged landscape capable of weaving relationships between only seemingly distant places of exploration. With the usual plurality of looks, the issue presents some points of view according to which to analyze the alternative relationship between image and word when the latter becomes subordinate or disappears altogether.

The contributions, which present both general analyses and specific case studies, ideally identify three main areas of investigation: architectural language, graphic language and

especially the languages used in an elaboration located in the terrain that is always in the balance between image and word, namely the picture book.

Referring to architectural language, Giulia Bertola shows how the three-dimensional visuality of architecture is representable through specific tools such as *maquette* and photography, demonstrating the privileged relationship these languages establish with plastic art. Fabio Colonnese investigates the conflict between images and captions, that is, between visual and verbal texts, in the elaboration of architects' design process. Maria Pompeiana Iarossi, Giacomo Gramegna and Cecilia Santacroce recount a case study emblematic of a much broader communicative practice, namely the catechizing emphasis of figurative art toward illiterate believers who need the narration of theological themes through a 'universal' and natural language such as the graphic and visual. Alessandra Palma philologically investigates the intimate yet universal relationship between an architect and the places he represents through drawing or photography, in which it is possible to show and deepen elements that words only describe with much difficulty. Manuela Piscitelli shows the importance of graphic and visual heritages digitization, investigating the case of the archives of 19th-century historical theatres, both in terms of set designs and in communication through the visual documentation of scenes and in advertising posters. Finally, Francesca Sisci archaeologically traces the values of Robert Venturi's imagery, from the beginnings of his intense essayistic activity to some design masterpieces, investigating the role of the image in the architect's creative process.

Referring to the field of graphic language, Letizia Bollini reflects on the use of icons and the dichotomy of the concepts of mimesis and realism, in visual communication and especially in the digital communication ecosystem. Gianluca Camillini, Marcello Barison and Roberto Gigliotti organize a critical analysis on how images interact with each other to construct their own visual language. Maria Grazia Proli presents an experimental research project in which musical and theatrical video performances foster intercultural dialogue between peoples, aimed at validating community-building processes based on the development of creativity. Michael Renner investigates the avant la lettre languages of inkblots in both psychological and communicative contexts. Michela Rossi and Greta Milino investigate the possibilities of visual communication, starting from the field of advertising, through a taxonomic analysis of visual transpositions of rhetorical figures.

Referring to the specific field of picture books, Enrico Cicalò presents reflections on the relationship between images and words in authorial's picture books, investigating this relationship in a dual register that reads the contemporary from a historical perspective. Daniele Colistra's contribution leads us to the imaginative and pictographic world of Warja Lavater, who told stories using only graphic signs between the 1960s and the early 1980s. Giulia Mirandola reports on an educational experience developed in Berlin in which intercultural studies, publishing projects from the 1970s, educational use of silent books and inclusion for visually impaired individuals are intertwined. Paola Cortiana and Alberto Ostini offer an explication of Sophie Borrows' latest work: a picture book that deals with themes that

play a crucial role for adolescents but not only: loneliness, incommunicability, and the desire to meet others. Finally, Valentina Valecchi proposes a comparative reading between author publishing proposals in the second half of the 20th century and the current catalogue of children's publishing. Through the common thread that unites the contributions that compose it in a choral vision, issue 7 of *IMG journal* returns an insight into the functions of wordless images and the uses to which they are currently put and offers itself as a tool for a more conscious reading of their role in the transmission of content and more generally in contemporary visual culture.

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ARCHITECTURAL MODEL POINT OF VIEW
MINIATURE
AND
ITS REPRESENTATION
BEYOND WORDS

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With this article, the author intends to reflect on the role of the plastic model and its representation through the use of photography and images as a means of narrating the architectural project, arguing that they are very often more effective than words.

This reflection stems from the contemporary debate on the role of the model in the era of digitisation and its tendency to become an increasingly autonomous object. Moreover, with the progressive spread of digital technologies and the ease of access to software and devices for producing, storing, manipulating, transmitting and sharing images, the number of images in circulation has increased dramatically (Pinotti, 2016).

The expressive capacity of the model is manifested not only through its materiality but also through two-dimensional visual representations, which contribute to further reflexive reading of the project. In this context, we intend to present a practical case concerning the creation of two-scale *maquettes* and the production of photographic images of preferential views of the model aimed at the dissemination of the project.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, architects have used maquettes as a tool to verify the design process by visualizing formal, functional, or structural hypotheses and to present the project to the public and clients, executors, and manufacturers (Maldonado, 2015).

Today, however, their task is not only limited to the visual anticipation of a design proposal but seems to become an autonomous element itself, the result of an internal logic capable of generating creative thought flows that move between architectural design and artistic investigation (Daguerre, 2020).

Several examples can be identified in this area of formal experimentation: the studio models of Herzog & de Meuron, Peter Zumthor, Peter Märkli and Angela Deuber, with different declinations and material expressions. They tend to become media narrative devices of the studio work illustrated in international exhibitions and publications.

Models have a specific relationship with the body. There is an 'object' means that they can be held and manipulated without necessarily requiring explanations in words. We, humans, are, as Hejduk noted, much larger than the model: "we walk around it, we hold it in our hands" (Hejduk et al., 1989, p. 69).

Its compactness gives the object a sense of reality: the way light hits a surface, the parallax effects of a moving viewpoint, can be simulated and perceived more quickly and effectively with a physical model. The miniaturisation and lack of detail help trigger a process of free association in the observer.

Models are not just an end product of a design process. They are a tool through which future perceptions and aspects are projected.

The expressive capacity of the model is also manifested, not only through its materiality, but also through two-dimensional visual representations, such as photographic images or graphic reworkings in general, which contribute to the observer's reflective reading of the design. Taking photographs of the model means, for example, looking for a final image that somehow encapsulates the concept of the building.

Models, photographs of models, are a way of getting closer and closer to an image that is already in our minds, it is about articulating all the qualities of that image.

Caruso St John argues

in a competition one can try to communicate the concept and the atmosphere of a project in one or two such images. I would say that the preoccupation in the office is not the production of models, but of finding the image of a project (Teerds et al., 2011, p. 131).

In this context, the author intends to present a practical case relating to the creation of two scale maquettes for the *Lishui Exhibition Centre*, presenting not only the plastic models but also their associated graphic contents and photographic images. All this is characterised by a precise narrative and communicative register aimed at the dissemination of the project.

The design phase of the models involved the definition of a framework of requirements within which the following were established: the function of the model, the choice of content to be displayed, the characteristics of the location, the type of audience and the possible need to anchor immersive technologies (AR and VR). The plastic model can thus become a 'narrative' artefact to which information about the architectural artefact can be anchored, thus generating different levels of interactivity and immersivity (Meschini et al., 2016).

EXHIBITING ARCHITECTURE: THE PLASTIC MODEL
AND ITS IMAGE. THE STATE OF THE ART

After a long history culminating in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the architectural model suffered a decline in the 19th century mainly due to changes in representational cultures and then a subsequent revival during the 20th century, becoming a tool for design education and practice. This revival also coincided with the increasing role of photography in the symbolic construction of modern architecture by aligning it with mass media culture.

In fact, the model has hardly ever appeared in isolation. It has often been reconfigured by procedures of visual reproduction. A significant example is certainly Mies van der Rohe's design for the glass skyscraper in Berlin (1922) (Figure 1). The dissemination of these few images in the press elevated the design of the glass skyscraper to image status and made it an icon of architectural modernism (Deriu, 2016).

Today, many models circulate outside the studios through the filter of photographic images and graphic re-elaborations.

These models are, through the photographic medium, decontextualised and isolated from physical and realistic ele-

Fig. 1 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Glass Skyscraper project (View of lost model), Berlin, 1922. Retrieved September, 2022 from <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/82759>.

ments, resulting in floating and weightlessness. The resulting images are, like the models, in tension between the real and the abstract, they have a documentary value as a transcription of reality, but at the same time, the image of reality is flattened, cropped, resized, rendered in false colours and digitally manipulated (Allen, 2020). Lighting, point of view and background are controlled, thus creating a narrative within the narrative.

Significant and illustrative examples of this approach emerge from the Nemestudio studio's plastic models. The projects are presented on the website through photographs of monochrome plastic models superimposed on graphic re-

Fig. 2 Nemestudio, Manual of Instruction, 2019. Retrieved September, 2022 from <http://nemestudio.com/projects/manual-of-instructions>.

Fig. 3 MOS Architects, House
Parts Collected. Retrieved
September, 2022 from <https://
www.mos.nyc/>.
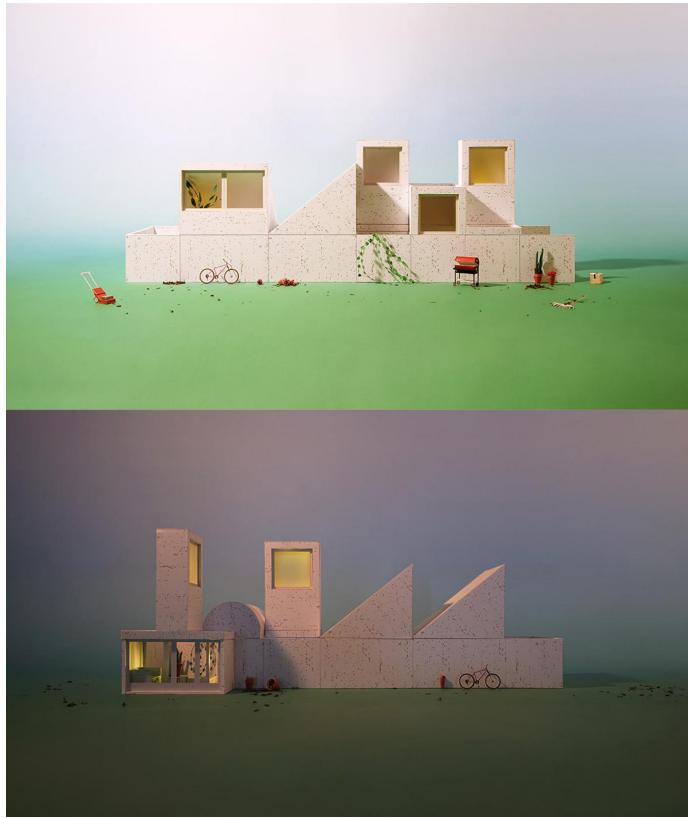
elaborations. The latter, containing renderings of the models
superimposed on digital reworkings, is intended to establish a
dialogue between large-scale environmental imagery and the
everyday life of architecture and construction. These images
become exhibition spaces, places where the making, assem-
bling and unmaking of architecture is discussed, both as rep-
resentation and performance (Nemestudio, 2020) (Figure 2).

   A second interesting example are the projects of the New
York studio MOS Architects. The architect and co-founder of
the firm, Michael Meredith, argues that model photography
has become more important today than the model itself. Ac-
cording to Meredith, whereas in the past the maquette was
used by the studio to work on ideas, now it is used to create
images. The model has increasingly become a kind of set de-

sign, a collection of objects aimed at creating images, special effects, and short videos. These operations over time have become more and more technically demanding, requiring greater precision to achieve a kind of abstract or surreal realism (Meredith, 2020) (Figure 3).

An example that fits into the sphere of augmented reality applications and deals with the subject of image-real model superimposition is the model of the Apple Park in Cupertino, in the heart of Silicon Valley. Photorealistic renderings can be superimposed on the neutral-coloured model using *Apple* tools, thus seeing a virtual version of the campus. They can change the time of day to see how the huge glass structures look when hit by the morning sun. They can also touch any building to get a small view of the interior and see how solar energy is collected by cells on the roofs of the buildings and how the air moves through them (Cupertino Apple Park, 2017) (Figure 4).

MODELS FOR SHANSHUI CITY. THE CASE STUDY

The aim here is to show a practical case concerning the creation of two static scale models made using Digital Fabrication technologies and the associated photographic images and graphic processing.

The activity of creating the models started after the Politecnico di Torino won the third prize in the *Future Shanshui City - Dwellings in Lishui Mountains International Urban Design Competition* in October 2020. The project was developed by China Room's research group (DAD and DIST) and DAD's Institute of Mountain Architecture. Following the outcome of the competition, the ModLabArch laboratory, of which the author of this contribution is a research fellow, produced two 1:200 scale models of two buildings representative of the project: a logistics hub and a residential building. The first is a circular logistic hub, located at the intersection of the air and road transport system crossing a valley, the second is a residential building grafted onto the mountain and with different levels of roads, low and high traffic roads and trains within it with the overlapping of public and private functions (Figure 5).

The production of the models and graphic content was designed both for a real exhibition context, the *Lishui Exhibition Centre*, and for the dissemination of the projects through digital platforms and publicity activities. Therefore, it was necessary to consider aspects related to the heterogeneity of the public, trying to overcome linguistic limitations as much as possible and favouring a communicative immediacy completely free from verbal language.

The work involved the following workflow: the definition of the aesthetic and dimensional characteristics, the choice of materials and printing techniques for the realization of the models; the three-dimensional digital modelling of the plastic models on a 1:200 scale and rendering; the post-production of renderings and graphic elaborations starting from the 3D models; the photo shooting of the models and post-production; video editing and production of a stop motion video; AR simu-

Fig.5 Prosperous Lishui logistic hub and residential building. South China University of Technology: School of Architecture and Politecnico di Torino, China Room and Institute of Mountain Architecture, *Future Shanshui City - Dwelling in Lishui Mountains International Urban Design Competition*, 2020.
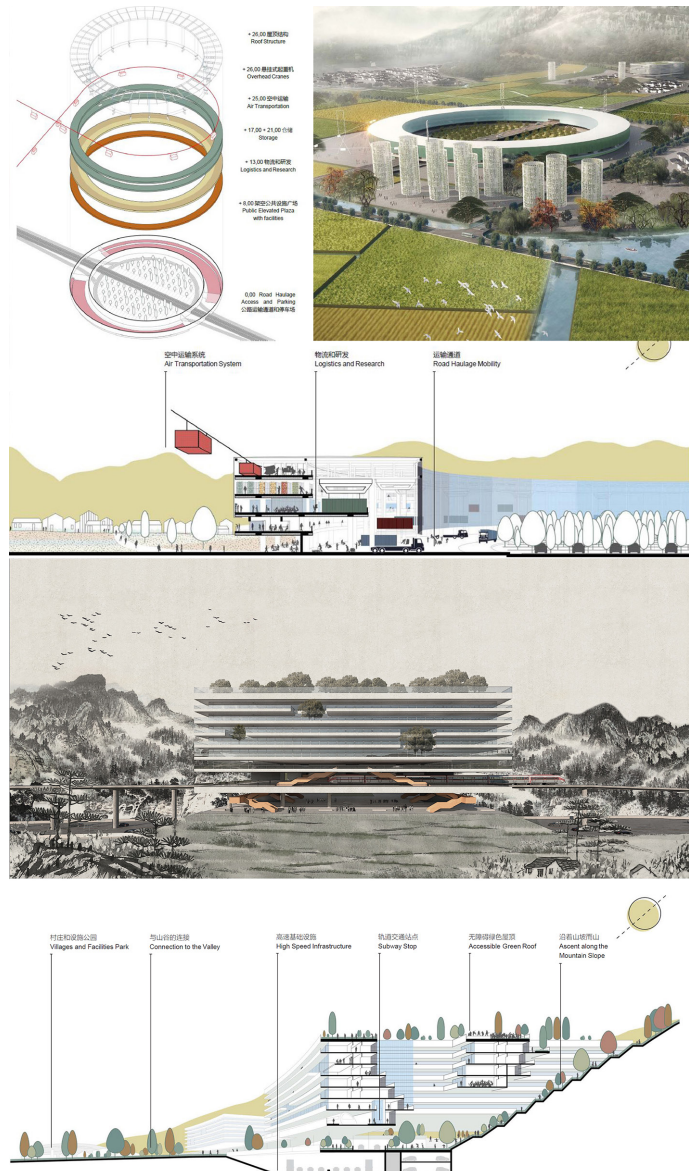
lations using *Vuforia®* and *Unity®* software with superimposition tests between the digital model and the real model.

In particular, given the absence of any particular design detail, it was decided to create conceptual models, diversifying

materials and colours according to the different functions per-
formed within the buildings in order to emphasise and high-
light the formal and distributive aspects. In particular, grey
cardboard was used for the context, transparent and opaque
Plexiglas for the distributive elements, and white PLA for the
structural elements, processed by means of a 3D printer and
laser cutting machine. The use of digital fabrication tech-
niques presupposes the design and creation of preparatory
three-dimensional digital models for the printing and cutting
of the various pieces (Figure 6). The digital model makes it pos-
sible to quantify the various parts by organizing them within
a single file and counting time, costs and materials. From the
digital model, a series of images, were subsequently derived
that were useful for the dissemination of the designs on the
web and publishing platforms. These images, when combined
with the photographs of the model, allow additional infor-

Fig. 6 Bertola, G., *The 3D model:
example of organization and
numbering of some pieces of the
model and rendering images*, 2021.
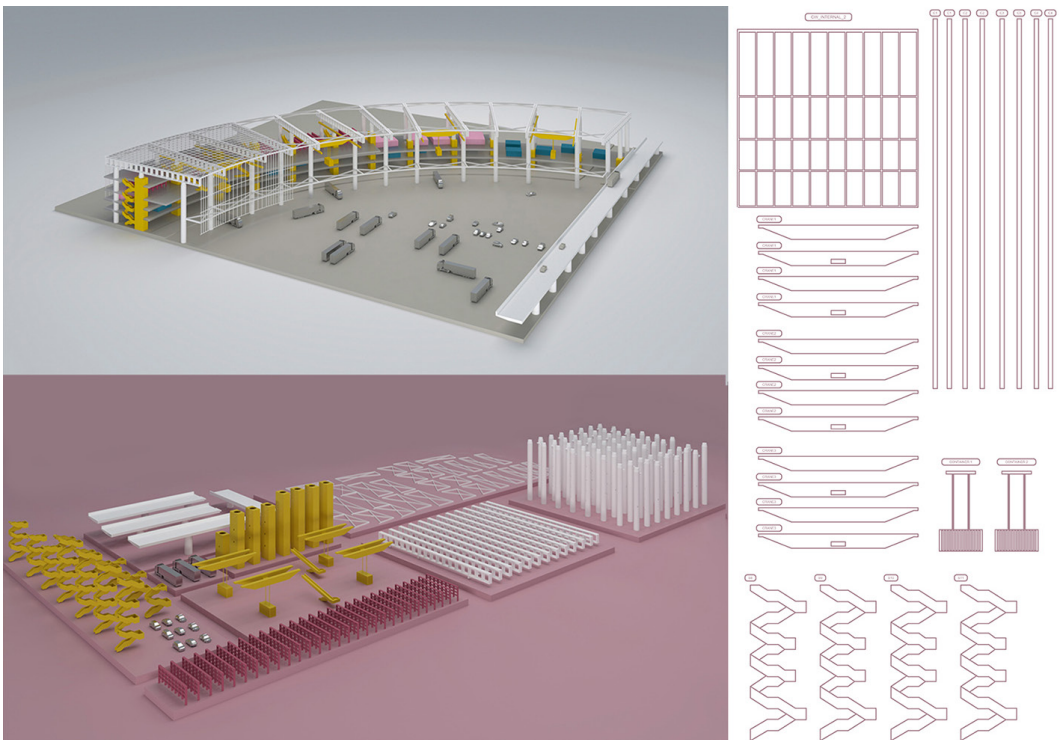
Fig. 7 Bertola, G., Pupi, E., Awada, A. *Production and assembly of the models*. 2022. Merlo, P., *Photographs with a black background*, 2022. Bertola, G., *Photographs with a white background*, 2022.
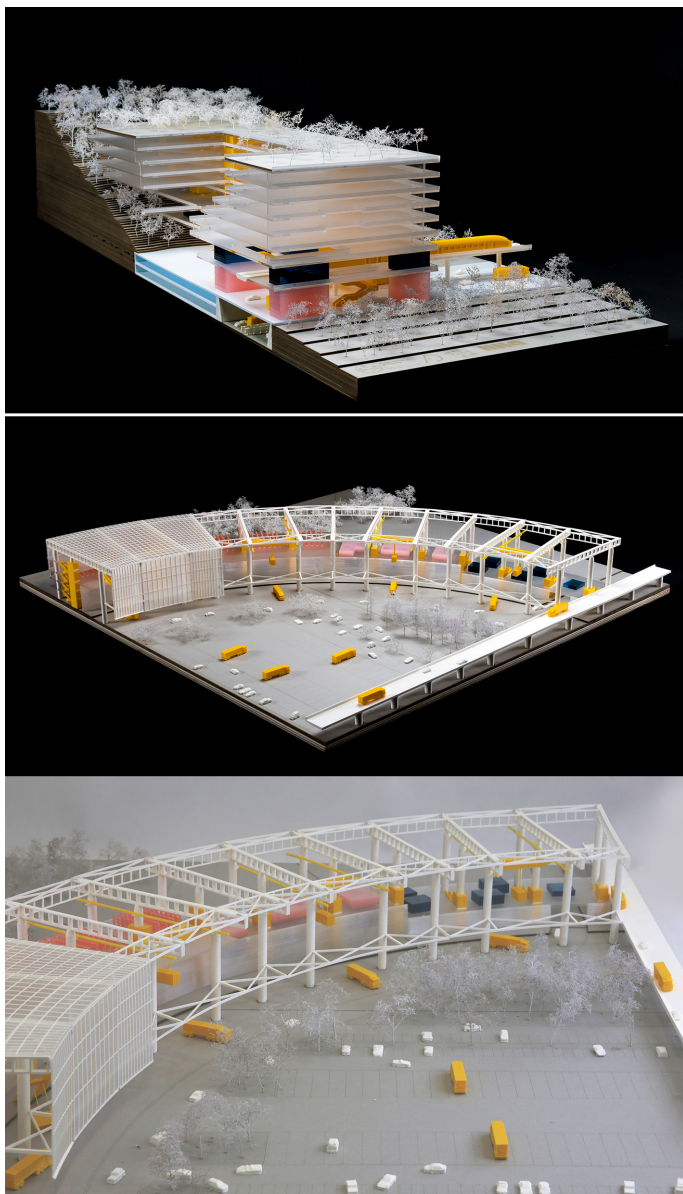
mation to be conveyed, thus broadening the accessibility of knowledge of the architectural project.

Once the models were assembled, several series of photographs were then taken (Figure 7). In particular, the photo

shooting project involved the choice of framing, lenses, background colour and type of lighting. In particular, axonometric views were favoured, considered more objective and suitable for understanding the model in its entirety, over perspective views, considered more subjective. Indeed, the choice of a point of view tends to focus more on the composition of the image and less on the architectural work; proportions are distorted and tectonic ideas tend to be lost. Two series of photographs were taken, the first, subsequently discarded with a white background to give a more narrative and surreal aspect, and the second with a black background to make the white of the structures stand out against the background. During the assembly of the models, a series of consequential photos were also taken, to give space not only to the design aspects of the buildings but also to the design aspects of the real models. subsequently edited into a stop-motion video (Figure 8).

Finally, the experience of AR has shown how it can be a very effective means of conveying additional information about architectural projects when placed alongside the real model. Indeed, it is possible to create different types of static or dynamic content in which images, videos, design drawings are linked to the real model through a system based on image recognition (Piga et al., 2017).

Users can access the content through downloadable applications or connect directly to a website dedicated to the project, accessible through devices such as phones or tablets.

Fig. 8 Bertola, G., Pupi, E., Awada, *Frame of the stop-motion video of the Logistic Hub*, 2022.
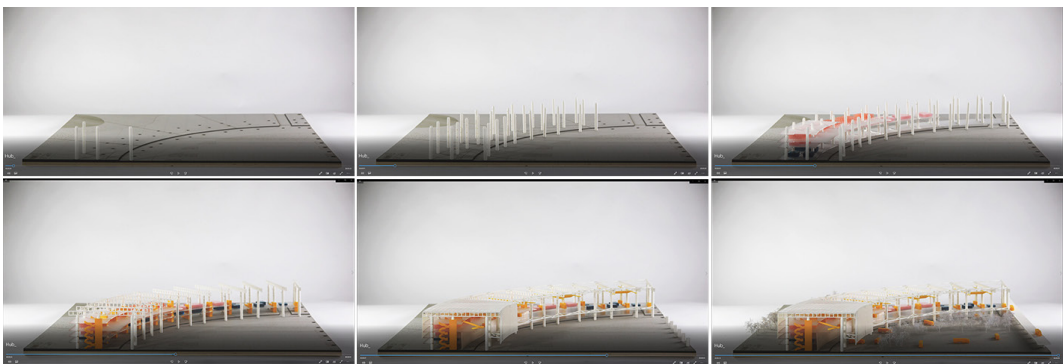
Fig. 9 Bertola, G., *The Augmented Reality Project. Model Target creations on Vuforia® and the project on the Unity® platform (the recognition of the model target following the overlapping of the real model and the appearance of the Child object in AR)*, 2022.

In this case, it was decided to create static three-dimensional content to be displayed dynamically directly on the real model. With regard to the choice of tracking tools, the following applications were used: *Unity®*, a cross-platform graphics engine and *Vuforia Engine®*, a software development kit for augmented reality for the realisation of the Model Target (Bertola et al., 2022) (Figure 9).

WORDLESS MINIATURE. THE REAL MODEL BETWEEN DIGITAL AND ANALOGUE SPACE.

The subject of the plastic model and its representation today opens up many questions that often find contradictory answers. Two of these are the role of the plastic model in the age of digitization and the trend towards the autonomy of the model capable of conveying information without the aid of words.

Brian Massumi's 'On the Superiority of the Analog' argues that analogy is the system that enables the digital, the analog is the primary and the digital is the secondary. In contrast, the philosopher Alexander Galloway argues that they are equivalent and inextricable. Today, we work in an intermediate space, consisting of both digital and analog, and perhaps we can place all practices. The other topic of discussion is the question of the autonomy of the model. A concept that has its basis in the exhibition curated by Peter Eisenman *Idea as Model* in 1976; this exhibition presented numerous models of the American

architectural avant-garde of the time at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York. The aim was to promote the architectural model not only as a tool for communicating ideas to clients in miniature form but by elevating it to a work of art in its own right. But can the architectural model and its representation be considered works of art? In this regard, the position of Christian Hubert is interesting. In his 1981 publication about the exhibition, he stated that this autonomy was impossible, given its univocal relationship to the project proposal it was meant to represent (Morris, 2021).

It is therefore important to consider the model, not as a work in itself, but as a tool capable of communicative immediacy and of performing an informative task, free from verbal language. This work has shown how these aspects are not only present in the actual model but also in the representation of the model itself. The viewer's attention is focused on certain elements through the choice of framing, colours, materials and graphic techniques. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the collaborative role between the two communication systems as this could lead to the creation of new digital and analogue spaces giving the model new ways of visualization and further influencing the critical reading of the project and the stimulation of the viewer's imagination (Gulinello et al., 2019).

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FROM ALEPH TO EMOJI

SEMI-SERIOUS CRITIQUE OF ICONS' AFFORDANCE IN THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM DESIGN

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
The paper proposes a critical reflection on the use of icons – silent images – capable of communicating functionality, interactions and emotions, within digital communication ecosystems with particular reference to the mimesis/realism dichotomy and the concept of affordance as criteria for designing and decoding the visual message.

AT FIRST, IT WAS AN (H)O(A)X

One evening, along the shores of the Nile, in a place that seemed made for romantic rendezvous, Ramesses decided to write a papyrus to communicate his passion to a girl he had glimpsed, "cursing the Egyptians' strange way of writing, which obliged him, not very strong in drawing, to express himself by means of puppets.

Fig. 1a-1b-1c Achille Festa Campanile, Lettera d'amore, 1931. Retrieved July, 2022 from <https://docplayer.it/182863948-La-lettera-di-ramesse-da-in-campagna-e-un-altra-cosa-1931-di-achille-campanile.html>

Sweet maiden...	from the first moment I saw you...	my thoughts fly to you...	If you are not insensitive to my darts of love...	Find you in seven months...	there, where the sacred Nile makes an elbow...	and precisely near the temple of Anubis...	so that I may express to you the senses of a respectful admiration
(And he drew a maiden at the very least trying to give her as sweet an air as possible, as gentle as possible)	(He tried to draw an open and passionate eye)	(How to express this poetic concept? Here: he drew a bird on the papyrus)	(And he drew a shot arrow)	(Seven small moons aligned on the papyrus)	(This was very easy: the lover drew a zig-zagging stream)	(This was also quite easy, the image of the god with the body of a man and the head of a dog is known to all)	(He drew himself kneeling)

'Believe me, with perfect observance, etcetera, etcetera'. [...] Shortly afterwards, the suave daughter of Psammetico deciphered the not-so-successful drawings of young Ramesses, giving them the following interpretation:

Hateful lame	I ate a fried egg...	you are a perfect goose...	but, in physique, you resemble rather a fishbone...	I will throw stones at you	you're a vile little worm...	and you need the protection of Anubis... ('Rascal!' thought the girl. 'Anubis is the protector of mummies!')	I'll stop now because I have to clean my shoes

Four thousand years have passed. The Ramesses papyrus was unearthed by a great Egyptologist, who after two lustrous years of profound study succeeded in restoring to the admiration of men the passage of sublime poetry contained in it. Here it is, in the full translation: made by the scientist:

O Osiris, who dances wearily	on the lotus flower,	followed by the Ibis, bird sacred to you,	I offer to you the ear of wheat...	and seven small beans freshly shelled...	that thou mayst keep from me the serpent of envy...	to the supreme Anubis	to whom I prostrate myself.

Beyond the *divertissement* of Achille Festa Campanile (1931), and the fact that in ancient Egypt hieroglyphic writing was only one of the notational systems –the sacred and courtly one, together with the 'demotic' and 'hieratic' scripts– the short novel exposes a fundamental problem of the semiotic process (Eco, 1975) and intertextuality (Kristeva & Waller, 1996) between different language shifting. Where, in that case, language as not just intended as an idiom linked to a cultural, territorial, or transnational identity, but a mode of communication that simultaneously uses different sign conventions and different transmission channels and sensory modalities (Bollini, 2001).

The hieroglyphic pictorial notation was finally decodified thanks to the three transcriptions – hieroglyphic, demotic and ancient Greek– by means of the *Rosetta Stele* back in 1799 and then deciphered between 1802 and 1822 by several French scholars (Solé & Valbelle, 2002). Here, the presence of two different transcriptions in ancient Greek (whose tradition has remained alive in western culture) and demotic –already partially based on phonetic components– are the key to access and understanding the meaning both of the notation system as well as the language, although the original context able to produce it and to socialize the meanings got lost through time creating a discontinuity in the transmission code. Besides, it is interesting to emphasise how hieroglyphics and demotic, the later form of ancient Egyptian writing (a simplified form of hieratic developed from the first millennium BC) do not represent different languages, but two coexisting notational systems, i.e., graphical forms

used in specific contexts and by diverse social groups.

According to the Jakobson reflections on translation –not only linguistic but also symbolic and sign-related (Jakobson, 1959)– and his scheme about the communication functionalities, then extended by Sorice (2000) and its reinterpretation shaped on visual communication brought out by Bruno Munari (1968) – among the key factors to establish a 'communication act' the code plays a prominent role. On the other hand, in the case of pictograms and other notations based on figurative signs (ideograms, pictograms, and so on) rather than on visual, abstract and phonetics symbols, the evolution seems to follow a common pattern, in a process– shared to many transitions in the innovation field –i.e. the evolution start from a mimetic or simulative reproduction and then turn into an increasingly abstract representation of the object originally adopted in metonymic, synecdotal, or metaphorical evolution. The referent and the signifier are both and deeply rooted in the actual world mirroring each other. The phenomenic experience is reproduced, and therefore sufficiently recognizable and understandable– the 'picture', the sign that stands for the meaning. The head of an ox, depicted with few strokes (Gaur, 1995), is recognizable nevertheless as a real head to which a meaning –that shifts from the actual object to a broader 'container' including under that 'label' more meaning and concepts– is collectively produced, accepted, and transformed. In a sort of phylogenetic evolution, the process of signification and representation tends to a further synthesis of the representative process that progressively uncouples the morphology of the referent into an abstraction with continuity or discontinuity in the formal/shape of the signifier.

In such a stratified process, however, any leaps or discontinuities are metabolised at the level of the social construction of meanings attributed to the sign system. That is, in the creation and learning of the codes that allow

Fig. 2 Tomàs Maldonado: Data processing symbols for olivetti, 1964-1967 (Baroni, 1999)
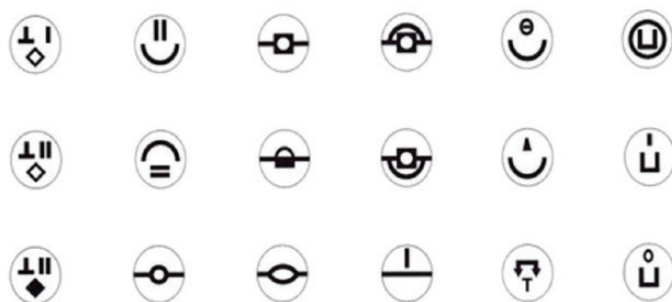
them to converge on a shared and common meaning. However, if in verbal language and its phonetic notations –which allow a continuous permutation and combination of signs in the composition of codified and verifiable units of meaning–the meaning is sufficiently stable (this after all is the role of dictionaries) in visual language the issue is more complex.

Visual language, in fact, is by its very nature polysemous –as extensively demonstrated by the principles of Gestaltpsychologie (Kanizsa, 1997)– if not 'synsemic' (Perondi, 2012), often less codified and, above all, less acquired through formal learning processes –i.e. through graphicacy (Balchin & Coleman, 1965; Fry, 1981; Bollini, 2019)– as occurs instead in the verbal 'articulacy' and textual 'literacy' (Aldrich & Sheppard, 2000) realm.

In this respect, the visual glossaries or abacuses of pictograms designed and adopted in the various communicative contexts and ecosystems cover the extreme end of the spectrum from figurativeness, in which the real object is recognisable in its representation in a sort of sign translation – to symbolic abstraction, in which the connection with the real is personified or originally absent and the icons that make up this language must be learnt as a visual 'alphabet' in itself. This is the case, for instance, of the 'data processing symbols' (see Figure 2) designed by Tomàs Maldonado for Olivetti between 1964 and 1967 (Baroni, 1999).

THEN WAS THE METAPHORICAL WORLD
OF DIGITAL ICONS

The iterative loop between mimesis and abstraction becomes particularly evident in the ontogenetic process of the icon language used since the 1980s in the digital world and in the subsequent technological revolutions and evolutions.

Beginning with the formalisation of the desktop metaphor –the 'mother' of all digital metaphors– the new interaction paradigm based on visual processes of encoding, perception and interpretation –i.e., GUIs Graphical User Interfaces– the iconic component plays a foundational and fundamental role in digital communication ecosystems (Bollini, 2016). In 1982-1984, Susan Kare was called upon at Apple to design the images, imagery and imaginary of this new environment of interfaces based on direct manipulation: the possibility of moving and dragging 'windows', 'documents' and 'stacks' according to a translation of the tridimensional actual experience to the flat space of a screen, and, above all, to imagine and populate the figurative realm of the digital desktop with icons and interaction patterns.

A friendly technological world accessible even to non-experts in which the iconic and anthropomorphised computer smiles at you –it will remain the symbol of the OS Classic until version 9. A simulative environment in which

Fig. 3 Andy Hertzfeld's Icon editor based on Bill Atkinson's 'Fat Bits' pixel editing techniques used by Susan Kare to craft most of the early Mac icons. Retrieved July, 2022 from <https://www.folklore.org/StoryView.py?project=Macintosh&story=Busy_Being_Born,_Part_2.txt>
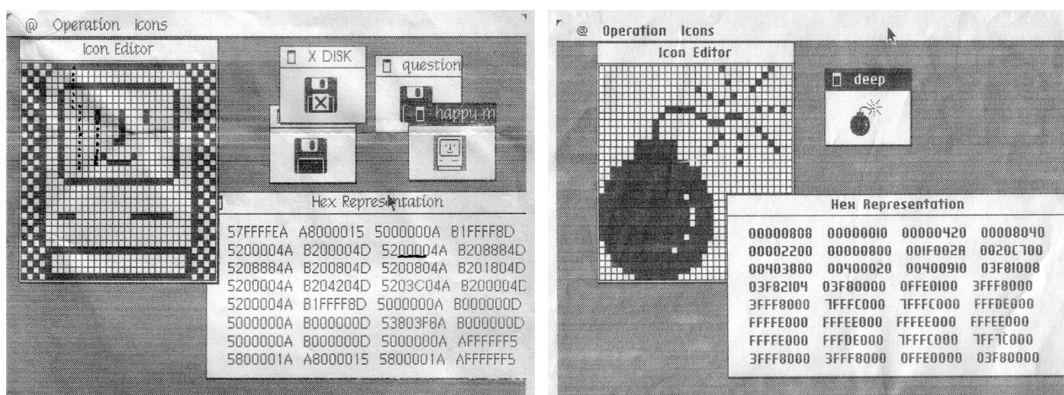
to throw a document ('file') you drag it from a 'folder' to the trash-bin and if the system crashes the bomb reminds you of Warner Bros. cartoons (see Figure 3).

Kare invented a world populated with symbols representing abstract operations and yet simple, comprehensible, human, and friendly (the concept of 'user-friendly' interfaces would only later be replaced with the functionalist and somewhat mechanical concept of 'usability'). The icons, initially accompanied by a customisable label or title, are so intuitive and soon become so familiar that they paradoxically become referents –originally object-based– of meanings that no longer exist.

Such is the case with the 'floppy disk'(the 3½ inch, high-density floppy 'diskettes') icon and its further evolution in Microsoft products, starting with Windows 93 in which Kare will once again be called upon to produce a visual and iconic world, become synonymous with 'save'. An object symbolic of back upping on an external drive, the floppy disk in fact, at a time when hard drive resources were precious and limited, soon to be replaced by more capacious and stable external supports (from DATs to DVD-Roms) and which, now gone, became for everyone, even for those who had never seen or used it, a –visual– synonym of a fundamental function, that of saving a file.

Subsequent transitions –for instance the shift from Classic to OS X– would also follow the same evolution. The well-established metaphor of the desktop is less and less connected to the physical office environment, which, in turn, is being transformed by the introduction of computers, software, digital devices, and DTP. Icons retain the same imagery but evolve in visual terms. From realistic objects, albeit in low resolution –drawn pixel by pixel and in black and white on a squared grid– or increasingly abstract, but at the same time, hyper realistic, three-dimensional, prospective, coloured and shaded references (Botta, 2006) of no-more-existing references. The more the actual object disappears, the more it seems necessary to describe it visually, as if giving tangible

concreteness to a no longer perceived reality would make it real and, therefore, recognisable and comprehensible.

It is a similar process we witnessed with the introduction of mobile devices starting from the introduction of the iPhone in 2007. The first iOS adopts a hyper-realistic and hyper-metaphorical visualization, the so-called skeuomorphic language (see Figure 3.a) that combines elements directly drawn from the real world to signify new functions also in the digital one. The built-in apps –such as the weekly planner, the eBook library, or the voice notes– that underpin the first generation of (multi)touch-interfaces –based on visual perception and gestures, i.e. a tactile-manipulative interaction– creates a deep-rooted but non-existing imaginary of stitched leather objects, yellowed and torn paper or wooden shelves (Bollini, 2019).

In the second generation –the so-called flat wave (see Figure 3.b) introduced by Apple in 2011 and taken over by Google Android with the Material Design System– however, the iconic-symbolic, flat and abstract dimension prevails over the hyper realistic-figurative one. People seem to have understood the new functionalities by now and no longer in need of concrete and tautological references to the features and functionalities in a crowded mobile world now populated by devices, applications and new players. On the

Fig. 4 Apple iOS: a) skeuomorphism (2007) b) flat design (2013); c) Android Nexus UI template; d) Windows 8, Metro language (2) (Mobile devices OS screenshots).

contrary, the meteor of the Windows Mobile Operating System, which adopts a completely abstract and geometric paradigm based on space proportions and colours, rather than on icons, seems to have definitively changed the design and experiential scenario.

(DIGITAL) ICONS: THE AFFORDANCE OF SILENT IMAGES

Since icons, in the digital ecosystems, play a significant role in interactions –i.e. as action triggers, call-to-actions or navigation menus– their comprehensibility becomes one of the fundamental requirements for the efficiency and effectiveness, in terms of purpose and functionality, of applications and software, but also to ensure a positive and engaging –friendly– experience for people. If in the case of a written text, i.e. typography understood as transcription of the verbal and orality, we could use parameters such as legibility and readability to assess its validity and the overall reading performance and experience –even in empirical-experimental terms– in the case of icons the issue is blurred. However, we can use another criterion that has emerged from various studies on perception and communication, namely the 'affordance' concept. Originally studied by Elanor Gibson in her pioneering experiments (Gibson & Walk, 1960, Gibson, 2002) as a visual cliff, her definition became the reference for subsequent conceptualisations and research that extended its use to the specific field of interaction and digital design (Bollini, 2018). Formalised later in 1966 in the J. J. Gibson's seminal text *The ecological approach to visual perception*

> The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, the noun affordance is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It

implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment. (Gibson, 1979, p. 127)

Or, in psychology field, is a property of an object or an aspect of the environment, especially relating to its potential utility, which can be inferred from visual or other perceptual signals. More generally, it is a quality or utility which is readily apparent or available, i.e. that capacity that in the case of communication or interaction an artefact has in making its own function comprehensible. In his book *The Design of Everyday Things*, Norman further refers to the concept:

When you first see something you have never seen before, how do you know what to do? The answer, I decided, was that the required information was in the world: the appearance of the device could provide the critical clues required for its proper operation. In *POET*, I argued that understanding how to operate a novel device had three major dimensions: conceptual models, constraints, and affordances. (Norman, 1988, p. 109)

Norman's reflection straddles two concepts: real affordance and perceived affordance, similar to the apparent/inherent usability (Kurosu & Kashimura, 1995). In the former case, it refers to all the possibilities of action that an object allows, in the case of perceived affordance, on the other hand, it refers to the actions that a user perceives he/she/they can do. It is on the latter that the design of digital interfaces is mainly based. As a corollary of this argument, Norman (1988) defined four principles for ensuring the affordance of screen interfaces. However, the second "Use words to describe the desired action (e.g., 'click here' or use labels in front of perceived objects)" Norman, 1988, p. 109) seems to contradict the idea that visual elements, such as icons, already carry within themselves the capacity to convey their function and/or the meaning of their referent. A concept finally taken up and reworked in Living with complexity (2016), focusing, on the one hand, on the idea of the intentionality of affordance, i.e. the invitation to (do/interact), and on the other hand, on the gap

Mac Classic
1984

iOS: Skeuomorphism
2007

iOS: Siri
2011

iOS 7: Flat
2013

Fig. 5 Apple icons' evolution
(Apple i/OS screenshots).
Retrieved July, 2022 from
<https://emojipedia.org/>

between the three-dimensional world and the perceptual translation to the two-dimensional one. Or, perhaps, more simply, as Polillo underline already in 1993, when speaking of human-computer interaction, it is "A well-designed system must be usable without any need for user manuals" (Polillo, 1993, p. 75) i.e., the system is able to communicate 'spontaneously' —to the people who will use it or to whom it is addressed— how it works. Moreover, affordance thus seems to be the meeting point between theories of perception and cognitive ergonomy and design, according to Bagnara:

> Looking at an object, we immediately 'see' what it is for, whether we can use it and how. Perception and action are included in a single act. This is a formidable change in cognitive psychology because the development of cognitivism had broken the link between perception and action seen as different cognitive phases and processes. […] This concept makes it possible to overcome, in most cases, the processing stages envisaged by cognitivism: we are quick, when the object is usable, we would say 'it is intuitive. (Bagnara, 2017)

A tangible application of these theoretical reflections can be well illustrated by analysing the evolution of the icons adopted, over the years in the Apple Operating Systems, to represent the possibilities of interactions referred to the acoustic/sound channel (see Figure 5).

From the original version (1984), where the acoustic dimension was predominantly represented by outputs i.e., alerts and feed-back sounds, and thus the ear-cons is represented by a loudspeaker to the first version of the microphone the deviation is not so obvious, at least in visual terms. In the second case, which is a typical example of skeuomorphic language, the reference is to a hypermetaphorical and realistic object no longer in use. It is out of contemporary experience, but at the same time strongly rooted in the collective imagery thanks, above all, to cinema and radio/TV references that make it totemic, iconic, familiar, and hence recognizable. In the first transition to a synthetic, abstract and flat representational mode, the object loses its real references, three-dimensionality, colour, details and shading, to become an abstract form in which only the silhouette seems to refer back to the original referent and the previous reference. Stripped of all detail, the icon expresses all its synthetic-narrative potential if, and only if, it is associated with the context of use, namely the newly introduced Siri app. An early form of VUI –Voice User Interface– which, relying on artificial intelligence simulates a dialogical interaction that goes beyond the mechanics of input/output dynamics or the command logic on which chatbots are generally based. In the last shift that completes the transition between skeuomorphism and flat design (2013), however, the microphone paradigm/referent is replaced by a new signifier. From the material object that produces or records/amplifies sound, we move on to the concept of sound waves, shifting from the recording device to the synthesiser display. The reference becomes from actual to abstract, from real to conceptual. Curiously, the sign-referential translation operation seems, on the contrary, to weaken the affordance of the icon. The 1950s microphone, just as foreign to our everyday life as the visual representation of the physical phenomenon can be, nevertheless seems more connected and embedded

in our memory and thus in our ability to recognise it and understand its process of rhetorical construction of signification.

As in the case of the magnifying glass –one of the first iconic elements already in use in software for creating multimedia and interactive hypertexts– which changes its meaning depending on the contexts in which it is used –synonym for search combined with text input fields in websites or apps, magnification or reduction in vector drawing, art or photo retouching software, or when associated with an image– code and context are inseparably linked in the process of decoding the meanings of visual language in terms of visual usability (Schlatter & Levinson, 2013). Not to mention the fact that in some software such as the early versions of Adobe Acrobat (1993) the concept of search, or rather find within the finite domain of the pdf document, was symbolised by a binoculars/ telescope.

ICONS, EMOTIONS, EMOJIS AND THE GENERATION GAP

Icons, images able to show and conveying functionalities, features without using words, become furthermore, emotive –expressive or affective– triggers, according to Jakobson (1959) conceptualisation: pictograms or ideograms aimed to convey the 'tone of voice' and the mood of the message.

Originally intended as typographical art the emoticons date back official to 30 March 1881 when they were presented in the humoristic US magazine Puck already

Fig. 6 Emoticon/emoji(s) evolution: a) emoticons (1881); b) smiley ASCII emoticon (1990s); c) Face with tears of Joy (2010) and d) Loudly Crying Face (2010) both in the Apple version. https://emojipedia.org/

displaying a specimen from the Studies of Passions and Emotions (see Fig. 6a). The evolution through the ASCII art culture and community reinforced the text/typographical vocabulary where "the most common ASCII art picture is the smiley (-:" (see Fig. 6b) according to the ASCII Art archive[1] and offered a possibility to visualise moods & feels even in command-line-based interfaces (1960s-1980s) and in the early years of the web revolution (1990s). It is in 1999 that the Japanese designer Shigetaka Kurita was invited by mobile telephone operator NTT DoCoMo to collaborate to a mobile-specific browser, then ending up in developing a visual vocabulary made of 176 pixeled pictograms on a 12x12 grid then included in Unicode in 2010 (and in MoMA collection in 2016) and consequently world-wide spread in Apple and Android smartphones (Prisco, 2018).

If emojis are now an integral part of the visual dimension of interfaces and interactions on many digital and social platforms, it remains an open question if they are –as other 'silent images'– a (universal) language or not.

> Language is organized into meaningful units such as words, and a system of rules –a grammar– that enables us to compose our words and express everything from the gnawing ache of unrequited love to a banal observation on the weather. [...] A potentially insurmountable problem is the sheer difficulty of expressing abstract ideas using a pictographic form, underlines Evans comparing emojis vocabulary and structure whit other verbal idioms.(Evans, 2017)

Despite the common figurative basis referring to facial expressions and human emotions (Morris, 1977) that should make them perfectly recognisable, interpretable, and comprehensible, the more the visual language seems to converge towards a sign-like and meaningful stability, the more, again, the signification seems unstable and ambiguous. As in the case of the floppy disk, alien

to the post-millennial digital native generations, but comprehensible in symbolic terms, so emoji suffer a kind of generational gap at the level of the semiotic process. Depending on the cringe/boomer interpretation and with the identical figurative morphology, the same image constructs different meanings in which the context of interpretative validation is no longer shared within a diffuse social context, but rather limited and, indeed, distinctive to sub-groups and communities that identify with it.

In particular, analysing the different meaning of the most used emoji (at least on Twitter according to the real-time visualisation tool[2]) —named Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary in 2015— the Face with Tears of Joy (see Fig. 6c) "A yellow face with a big grin, uplifted eyebrows, and smiling eyes, each shedding a tear from laughing so hard. Widely used to show something is funny or pleasing[3]" we observe, paradoxically, different meaning when used by digital migrants (i.e., Baby Boomers and Gen X), Millennials (1984-1996) or Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2010 (Howe & Strauss, 1992). In the first case, it is understood as an alternative of the textual acronym LOL —Laughing Out Loud— and used in this meaning by Gen Y too. For Gen Z, instead, it is considered cringe and old fashioned. Late Digital Natives have replaced it with the Loudly Crying Face (see Fig. 6d) as synonym of 'overwhelming joy', Boomers use it in the label meaning, while the younger generation adopted it as 'embarrassed' alternative. Taking the test proposed by the TikToker Scarlett Alexandra (Aspler, 2022), I personally discovered that the icon of the fraternal kiss —the one without the little heart— I send to friends —actually meaning whistling (sic!)— is used as 'Sounds good to me and/or 'ohhh'!' by Centennials and Gen Alpha (born after 2010). In the generational and meaning shift, the contextual dimension of the signification and interpretation of a language seems to emerge in all its relevance, at least in the case of an idiom —such as the visual realm— so open in terms of interpretation and polysemic by nature.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea, the utopia or, perhaps, the illusion of creating a visual glossary that is meaningful and over-cultural seems as old as digital, or at least as old as the web. The once famous Michael Herrick's Q-bullets project, a set of minimal, animated icons developed in 1994 "that tell you what a link will do before you click on it […] and that attach to hypertext links to indicate their function" (Herrick, 1994) is a fundamental as well as unsuccessful exploration of the universality of iconic language, just as, on the other hand, this same attempt is successful in its synthetic power in software and app interfaces or in those interactive contexts with a high intensity of use and/or a conscious learning process.

The visual language, in fact, like any language, lives and functions because it is based on known and shared codes within the community that generates it, transforms it, and passes it on. Graphicacy, i.e., the learning of the ability to decode and "write" down ideas, information, and messages in visual terms, therefore, becomes the decisive element and a fundamental skill in an increasingly image-oriented and image-based society.

NOTES

1 https://www.asciiart.eu/faq
2 http://emojitracker.com/
3 definition by https://emojipedia.org/

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IMAGES IN DIALOGUE
HOW THEY TALK
AND WHAT THEY SAY

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WORDLESS IMAGES
TALKING IMAGES
SILENT BOOKS
VISUAL STORYTELLING
VISUAL COMMUNICATION

As well as being tasked with clearly communicating textual and written contents, as communication designers and design scholars, we are also, and above all, responsible for visual ones, deciding how to convey these contents; the point of view and emphasis, authorship and interpretation of the designer ensure that the communication becomes a tale, a story made up of symbols and images. The transposition from the semantic to the visual plan takes place through various types of operations which ensure that the original content is always different from its visual translation, even if only very slightly. To carry out this process we use images with different kinds of relationships which allow us to visualise, condense and convey complex concepts that would otherwise be difficult both for graphic designers to translate and users to understand. Taking into consideration a series of case studies coming from different fields pertaining to the visual sphere, this text focuses its attention on the dialogue between the images, understanding how they talk to each other, and which relationships contribute to the construction of a narrative.

IMAGES THAT TALK

The way we use images, the way we arrange and crop them, can significantly alter the perception of the end user. One standout example of this is the iconic war photograph taken in Iraq by Itsuo Inouye (2003) which depicts two American soldiers at the sides of the image with an Iraqi in the centre of the composition.

The meaning of the image changes radically depending on how we crop it: if we cover the right side with our hand or a piece of paper, the left half suggests that the Iraqi soldier is being held at gunpoint; this is in fact an optical illusion as the rifle which appears to be aimed at the head of the soldier is actually being held by a fourth person not in the picture. If we consider only the right side of the photo, the message is turned upside down with the marine intent on giving his adversary some water. But which of the two versions is more accurate?

There is no way of knowing which narrative is more correct but both images –the capture and the aid– are a valid part of the image as a whole. In the arrangement of the content and their communication on different media, the actions of the designer play a key role and can deeply alter the meaning of the story. We therefore have a photographic reproduction that is susceptible to different interpretations based on how it is cropped and presented in the context, and the perspective of both the designer and the viewer[1]. Unlike with news reports, in the field of visual communication the composition of the content, with text placed on the same footing as visual content, enables us to actively contribute to the narrative with pictures.

This potentially endless use –and reuse– of images is a key part of the contemporary visual culture we are living in. Borrowing the words of image expert Riccardo Falcinelli: "To use images is to give them meaning" (2016, p. 6). Images are many different things, and their meaning is defined by a myriad of parameters: the social and historical

context, the place in which an image is then positioned, its economic value, the cultural negotiation that occurred between senders and receiver, its technical qualities, the way it is framed – "an image's use and context come first, and they frame how we read it" (Falcinelli, 2016, p. 10). Based on this excerpt, below there is a series of case studies that exemplify different kind of relationships useful to understand the language of images and the circumstances that enable them to speak to each other.

HOW IMAGES SPEAK AND WHAT THEY SAY

In order for two images to 'talk' they must be in a position of mutual dialogue. We have noted how the creator of the image or the designer that has to manipulate it is responsible for communicating one story rather than another. But the observer –as the end user– is also able to change the original message of the image with their own perception based on the relationships they are able to create.

In particular, the narrative potential of images multiplies when we find ourselves faced with a visual story – a combination that implies a mixture of two or more elements. In the case of images their association can be formal, on the basis of their aesthetic similarity, or semantic, i.e. when images communicate and create a dialogue between themselves and according to their meaning (Luigini & Moretti, 2022; Camillini, 2022).

The two typologies just mentioned call into question the two different horizons of semiotics and semantics. In the first case, as the title of an important work by Umberto Eco –later collected in his *Trattato di semiotica generale*– states, the emphasis is on the 'forms of content' (1971). The second, as widely demonstrated by Gilbert Durand, addresses the symbolic regime of meanings –'signified'– thus a much broader domain than that, judged abstract, of the structural unity of a configuration of signs alone

It can be said that the symbol does not belong in the semiological area, but has a special kind of meaning. It does not simply have an artificially given meaning, it has an essential immediate power to affect deeply the consciousness. (Durand, 1999, p. 32).

These two modes of image functioning have often been conceived as antithetical and irreconcilable. Symptomatic in this respect is the formalistic attitude found in both Saussure and the Prague Circle and, later, in some French developments of the *périple structural* (Milner, 2008). While on the other hand, privileging the symbolic side has opened the door to the anthropological investigation, especially in the context of the history of religions and comparative approaches. It is true, however, that an example such as the one cited, Inouye's photograph, becomes significant exactly where these two approaches are not kept distinct but rather made to act jointly. Indeed, both the act of giving drink to a thirsty soldier and the act of pointing a gun to his head are loaded with symbolic connotation: they cannot disregard, in terms of what they communicate, the socio-historical context in which they acquire meaning – which, in this case, is represented by war.

However, the procedure of excluding either side of the photograph, which could be cut off, thus conferring to it a meaning or its opposite, is possible only on the formal basis of the symmetry that characterizes it. Hence, it is a specific form that makes possible a specific operation on the content. How can this happen and, more importantly, what kind of theoretical equipment makes it possible to articulate a discourse consistent with this specific performance of the image? The proposed thesis concerns the need to refer to the concept of montage in order to conceive of semantics and semiotics in unity. Montage –and, specifically, in Sergei Eisenstein's theoretical elaboration of it– will thus be conceived as that fundamental operation on images that allows both their formal structure –semiotics– and the meaning of their content –semantics– to act unitarily.

A THEORY OF MONTAGE

That the core of Eisenstein's theoretical elaboration is defined by the unity of content and form in the treatment of images is made explicit from the very first pages of his seminal work:

> We shall consider the notion that living man, his consciousness and activity, is not only the basis of what is expressed in the content of a film, but that man is also reflected in the exigencies of form and the structural laws of a work of art, of its generalized image. (Eisenstein, 2010, p. 4).

To be decisive, in this regard, is the concept of life –in fact, he speaks of 'living man'– because the set of sensations, perceptions and emotions that an image arouses depends first and foremost on the fact that it represents an action performed by the living, by something therefore, which is jointly form, content and movement. Montage, from this point of view, succeeds in fusing the three elements together: in translating the content of a living movement into form. It remains to be understood, however, what exactly the terms content and image mean in this approach at once empathic –in the classic sense given to the term by Worringer (2014)– and realist. The Russian director clarifies this shortly after in an inspiring line:

> A truly realistic work of art, deriving from the fundamental tenets of realism, must contain as an indissoluble whole both the representation of a phenomenon and its image; by image is meant a generalized statement about the essence of the particular phenomenon. (Eisenstein, 2010, p. 4).

As made explicit by Michel Foucault in his famous essay on Magritte (Foucault, 1988, p. 43), the representation of something is based on the similarity between the actual content ascertained by visual perception and what is seen in the image. Otherwise, the virtual form of representation must be more general than the actual form, first of all be-

cause, unlike the latter, it can be separated from the concrete matter of the represented entity. It is no coincidence that a represented form, precisely because it is removed from the specific material constraint, can be reproduced serially –the series, for example, of photographs of a thing– while a real object is itself unique and irreproducible – no two Napoleon Bonapartes exist, but neither do two animals that are the same animal, or two stones that are the same stone. The image thus represents a generalization of the immaterial existence of a thing achieved through the transfer of that same thing into a form that is logically more abstract, but precisely for this reason also more 'free'. This last observation makes it possible to define in the most precise manner the theoretical junction that makes possible the considerations that will be addressed later, where we will discuss the way in which images combine with each other by establishing a relationship based on formal correspondences and-or on the establishment of connections that disregard the context. Since in fact, as argued by Eisenstein, the operation of montage is accomplished by jointly implying both the content aspect and the formal aspect, and since the formal aspect allows a release from the objective real context from which the images come, it is possible to juxtapose two images either by keeping their context of belonging unchanged or by abstracting them from it. In this article, these two possible approaches will be analyzed by considering some specific examples.

RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON SHAPES AND COMBINATIONS

The first relationship is more intuitive, i.e. when two images are placed side by side because of aesthetic similarities: colour, balance or, as alluded to, shape. To this end, it is worth looking at the work of American artist and photographer Tana Hoban (1917-2006) who, having begun her career as an advertising photographer, established herself as a leading creator of silent or wordless books for

children, with 50 of her over 100 publications belonging to this genre. Tana Hoban believed in the importance of noticing and, with her picture books made of seemingly banal moments, she invited us to look around and lay our eyes on what is around us, without superficiality, and taking care of certain moments of life that, if unnoticed, would slip away. In addition to this, the ability to understand the meaning of illustrations, i.e. to perceive that a drawing is a representation of a real object, is not an easy achievement. Until 18 months, children are not yet able to understand this process; it is much easier for them to identify objects through photographs or very realistic drawings: this is the case of *White on Black* (Hoban, 1993), a book aimed at stimulating the curiosity and interest of young readers also through the use of the basic principles of visual perception (Giazzoli & Lortic, 2021). Though completely devoid of text, Hoban's books 'say' a great deal with sequences of juxtaposing photographs positioned alongside each other because of their colour and textural similarities, or images that share the same shape, as in *Shapes, Shapes, Shapes* (Hoban, 1986) (Figure 1) and *Round and Round and Round* (Hoban, 1983): two books made of photographs depicting shapes to be discovered page after page thanks to their visual affinity and sequence.

Fig. 1 Tana Hoban (1986), analogue photography, New York: Greenwillow. Courtesy of the author and the publisher © Tana Hoban and Greenwillow.
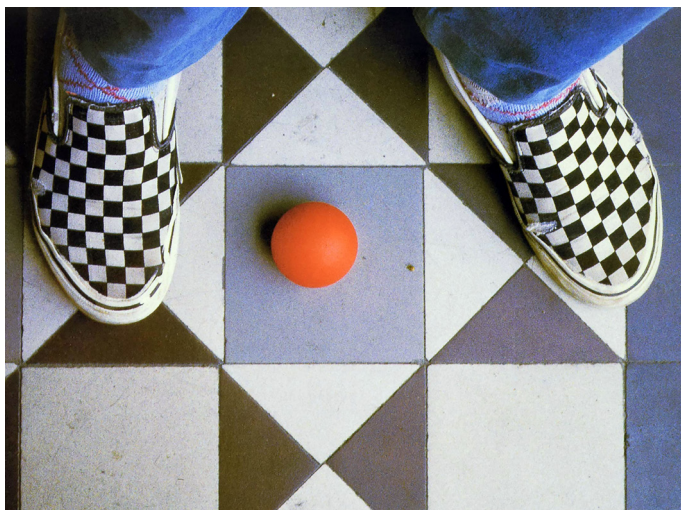
Visual associations similar to those of Hoban are also the premise of *This Equals That* (2014), a picture book by Jason Fulford and Tamara Shopsin that takes readers on a journey while introducing them to the fundamentals of visual literacy and teaching them associative thinking. The book can be used to teach how form, content, and context work together to create meanings within a single image or group of images.

Through a sequence of photographs, the book inspires conversation and multiple interpretations, allowing for an image-based learning experience: underlining the similarity of the shapes, in the first spread we are presented with a photograph of a wooden set square alongside another photo depicting a large shark-shaped tunnel (Figure 2); when we turn the page the large shark tunnel is repeated but is now paired with a festive decoration made up of flags which look just like a close-up of the teeth of the shark on the previous page (Figure 3). Not only do the two photos repeat the same shape, but they are also balanced in terms of their colours

Fig. 2 Jason Fulford & Tamara Shopsin (2014), photography, New York: Aperture. Courtesy of the authors and the publisher © Fulford, Shopsin and Aperture.

with very similar palettes used in the two images. The book continues in this vein, following this and other forms of logic, before arriving at the final double page spread where we are once again presented with the original wooden set square. The result is a 'circular' Duchamp-inspired book in which the stories and the associations established between the images are endless and at the discretion of the reader (Fulford & Shopsin, 2014); the thick cover with rounded corners suggests the book is aimed at children but in reality it is actually designed for a wider audience interested in the use of images and professional photo-editing.

DECONTEXTUALISED RELATIONSHIPS

Fig. 3 Jason Fulford & Tamara Shopsin (2014), photography, New York: Aperture. Courtesy of the authors and the publisher © Fulford, Shopsin and Aperture.

Every photograph has an intrinsic meaning defined by the taker, by the objective reality that the image depicts and the surrounding context. Let's take a school yearbook

for example, one with lots of portraits of students and relative captions with information on them. This image is unequivocable and leaves no space for interpretation. But what happens if the image is separated from its original context? When do we not have any supporting information or unambiguous clues that tell us what the image refers to?

On the possible dialogues between decontextualised images, it is worth mentioning *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*, which was an exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, from April 29 to August 2, 2009): the research of the artists on display –including Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine– was focused on the use of existing images which, once decontextualised, acquire new meanings. This is the case of *April 21, 1978* by Sarah Charlesworth, an artwork that challenges photography's reputation as the embodiment of truth. Starting from the front pages of the main international newspapers, the artist deconstructs time by isolating the visual contents from the textual ones, demonstrating that words are unnecessary and the magnitude of mass media's reliance on pictures.

The blankness on the page is unsettling, but here the image recounts the entire narrative. In addition, it is interesting to note how the same image –the iconic photo in which Aldo Moro held a newspaper in his hands as proof that he was still alive during his kidnapping by the Red Brigades– can take on a different meaning in a new, manipulated context: in the Italian newspapers like *La Repubblica* and *L'Unità* –two historic left-leaning dailies– the picture is large and centred while in the foreign press the image occupies a marginal space, overshadowed by a photograph of Queen Elizabeth holding her grandson Peter Phillips in *The Times*, for example.

Another approach worthy of mention is the work of Peter Piller, a German artist whose archive contains over 7.000 newspaper photos; in 2002 these were joined by 12.000 aerial images produced by a company in the 1970s to be sold

door-to-door to the owners of the houses in the pictures; the collection is completed by historic postcards and images taken from the Internet. Piller's artistic research is based on the manipulation of this vast collection of images to create visual stories consisting of different associations: formal or in terms of meaning, some intuitive, others less so: why is a woman depicted alongside an image of a rocket blasting off? And a war photo depicting parachutists jumping from alongside a girl blowing a dandelion? There is no single interpretation, the observer is left to draw their own conclusions. By reusing found photos in new contexts it is possible to create new stories but also new worlds, as is the case with the *Parallel Encyclopedia* by Batia Suter (2007). As the title of the book suggests, it talks about an imaginary parallel world to our own and is illustrated with pre-existing content completely devoid of text, with the exception of the original captions of some of the images which do not however impact on the narrative – on the contrary, the reader is free to imagine their own world, creating their own personal associations between the pieces of visual content. Batia Suter's work is a study of graphics and photography, an exercise in appropriation and decontextualisation, understood as artistic practice:

> In my work, I collect groups of images based on various themes and characteristics, and I investigate how they can manipulate each other, depending on where and how they are placed. In the process of making this book, narrative lines unfolded before my eyes as I shifted images around. (Suter, 2007, n.p.).

Leafing through the almost 600 pages of the volume, we are able to understand the associations, both formal and semantic, between the sequences of images; and it is also possible to recognise chapters –or rather thematic groups of images– as in the case of pages on the human body and its representation (Suter, 2007, pp. 430-585).

One exponent of narration through appropriation is designer and artist Erik Kessels, whose practice is mainly

Fig. 4 Erik Kessels (2014). Courtesy of Erik Kessels © 2022. This is a book focused on the most common mistake in the history of image-making: the finger on the camera lens.

focused on the use of found photography. In his periodical publication *In Almost Every Picture* he presents a different theme series each time made using photographs found at flea markets: they are vernacular images, often deriving from private collections, taken by amateur photographers unaware of the reuse of their images. Kessels deconstructs the original collections, without the need for introductory texts or accompanying captions, and recombines and organises them to tell a new, different story; this is the case of issue number *13*, *Attack of the Giant Fingers* (Kessels, 2014) which is a book focused on the most common mistake in the history of image-making (Figure 4): the finger on the camera lens, but how can a finger on the camera lens be a creative error? And what do these 'wrong' photographs have to say?

Page after page, one mistake after another, we notice that the finger highlights a certain part of the picture and, at

Fig. 5 Erik Kessels, *In Almost Every Picture* 17, 2021. Courtesy of Erik Kessels © 2022.

the same time, it becomes a graphic and narrative element of the sequence. Another magazine issue that exemplifies well this narrative potential is number 17 (Kessels & Smerieri, 2021) about the holiday pictures by Carlo and Luciana, a couple from the small Italian town of Vignola, in the province of Modena. And once again, what do the photos of a happy couple travelling around the world tell us? Carlo and Luciana made a small handful of trips right after they were married. This is the beginning of their project, black and white images, many shot on the road. Yet it is not until later, past the blank pages symbolic of their working years, that we really get to know how Carlo and Luciana explored the world. Black and white becomes colour, we witness time passing. Together they create a curious contradiction; two halves each with their own different motive, making one whole (Figure 5).

The final case study on how images can talk effectively without the need for any accompanying text makes use of recent technologies: *LP* is the magazine of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano which is focused on the narration of the South Tyrolean territory, but it is also the product of the co-design strategy adopted by this institution and a research team from the Faculty of Design and Art of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano[2].Given the history of the region the publication is trilingual –Italian, German, Ladin– and, thanks to the use of QR codes and a transmedia strategy, it is possible to access its content on mobiles, via desktop computers and in a printed version, according to the type of user and media – language, video, text, image or mixed. The seventh and most recent printed edition uses augmented reality to enhance the narrative experience: by taking a picture of the printed images with a smartphone, these come alive, becoming animations, interviews and videos.

A NEW STORYTELLING

Umberto Eco considers loss as an indispensable condition in the field of linguistic and literary translation and interpretation, in which the original text must necessarily undergo a transformation for the sake of understanding, and indirectly contributes to the creation of new meaning (Eco, 2003). Just like when we look at a piece of art and ask ourselves what it means and what the intention of the artist was, often we find that there is more than one valid answer, and it depends on the viewers and the relationships they manage to establish.

Something very similar happens in visual communication –because communication it is– where complex concepts are transposed from the semantic level to the graphic-visual one for the sake of user clarity and comprehension of the message. In this process of transition, the design choices

and the use of graphic techniques make the output always different from the original starting point. As analysed in the examples above, the transposition from the semantic plan to the visual one takes place through various types of operations which ensure that the starting content is always different from its visual translation.

To carry out this process we use images with different kinds of relationships which makes a dialogue made of pictures to visualize, condense and convey complex concepts that would otherwise be difficult both for graphic designers to translate and users to understand.

A visual dialogue implies a mixture of two or more pictures; their association can be formal, on the basis of various criteria such as similarity, contrast, balance, colour combination and so on; or on the basis of meaning: in the first case, the montage and its resulting dialogue will privilege its semantic value, establishing a formal correspondence between representations analogically linked by nexuses of meaning; in the second case, it will instead privilege semiotic-structural —i.e. syntactic— nexuses, suspending the analogy of contexts and thus of meanings.

The case studies examined in this text demonstrate the potential narrative of images when associated with each other; original or found, decontextualised or animated, but above all without the addition of text, they are able to convey new stories, which can be unequivocal, multiple or freely interpretable messages according to the perception of the users.

NOTES

1 With regard to images, and war reports in particular, see the interesting reflection of Riccardo Falcinelli in *Figure* (2020, pp. 391-405), in which three images of three different wars –Secession, the Syrian civil war and the Cambodian-Vietnamese war– show the difference between straight photography –for example the objective reproduction of reality– and staged photography.

2 *LP magazine* is one of the research outputs deriving from *Assessing post-publishing and its connection with public institutions and public services and their communication* –VaLP, 20.03.2018-31.08.2019 and 23.04.2020-31.03.2022– a trans-media and co-designed research project conceived and led by Gianluca Camillini –2018-2022– Dr. Alvise Mattozzi –until 2021–and Matteo Moretti –until 2019– at the Faculty of Design and Art-unibz, funded by the Autonomous Province, and aimed at communicating the territory to its citizens, exploring new forms of storytelling and developing new relations with different audiences.

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WAR AND PEACE BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES
THE PICTUREBOOKS AS NEUTRAL GROUND FOR THE DIALECTICS BETWEEN GRAPHIC AND VERBAL LANGUAGES

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This article discusses the relationships that have been established throughout history between drawn pictures and written words. An almost epic interweaving of war and peace emerges between the two languages that, depending on the times, cultures and contexts, have sometimes prevailed one over the other, have sometimes allied themselves, and then again fought and imposed themselves on each other.

Despite the fact that this diatribe never seems to reach a conclusion, there are some fields in which the two languages seem to succeed in dialoguing in unpredictable and surprising ways. One of these is the picture book, a neutral field in which the longstanding struggles for supremacy between graphic and verbal languages seem to disappear, whereas they instead dialogue and experiment together in new forms of narration. Words and images here renounce their traditional meanings and configuration, defining unusual forms of wordless books, which go far beyond the classic and almost predictable format of the silent books.

INTRODUCTION

Written words and drawn images are elements of two different languages on which the construction and transmission of knowledge of our culture is based; two different forms of visual communication that over the course of time have been able to respond to the different needs that have emerged from time to time from society, in different contexts, to achieve different objectives, in relation to different audiences. Needs, these, that in many situations have forced the two languages to find a meeting point, to establish a relationship and to collaborate in order to achieve common goals. Thus, throughout history, countless forms of interaction have developed between images and words, leading to the delineation of a continuum rather than a dichotomy between images and words understood as antithetical and incompatible elements, with wordless works at one extreme and pictureless works at the other, in the midst of which there are infinite declinations in which the two elements collaborate and interact, sometimes with images that illustrate texts, sometimes with texts that describe images. The two forms of expression thus give life to a story of conflicts and agreements, of wars and peace, in a continuous alternation and coexistence of competition and mutual collaboration.

METHOD

This article analyses the possible interactions between images and words starting from the state of the art discussed in paragraph 3 —*War and Peace between Words and Pictures*— which retraces, without any claim to exhaustiveness, a historical evolution by dwelling on some of the most significant moments and visual artifacts.
This state of the art will provide the tools for observing continuities and discontinuities with the current panorama, which is discussed by limiting the field of ob-

servation to a particular field of investigation, the picture books. This sphere is in fact among those in which images and words have greater degrees of freedom to interact and in which, therefore, the two languages can best experiment new modalities of dialogue (Campagnaro, 2013). Paragraph 4 –*The Picture books as Neutral Ground for the Dialectics between Graphic and Verbal Languages*– will discuss some of the possible ways in which the two languages can interact, focusing especially on the role of pictures. Again, the review of case studies does not claim to be exhaustive but is intended to propose a potentially implementable exemplification. Both paragraphs 3 and 4 are articulated in sub-paragraphs intended to exemplify the possible modes of intersections between the two languages, which from time to time tend to modify their balances and their power relationships. What emerges is a map of ever-changing relationships that together define a complex mosaic, the overview of which is fundamental in order to be more aware of the use of images in the various forms of multimedia communication. From this analysis, in fact, elements of continuity and invariants emerge that also constitute useful references from a designing point of view.

WAR AND PEACE BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES

Pictures anticipating words

"In the beginning was the word", writes John in his Gospel, giving the word a primordial role. "In the beginning was the image", would instead seem the more correct incipit to tell the story of the evolution of languages both from a collective historical-cultural perspective and from an individual psycho-cognitive perspective.

Indeed, images dominate the first phase in the evolution of human communication, both in reference to the early graphic-visual evidence at the beginning of the history of human civilisation, and in relation to the first ways of expression at the start of the individual's life.

In fact, although the function of cave paintings (Figure 1) –the earliest known human-produced images– is unclear, there is a general consensus that they were a form of wordless communication rather than merely a wall decoration. Having overcome the theory that the caves that sheltered these earliest forms of representation were places of habitation, these sites are now considered as a kind of primordial library in which information was stored and made available through graphic language alone (Male, 2014). Thus, the transmission of knowledge began without written words but with drawn images that anticipated the role that would only later be fulfilled by writing. Therefore, images emerged as the first form of representation and communication without words.

Words undermining pictures

The same primacy can be highlighted in the history of another evolution, that of the psycho-cognitive development of individuals. In the cognitive development of the child, from the first months of life to pre-school age, graphic expression takes the form of a spontaneous communication channel. Therefore, images can be considered as the most natural form of expression, communication and transmission of information, even before writing. Then, graphic language gradually declines due to the enhancement of verbal language in which school education tends to invest more. Written words thus replace images, becoming the main visual language (Anning, 1999).

Pictures generating words

Despite their undeniable communicative function, the pictures in cave paintings as well as children's drawings cannot be considered a form of writing in a strict sense, as it is not possible to highlight in them a codified system of standardised symbols. It was, however, precisely these images, used spontaneously to communicate objects and concepts, that evolved into those more abstract and symbolic pictographic forms considered to be the earliest forms of writing

(Harris, 1998). In this way, images take the form of graphic codes with a shared meaning, becoming true languages. From communication through hieroglyphic pictograms (Figure 2) to that using the characters of phonetic alphabets, via syllabic symbols, it has been shown how words originate from images and derive from a process of simplification and abstraction of figurative forms into symbolic forms associated with single phonemes (Figure 3).

Picture substituting words

Images make events and concepts visible. Over the course of time, this capacity has been fundamental in making intelligible narrative, celebratory and symbolic contents, even of a complex nature, and transmitting them to both posterity and contemporaries. This is the case of the Trajan column, erected to celebrate the conquest of Dacia by the emperor Trajan, around which scenes recalling the salient moments of that particular event are wrapped, organised strictly with chronological intentions (Figure 4). Another example is the Bayeux Tapestry, which recounts the key events surrounding the Norman conquest of England in 1066 by celebrating the figure of William the Conqueror (Figure 5). In both examples, the narration is entrusted almost exclusively to the images alone; the few accompanying texts have the sole role of explaining the little information useful to contextualise the events.

From the classical era onwards, pictures then became fundamental tools not only for the propaganda of the powerful, but also for the transmission of knowledge, as in the case of religious paintings inside church buildings (Figure 6), adopted by Christianity as a privileged means to communicate the messages and contents of the sacred scriptures to the great masses of illiterate believers (Bossaglia, 1992), who could only receive the teachings of Christian doctrine through them (De Fiore, 1967).

Words overpowering pictures

While up to this point it had been easier to convey messages through works aimed at a collective audience through

Fig. 1 *Wall paintings*, 15,300 BC,
Lascaux.
Retrieved November, 1, 2022
from <https://en.wikipedia.
org/wiki/Lascaux#/media/
File:Lascaux_painting.jpg>

Fig. 2 *Egyptian Hieroglyphics*, 1321
BC, inscription on stone stele,
Louvre Museum, Paris.
Retrieved November, 1, 2022
from <https://en.wikipedia.org/
wiki/Egyptian_hieroglyphs#/
media/File:Minnakht_01.jpg>

Fig. 3 *Evolution of the Phoenician
'aleph' character from the hieroglyphic
representation of an ox (2000 BC)
to represent the sound 'A'. Graphic
elaboration by the author.*

Fig. 4 *Supplies on the Danube, Trajan's Column*, 113 AD, bas-relief, Rome. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rilievi_della_colonna_Traiana#/media/File:006_Conrad_Cichorius,_Die_Reliefs_der_Traianss%C3%A4ule,_Tafel_VI.jpg>

Fig.5 *Bayeux Tapestry*, detail, 1100, embroidery, Centre Guillaume-le-Conquérant Bayeux. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayeux_Tapestry#/media/File:Tapisserie_de_Bayeux_31109.jpg>

Fig. 6 *Wedding at Cana, Resurrection of Lazarus, Lamentation over the Dead Christ, Resurrection and Noli me tangere,* Giotto di Bondone, 1303-1305, frescoes, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q3739862#/media/File:Giotto_di_Bondone_-_Scenes_with_decorative_bands_-_WGA09284.jpg

modes that had encouraged the use of images and graphic languages, with the printing press, communication became individual, private, domestic. Printing with movable type spread written works widely, fostering literacy (Rachal, 1988) and consequently the spread of written works over pictorial ones. The Bibles of the poor are no longer the frescoed paintings inside basilicas but are printed books (Figure 7), no longer the prerogative of a cultural elite but widespread among the people. These

Fig. 7 *Eve and the snake, the Annunciation, the miracle of Gideon, Biblia Pauperum,* 1465-1475, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/45a081c8-5211-43ac-a1ef-dbff1ef3e20e/surfaces/7c35fd91-b998-4f21-bf3c-6bf363cb4371/>

Fig. 8 Henry Courtney Selous. *The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851,* 1851, olio su tela, 169,5 x 241,9 cm, Victoria & Albert Museum, Londra. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8820/the-opening-of-the-great-oil-painting-selous-henry-courtney/>

books initially see the words commenting on the images according to a scheme of complementarity and then relegate them to a purely decorative role.

Words belittling images

When images become ancillary to the written text, they go from being works per se to being just an accessory component of a work of a different nature. In the traditional conception of illustration, in fact, this is an image having a secondary role to the content expressed through written language and could, therefore, also be omitted without losing this meaning (Walther, 2019). In this way, images go from being unique pieces and works of high art (Figure 8) to being considered commercial products aimed at reproduction in large quantities (Figure 9). The marriage with words celebrated in books and printed products eventually vulgarize printed images, which become products of lesser quality and prestige as they are considered closer to popular culture and mass communication rather than pure aesthetic enjoyment. The illustrator for printed books thus becomes a less prestigious professional figure than the artist who produces unique works, autonomous from verbal language, that continue to retain a connotation of 'high' art (Gowans, 1971).

Words removing images

As we have seen images in some phases of the history of civilisation trying to impose themselves on words in narrating and communicating events, to the point of excluding them and totally emancipating themselves, words too –with the establishment of movable type printing– try to impose themselves on images as witnessed by the immense pictureless book production that sees words as the sole means of narration and communication and at most images relegated to marginal decorative roles (Needham & Joseph, 2009).

Words generating pictures

However, the thirst for revenge of words on images seems not to be quietened by the spread of picturelss books. The

Fig. 9 John Gilbert, *Queen Victoria and her children visiting the Great Exhibition of 1851*, Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London. Illustration from The Crystal Palace that Fox Built, a Pyramid of Rhyme, 1851. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://digitalarchive.tpl.ca/objects/240676/the-crystal-palace-that-fox-built--a-pyramid-of-rhyme>
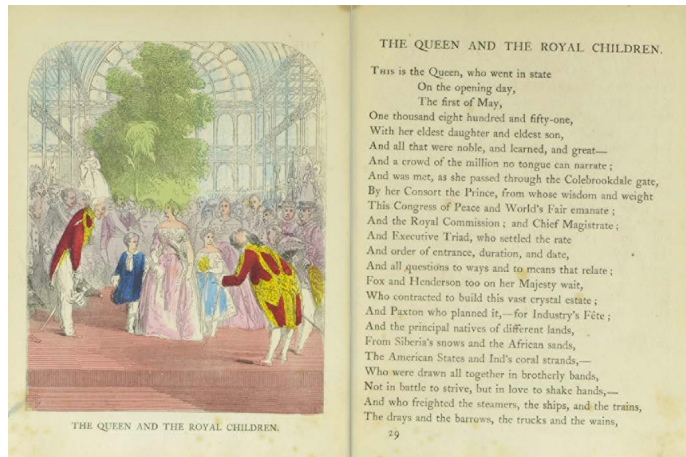
word not only refuses the presence of images but further challenges them by stealing their figurative connotation. Indeed, in the calligrams the word becomes image and tries to acquire figurative meanings thanks to the clever graphic composition of the individual words. They could be called pictureless works even though the word actually becomes an image by using meters of different lengths to reproduce the shape of objects (d'Alessandro, 2013), so the image is actually present to some extent. This is a challenge that words launch to images starting from Greek technopaignia (Figure 10) and Latin carmina figurata up to Louis Carrol's concrete poetry (Figure 11), passing through Apollinaire's calligrams, Mallarmé's visual poems, Depero's abstract verbalisation and Marinetti's words in freedom.

Images entering words

While with the spread of printing, texts dominated over images for centuries, today with the rise of new digital media, images have become central again to communication and the production of meanings. Speed is the distinctive feature of these new forms of communication and images become attractors capable of conveying content quickly and to catalyse the attention of the public towards written contents.

In the age of digital communication, in which the production of content constantly quickens and becomes endless

Fig. 10 *Simias of Rhodes*, Egg, 4th century BC. Retrieved November, 1, 2022 from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276254423_A_evolucao_da_poesia_visual_da_Grecia_Antiga_aos_infopoemas/fulltext/55e818bc08ae3e12184220ee/A-evolucao-da-poesia-visual-da-Grecia-Antiga-aos-infopoemas.pdf>

in the face of increasingly limited attention, the attention of the public becomes a precious commodity and images an effective tool to gain it. This reinforces the idea of an economy of attention (Wu, 2016) in which it becomes crucial to capture the viewer's gaze in order to lead it towards the enjoyment of written content.

THE PICTUREBOOKS AS NEUTRAL GROUND
FOR THE DIALECTICS BETWEEN GRAPHIC
AND VERBAL LANGUAGES

Although a history of war and peace between drawn images and written words was briefly discussed in the previous chapter, the two languages have also learned over time to dialogue. According to a traditional conception in these collaborative forms, images always act in any case as a support to the

Fig. 11 Lewis Carroll, *The original manuscript of Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, 1863.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Mouse%27s_Tale#/media/File:Alice's_Adventures_Under_Ground_-_Lewis_Carroll_-_British_Library_Add_MS_46700_f15v.jpg
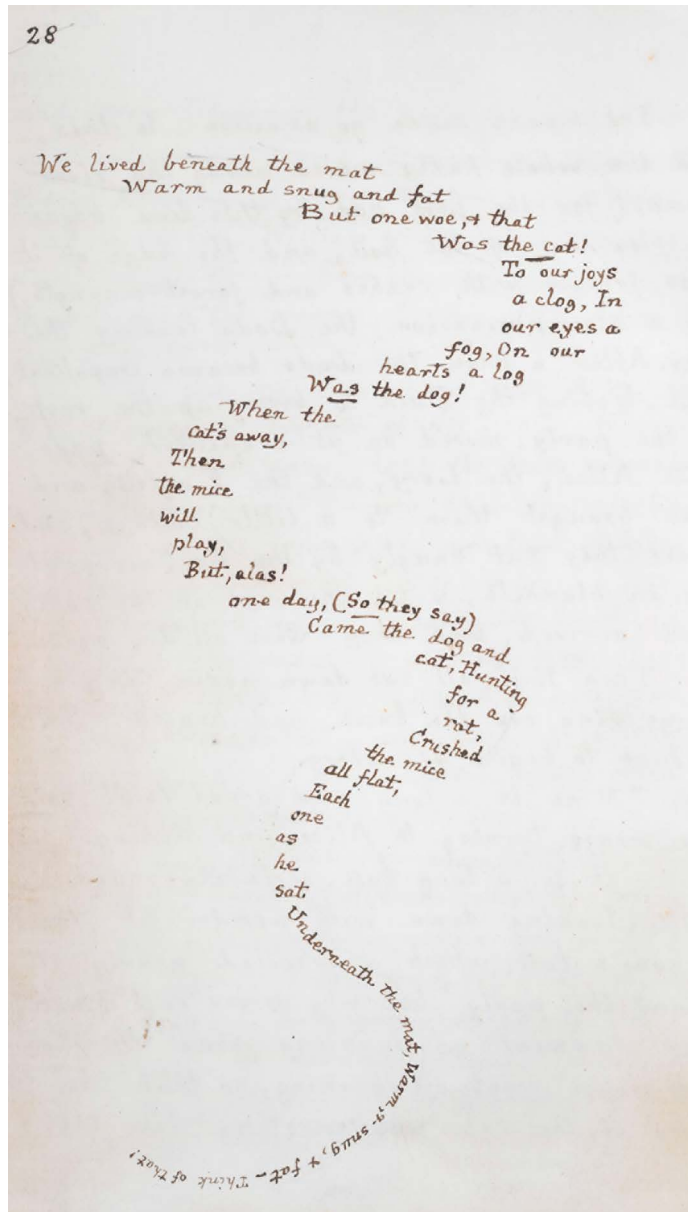
text, and thus play a secondary role. However, it is now agreed that visual narratives take on meanings of their own, although always read in relation to the written text (Kress, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) through synergistic relationships (Sipe,

1998). Sartori states in this regard that words and images are able to reinforce and complement each other (Sartori, 2014). The illustration of texts as well as the commentary of images allow the multiplication and enrichment of the meanings conveyed. The image connects to the written texts but each maintains its functional autonomy and collaborates with the other in the construction of the narrative (Dallari, 2008).

A privileged space for this collaboration between texts and images are the picture books (Nodelman, 1988; Lunn, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In picture books, images and words can interact in unpredictable ways. Each of the two languages acts along two parallel narrative lines (Schulevitz, 1985). Word and image intertwine bringing specific content (Moss, 1990), without which understanding and interpretation of the text could not be comprehensive (Campagnaro & Dallari, 2013).

Texts and images sharing the space of the page can interact in multifaceted ways in which they continue to challenge each other producing new narrative modes. Images and words renounce to the classic manner of interaction based on the concept of translation, of words into images and images into words, moving towards the experimentation of new forms of dialogue. The text and the image 'dance' giving rise to the most diverse configurations: irony, paradox, symmetry, contrast, complementarity, parallelism, or even as an active relationship in absentiam, in the case of the silent books (Terrusi, 2012).

Images sometimes emancipate themselves from words by going beyond the well-established tradition of silent books (Figure 12), which are often seen as the conclusion of an evolutionary cycle of autonomization of visual storytelling; as the ultimate triumph of images over words that brings us back to the beginnings of the history from which the discussion in this article started.

The following discussion will present some examples of how images can relate to texts while emancipating themselves from them.
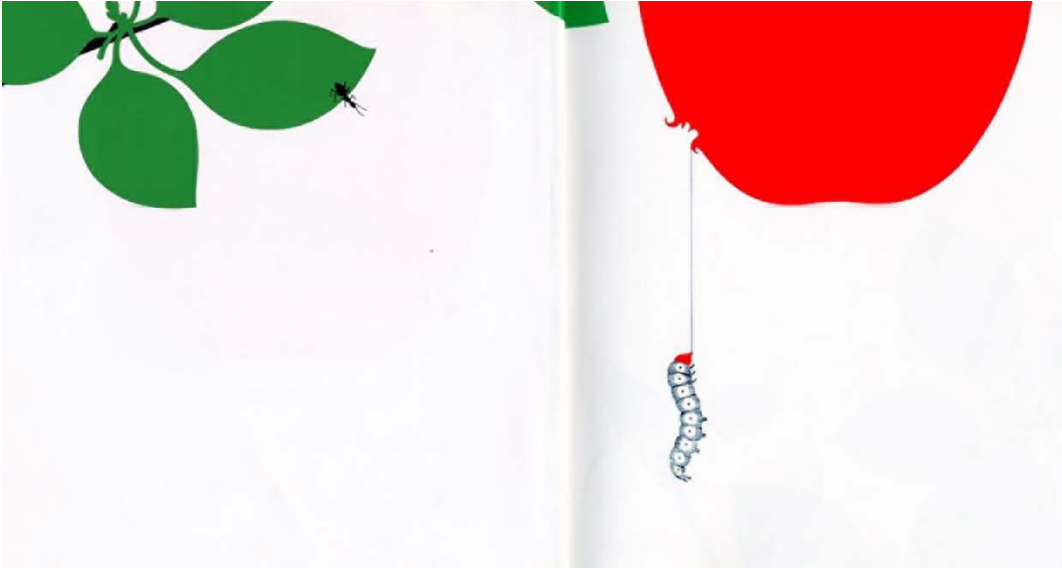
Fig. 12 Iela e Enzo Mari, *La mela e la farfalla*, 2004.

Pictures foretelling words

Actually, for any pre-school child-who has thus not yet been alphabetized regarding verbal languages-every picture book, despite containing written words, acts as a wordless book subject to multiple and personal interpretations, including those of the adult reader who offers the child his own interpretation of images and texts.

Every picture book in which texts and images are composed according to the traditional translation pattern (Figure 13) is thus a potential wordless book, to whose images the child can ascribe her own meanings, just as adults who present silent books to children through their own personal readings do, disproving or confirming what the child had already interpreted through his own personal interpretation.

Words denying pictures

The two narrative paths, that of drawn pictures and that of written words, can also run parallel without never meeting. In this case, the visual storytelling of images functions as an autonomous silent book on which a parallel textual narrative flows (Schwarcz, 1982). Two apparently autonomous and

C'ERA UNA VOLTA una bambina tanto bella, la più bella che si fosse mai vista.

Sua madre era pazza di lei, e la nonna ancora di più.

La mamma le aveva cucito una mantella di flanella scarlatta. Quel rosso faceva risaltare i suoi riccioli scuri, come il cuore nero del papavero spicca tra i petali color del fuoco...

La bambina lo indossava ovunque andasse; e nel villaggio in cui viveva tutti la chiamavano *Cappuccetto Rosso*.

Fig. 13 Helen Oxenbury, *Cappuccetto Rosso raccontato da Beatrix Potter, 2019.*

unrelated different stories seem to create a cacophonous composition that instead, surprisingly, adds new meanings and new levels of reading to both. In the book *Gli uccelli* (Figure 14) author and illustrator are different figures, each telling his own story, which when added to the other's stimulates an even more intense third narrative.

Pictures resignifying words

Pictures can thus give the written words new meanings, totally altering the sense of the narrative. In these cases, reading the texts assumes two different meanings depending on whether it is done with or without the support of images. As in the case of Cappuccetto Rosso. Una fiaba moderna by Roberto Innocenti (Figure 15), in which the narration of the classic story of Little Red Riding Hood is accompanied by images that change its features, updating not only the setting but also the meaning. The reading of one of the two narrative lines creates expectations in the reader (Nikolajeva

Fig.14 Germano Zullo and Albertine, *Gli uccelli*, 2010.

& Scott, 2006) that are punctually betrayed by the other, but it is precisely this dissonance that fosters the production of new meanings.

Words drawing pictures

When the text becomes a picture drawn through graphic compositions of the words different from the simple sequence of words, it acquires new character, following the tradition of calligrams described in the previous paragraphs. The rhythm of words on the page suggest the rhythm of reading, white spaces turn into silences, the intensification of characters on the page result in the acceleration of reading. In Il grande pesce by Aoi Huber-Kono (Figure 16), there is a dialogue between wordless pages and pages in which words become images, translating not only the story represented by the images but the sensations it conveys, an emotional narrative level that goes beyond the simple events of the story and becomes visual poetry.

Pictures becoming words

In continuity with another tradition, that of hieroglyphic languages, pictures can also aspire to become codified and

Fig. 15 Roberto Innocenti.
Cappuccetto Rosso. Una fiaba moderna, 2012.

standardised language in picture books. A significant example is Sandro Natalini's *Little Red Riding Hood* (Figure 17) in which the narrative unfolds in a long narrative plane, almost like a long folded papyrus in which a narrative map is drawn and in which events follow one another through a sequence of events entirely composed of pictograms. The only text present are the numbers marking the sequentiality of the scenes and a few onomatopoeic sounds describing the actions. The narrative plan seems to leave no room for words, which will however take their revenge on the back of the map...

Pictures decrypting words

Texts can also take different forms from the traditional words of the verbal language. Wordless works can also be considered those in which the alphabetic compositions take on an onomatopoeic role, in which they describe sounds instead of meanings. The meaning of the narration emerges through the interpretation of the images that make it possible to decrypt the alphabetical compositions, allowing the reader to attribute emotions to the reading of the texts on the basis of the events narrated by the pictures, as in the case

Fig. 16 Aoi Huber-Kono, *Il grande pesce*, 2007.

Fig. 17 Sandro Natalini, *Cappuccetto Rosso*, 2019.

of Emanuela Bussolati's picture books (Figure 18) in which a text without meaning surprisingly takes on meaning thanks to the clues provided by the pictures.

Words revealing pictures

In the same way that pictures help to reveal the meaning of words, words can also return the favour by suggesting
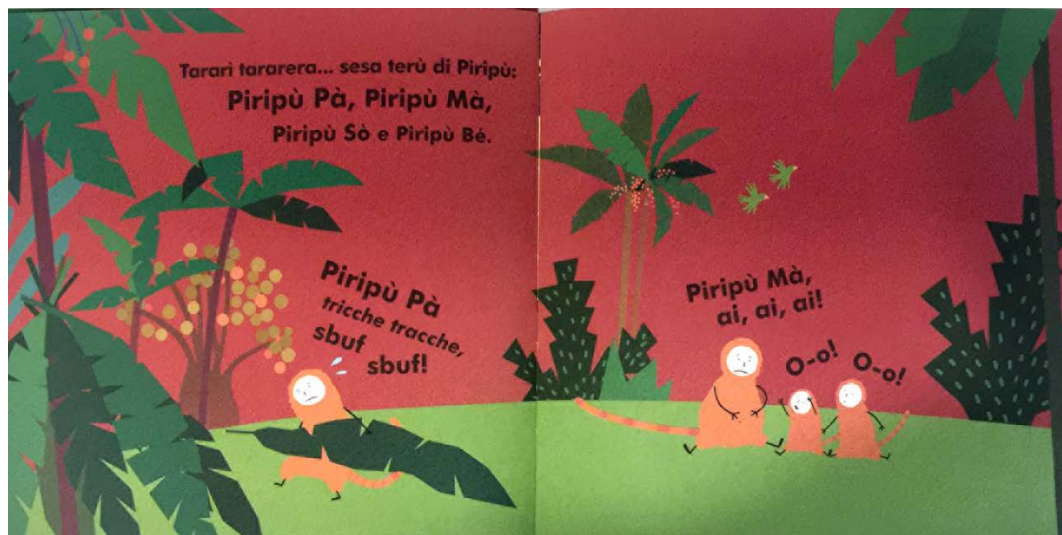
Fig. 18 Emanuela Bussolati, *Piripu Bibi*, 2020.

hints for reading the pictures. Thus an apparently picture-less book like Bruno Munari's Cappuccetto Bianco (Figure 19) turns out to be a book based on pregnant images, so cumbersome that they become practically unreadable. The words confer meaning to the wide white spaces of the pages, dissolving the ambiguity of a graphic composition that seems to privilege words, then discovering that the weights between the presence of the text and the absence of the image surprisingly are reversed.

Pictures teaching words

The introductory role that images play in confronting words is stated in Leo Lionni's series *Disegni per parlare* [Drawing for Talking] published in Italy by Emme in 1991 (Figure 20). These small wordless booklets present a series of scenes that give, both the young reader and the adult who interacts with the child through the books, cues on which to base stories, relationships, discourses with the greatest degree of freedom (Serafini, 2014). The title of the series seems to contradict the concept of the silent book to be read solely through images, inviting instead to use the absence of the written word as a space of freedom for the spoken word (Figure 21).

Fig. 19 Bruno Munari, *Cappuccetto Bianco*, 1999

Stamattina ci siamo svegliati e, aprendo la finestra, siamo stati accecati da tanto
bianco, la neve era caduta durante tutta la notte e aveva coperto ogni cosa.

Mai vista tanta neve!
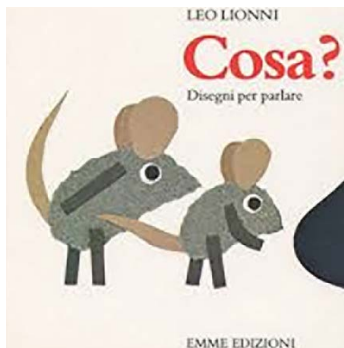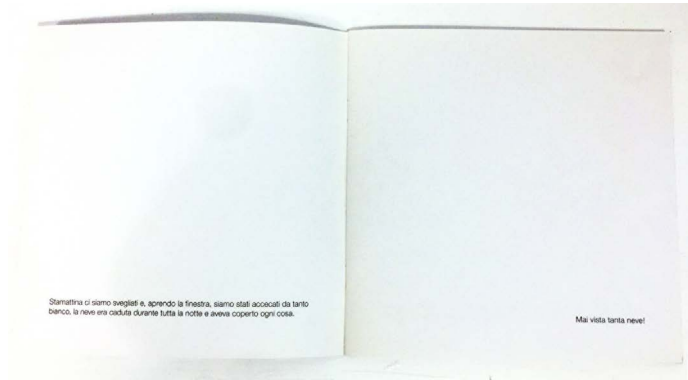
Fig. 20 Leo Lionni, *Disegni per parlare*, 1991.

Fig. 21 Leo Lionni. *Chi? Disegni per parlare*, 1991.

Words trivialising pictures

In the most recent re-edition of Leo Lionni's series (Figure 22), the title *Disegni per parlare* [Drawings for talking] (1991) is lost on the cover and the series is renamed *Due topolini curiosi* [Two curious mice] (2017). This difference is not of secondary importance as the words that are lost on the cover, and that invites the reader to use the book and its lack of words as a stimulus for the imagination of the
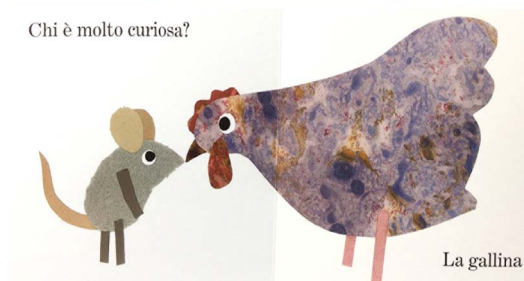
Fig. 22 Leo Lionni. *Due topolini curiosi*. 2017.

Fig. 23 Comparison of the same pages of the two editions, 1991 and 2017.

reader and for his or her ability to learn verbal language, are compensated by the insertion of texts inside. What were once freely interpretable silent scenes on which endless and ever-changing stories could be plotted from time to time become now fixed dialogues, defined once and for all. The printed words so imposed limit the interpretive possibilities by trivialising personages and scenes, which in the end result in tereotypes and clichés linked to the personalities of the protagonists. The irruption of words in wordless work leads to a weakening of its narrative potential and perhaps, by simplifying and trivialising the content, also its quality (Figure 23).

CONCLUSIONS

This article discusses the possible relationships between pictures and words within the different forms of visual communication, starting from historical aspects and ending with the application of the same interactive modes observed within historical case studies to the field of picture books, especially those related to children's literature.

In particular, it has highlighted the features of wordless works and of those in which the presence of the written word triggers virtuous relationships capable of revealing the value of the image. This is obviously the case with silentbooks, which the article briefly mentions but intentionally does not deepen, although it highlights how the inclusion of words on a silent book unquestionably undermines its potential (Figure 23). The article prefers to focus on other declinations of wordless works such as books in which the written text does not recall words but sounds (Figure 18), in which drawn images replace words according to codified linguistic patterns, as in the case of pictograms (Figure 17), in which words become images acquiring the value of a pure graphic element within a complex composition that can thus be read as a particular declination of ambiguously wordless work (Figure 16). All these examples are discussed on the background of the cultural-historical knowledge presented in the first part of the article. As a result, the continuity between the text-image relationships of the picture books and those of the historical case studies becomes evident. The visual poetry Il grande pesce by Aoi Huber-Kono descends from Greek technopaegnia and from concrete poetry (Figures 10, 11), the pictograms in Cappuccetto Rosso by Sandro Natalini recall the mode of communication of hieroglyphic languages (Figure 2), Cappuccetto Bianco by Bruno Munari (Figure 19) mocks the reader by presenting itself as a pictureless book but forcing the reader to look further, seeking images in the white space of the page through imagination.

In the silent books (Figure 12) we can recognise the conclusion of an evolutionary cycle of autonomisation of narration

through images that brings back to the beginnings of the history from which the discussion in this article started (Figures 1, 4, 5, 6) and the acknowledgement of the high quality that images have always had throughout history, produced to be works in themselves, and not as a support for texts (Figures 8, 9); therefore to be wordless works, where the lack of a text leads back to a concept of the picture as a visual product aimed solely at aesthetic enjoyment and the structure of the pagination stimulates an organisation of images in sequence, the ideal support for a form of narration, obviously exquisitely visual.

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PERFORMATIVE READINGS
WARJA LAVATER'S WORDLESS TALES

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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 fur 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 remembered[1]. 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

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 *Basilius Presse* in Basel. Also in 1962, Basilius 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 *Basilius Presse* (Basel) and *Editions Schlegl* (Zurich). In the early 1970s, Lavater began experimenting

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 works[2]. 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 confusion[3] (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 French[4]] (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
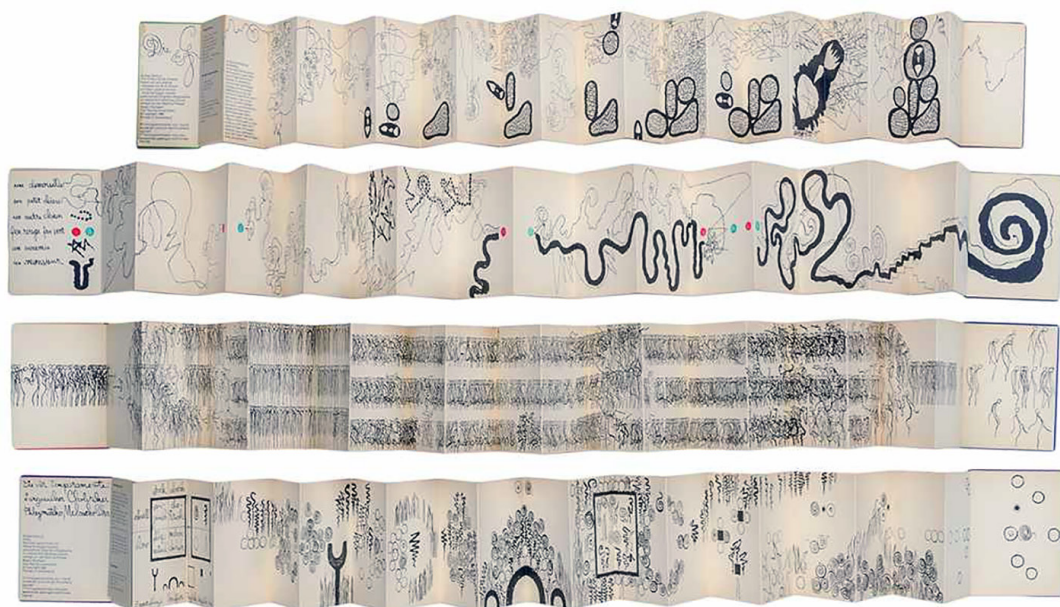
reader himself becomes a narrator who renews the orality of the story by adapting it to his own experience and sensitivity. The code is made up of elementary signs, easy to understand and that do not require special knowledge: it is a universal code that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. 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 French[5]] (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 French[6]] (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.
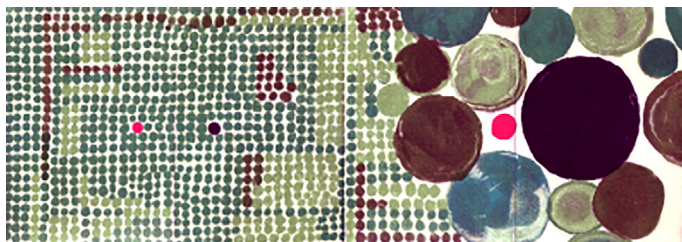
Fig. 5 Warja Lavater. *Little Red Riding Hood is in front of the wolf lying on the bed*; *The wolf devours Little Red Riding Hood*. Warja Lavater (1963). *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Maeght.
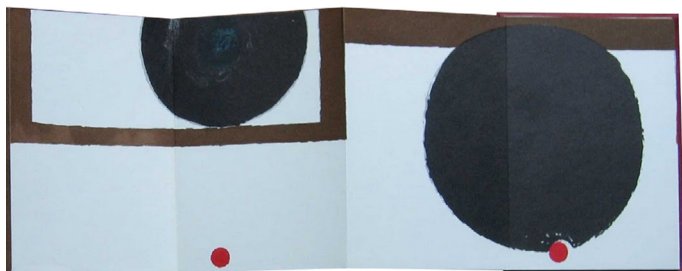
Fig. 6 Warja Lavater. *The hunter faces and kills the wolf*. Warja Lavater (1963). *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*. Paris: Maeght.

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 French[8]] (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 La-
vater; 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 print-
ed in 1962 simultaneously by *Basilius Presse* and the *Mu-
seum of Modern Art* of New York City. The original draw-
ing 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 ar-
row, governor's castel, ship), 2 locations (lake waves, for-
est). 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 ocher dots; the crossbow and ar-
row are the only figurative elements. Let's see the devel-
opment 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 jus-
   tifies 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 nocks 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.
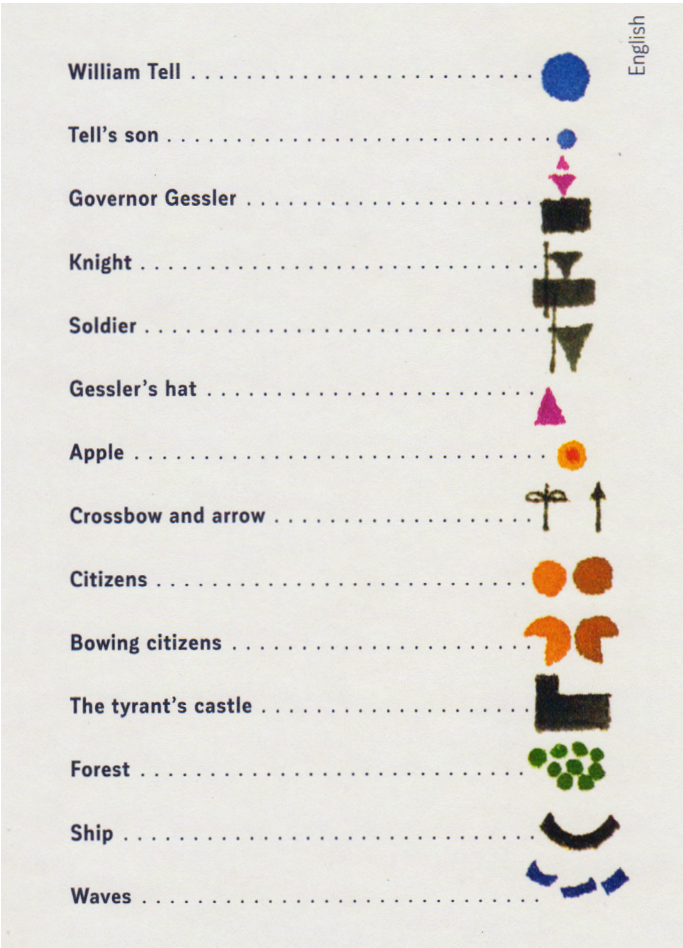
and women of the castle), 3 objects (the spindle, the castle, the door) and three settings (the leafage, the roses, the centenary forest) (Figure 14). In this work there is no correspondence between the colors, shapes, and roles of the characters. Round shapes prevail; warm/cold colors do not correspond to the role of opponent/adjuvant. 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.
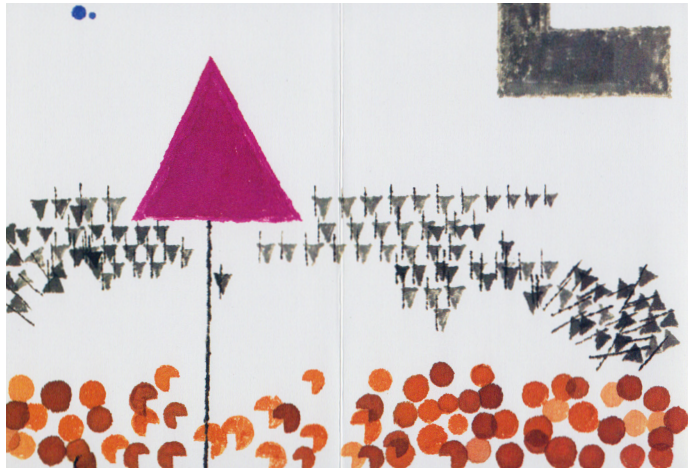
Fig. 9 Warja Lavater, *Tell and son refuse to kneel; Tell justifies his action*. Warja Lavater (1962). Wilhelm Tell. Basel: Basilius Presse.
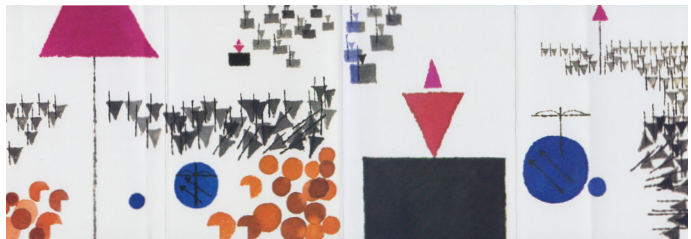
Fig. 10 Warja Lavater, *Gessler proposes the challenge of the apple; Tell nocks the arrow; Tell centers the apple and shows the second arrow*. Warja Lavater (1962). Wilhelm Tell. Basel: Basilius Presse.

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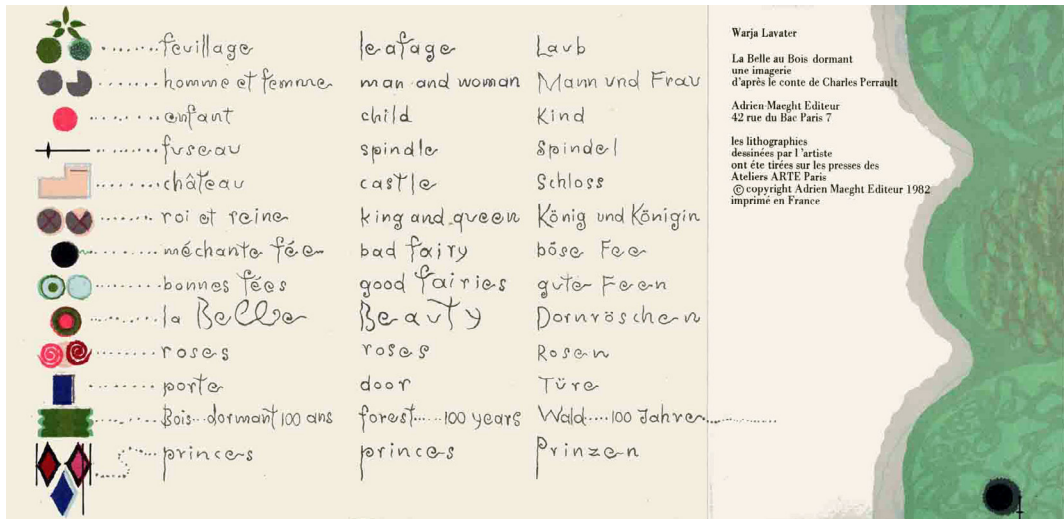
Fig. 14 Warja Lavater, *Legend and colophone*. Warja Lavater (1982). La Belle au Bois Dormant. Paris: Maeght éditeur.

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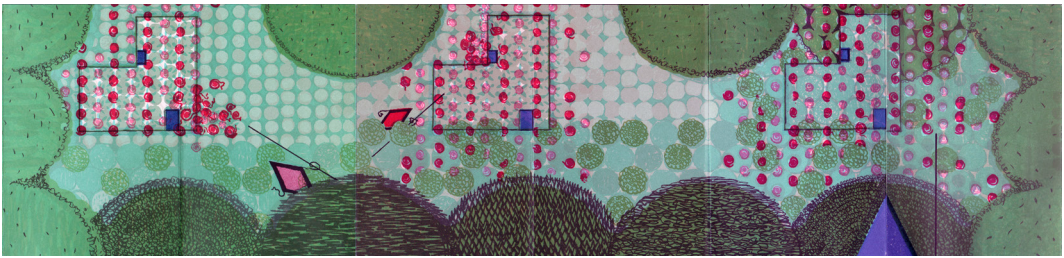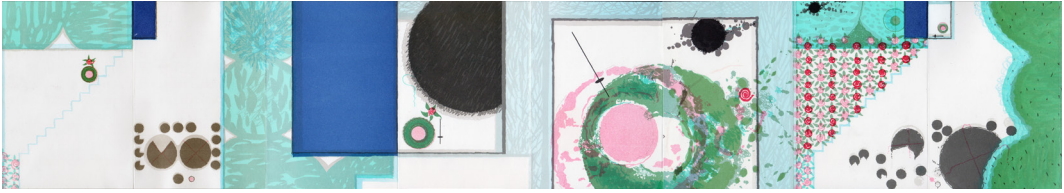
Fig. 17 Warja Lavater, *Belle walks to the attic door; Belle the bad fairy with the spindle; Belle pricks herself and sinks into deathly sleep; everyone in the castle falls asleep.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. Paris: Maeght éditeur (above).

Fig. 18 Warja Lavater, *Vegetation engulf the castle; the first prince tries 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.

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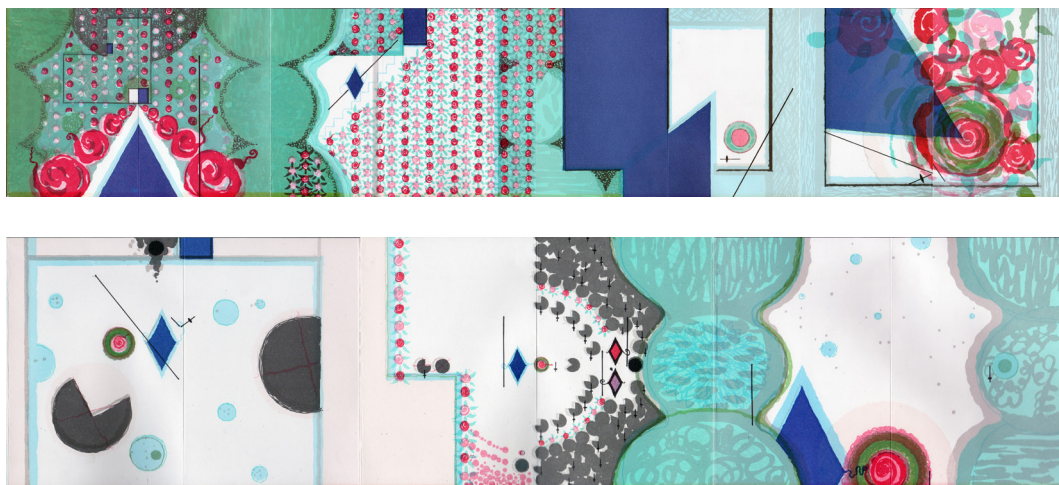
Fig. 19 Warja Lavater, *The third prince approaches the castle; the prince climbs the stairs; the prince enters the attic and bows to Belle; the prince kisses Belle and brings her back to life.* Warja Lavater (1982). *La Belle au Bois Dormant. Paris:* Maeght éditeur (above).

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 dépliaient, 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 'péripéties' (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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'CAPTIONS NOT INCLUDED'
NOTES ON THE ARCHITECTS AND 'THEIR' IMAGES

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Architects not only produce images of their projects but also take pictures of the reality around them, eventually appropriating of pictures made by others. In particular, this process of mediated assimilation of reality is quite hard to define as it follows many different criteria that tend to turn the pictures themselves into analogical devices oriented to the design development. Often, a fundamental step of the process is to make them wordless images by removing (intentionally or not) the caption. This action opens the pictures to a wide range of interpretations and uses (as well as misinterpretations and abuses) that are part of the omnivorous creative process of the architects. In order to frame the phenomenology of this process in the extended field of the 20th century art production, this article proposes a chaotic assemblage of major and minor episodes whose considerations indirectly reflects both the mostly unconscious process of the architects and the 'under-construction' mental scheme of the author. In this sense, this early, partial, subjective map provides no answers but questions and conjectural work-areas to be tested through further connections and developments.

AS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF THEIR EDUCATION

As a fundamental part of their education, architects have been drawing (and shooting photos, videos, and so on) to assimilate the world around them for centuries. During his European travels in 1907 and 1911, the young Edouard Jeanneret recorded a huge number of photographs and pictures in his notebooks, not too differently from his many predecessors. As Gresleri writes,

> what makes Jeanneret's journey different from that of his contemporaries at the *Ecole*, from the tradition of the Grand Tour, is properly that precise awareness of being able to start over that continually emerges from the pages: the notes, the sketches traced, the measures taken are not ends in themselves, they are not part of the culture of travel: they cease to be a diary to become a project (Gresleri, 1991, p. 7).

> Like the mysterious vagabond of Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, who rakes and renames broken objects along the streets of New York to re-found human language (and indirectly the meaning of the world), Le Corbusier gathered fragments from the past to design the new world, connoting, for example, seashells, stones and consumed bones as *objets à réaction poétique*.

> Besides the 'monumental' case of Le Corbusier, a sort of 'architectural world-building' is always a fundamental step in the preliminary conception of an architectural project, although with different proportions and tools. Most of my colleagues currently working as architects share a similar design practice. When they start a new project, they create a folder on their computer and fill it with not only the documents concerning the site but also digital pictures of potential references, precedents and inspirational images that are selected to frame and support the conception, the formal development or the communication of the project itself. Most of these pictures are quickly downloaded from the Web and often saved with self-generated numerical

Fig. 1 Paul Auster, David Mazzucchelli, Paul Karasik, *City of Glass*, 2004 (*Città di vetro*, Bologna, Coconino Press, 2005, p. 74).

codes as name. With this modality, the Web reveals to be a source that favours the dissociation between an image and the information on its content. Although images can be occasionally renamed with a few words to associate essential data to them, they are mainly wordless images that the architects assimilate and reuse in a free, random, often superficial when not distracted way.

This practice is not a novelty. Due to the difficulty to travel, architects' approach to reality was often mediated by visual and textual media. Although there is always someone, from Isidore of Seville to Adolf Loos, who distrusts of images' power to transfer knowledge and truth, architects favor visual tools to develop their projects. Except some who seek for inspiration in literature or use writing as a pre-design or design tool (Corbellini, 2016), architects prefer text to words when this appears to be a more effective or quicker means than drawing to illustrate something (Forty, 2004, p. 38), when they have to deal with pedagogical tasks (Colonnese, 2019) or when their pictures require a caption or an *èkphrasis* (Cometa, 2011). Anyway, modern architects seem to have a conflictual relationship with captions. Sometimes, their writing is nothing more than a huge caption below their beloved pictures. Sometimes they neglect or completely ignore the captions. They generally aspire to let the pictures 'speak' for themselves, with no words to guide their reception, up to using them as an analogical mirror of the design concept.

These generic claims would require the support of objective data, for example statements by architects or statistical data about their attitude towards the images. By the way, the deluge of images produced by books and magazines, by cinema and television and, by the World Wide Web exerts enormous pressure on all the productive contexts, altering practices and definitions established over time. Think of the importance the pictures borrowed from different disciplinary fields or artistic practices as icons to explain the philosophy – definitely, a late 20th century architects' necessity (Mitrović, 2021) that moves the design.

In such a dynamic, 'slippery' context, this article follows an intuitive concatenation of free and unconscious reflections on the practice of architecture design. Consistently with the topic of wordless images, the following considerations on contemporary architects and their use of pictures in the concept design process are presented in a fragmentary form, a sort of surrealist *cadavre exquis* played on the author's personal

Fig. 2 Marc-Antoine Mathieu, *Otto, l'home réécrit* (*Otto, l'uomo riscritto*, Bologna, Coconino Press, 2016, p. 55).

repository of pictures and memories. Like in the game, each fragment, arbitrarily chosen among many others, acquires a specific sense from the relationship with those that precede or follow it and contributes to compose only a small part of a wider, open network, a mutable landscape of visual knowledge.

AT THE 2012 VENICE BIENNALE

At the 2012 Venice Biennale, the Swiss architect Valerio Olgiati proposed the installation *Pictographs - Statements of Contemporary Architects*, which explores the ambiguous and complex *Common Ground* (the title of 2012 edition of the Biennale) of inspiration and imagination of architects. As Olgiati himself writes,

some collect images of memories, inspirations and atmospheres. Others talk by collecting images of analysis, explanations or manifestos. And yet others explain principles of their own architecture or simply show the things they

like, consciously or unconsciously. It is about the visual world stored in the head of architects (Olgiati, 2015, n.p.).

On the occasion, he created a sort of large rectangular altar below a suspended white slab and invited 41 (grown to 44 in the catalog) colleagues to cover it with 3 to 10 pictures they reputed fundamental for their own work. Olgiati writes that:

the images are explanations, metaphors, foundations, memories and intentions. They are poetic and philosophical avowals. They reveal a personal perspective on thoughts. They show the roots of architecture and expectations concerning projects. Conscious and unconscious (Olgiati, 2015, n.p.).

While in the distance the white surface expresses order and unity, approaching the 323 photographs reveals a chaotic world of forms which have only their materiality and size in common. More than 44 'imaginary museums', as Olgiati suggests, the installation looks like a single museum of the architects' imagery. Photographs of ancient and modern architecture, of drawings and models, of objects and fabrics, of maps and landscapes, of one's personal travel notebooks, of friends and the architects themselves, occasionally mimicking the subject of a painting (see Hans Koolhoff posing like Gaspard Friedrich). Some look antithetic to any architectural idea; others are just provocations chosen to demonstrate the limits of such an iconic approach.

At the exhibition, the pictures presented no caption, except the label that indicated the architect who had selected them, raising questions on their sense and their mutual relationship. This approach is confirmed by the vertical format catalogue (Olgiati, 2013), where each photograph occupies one page and is accompanied by the name of the architect and a fraction indicating the sequential number of the photograph. On the contrary, the book published two years later (Olgiati, 2015) presents an additional brief biography of each architect and, most of all, captions revealing the subject of each picture. This presence has the effect of the puzzle solutions at the end of a magazine, confirming or denying the

Fig. 3 Valerio Olgiati, *Pictographs - Statements of Contemporary Architects*, 2012, Venice. Detail of the pictures chosen by Alejandro Aravena (pages from his travel sketchbooks). Photo by the author.

hypotheses developed by the readers. But there is more. In the passage from the exhibition to the catalogue and then to the book, one witnesses the weakening and normalization of the pictures. By losing proximity to the other photos and then their mystery, they also lose the power to evoke fantastic scenarios and to demonstrate the innumerable and daring ways an architect can use them.

IN 1975, JEAN GIRAUD "MOEBIUS"

In 1975, Jean Giraud, later known as Moebius, published a serial on *Metal Hurlant* magazine. The comic, which today would be labeled as a fantasy, is called *Arzach*. The peculiarity of the comic is that it is free of balloons. It develops in 4

short stories of 8 pages each but is exclusively composed of pictures, without even those short texts that occasionally appeared in silent movies to provide some essential information. Moreover, the word *Arzach*, the only text of the work, is written differently each time, almost declaring the unreliability of words.

This way of narrating through images, which Moebius will often apply, not only exalt the centrality of images and entrust the reader with the task of interpreting the sequence of pictures, like in an open work, but is also the result of a particular methodology that the artist will consolidate over the years. In the first instance, Moebius creates some key-pictures. These work as a sort of key-section or directrix which, in Descriptive Geometry, constrains the development of a complex surface or, to stay in the artistic field, as the key-frames of the head animator that the 'in-betweeners' use to produce all the intermediate positions necessary to create the illusion of movement.

The methodology of Moebius is shared by several artists. As known, the dreams that Federico Fellini (2020) noted down in small notebooks have often guided the shooting of his inscrutable movies, postponing the task of 'discovering' a consistent story in the midst of miles of film to post-production editing. Like all constraints, the presence of these key-pictures can be a problem, especially when it comes to coordinating the efforts of hundreds of people grappling with the production of a film, like in the practice of Japanese Studio Ghibli. In *10 Years with Hayao Miyazaki*, Kaku Arakawa (2019) reveals that during the production of Ponyo, there was this watercolour of the main character riding huge waves transfigured into fishes that Miyazaki struggled to translate in a scene for the film. He knew it was necessary but did not know exactly how to place such a scene within the plot, which in the meantime was already in an advanced stage of production.

I recently discussed this working methodology with the Italian artist and architect Manuele Fior, who confirmed that some of his graphic novels were born around a few key-

Fig. 4 Manuele Fior, Approaching
Le Corbusier's Hospital in Venice
(Fior, 2019, pp. 107, 109, 113).

visions, as well (Colonnese, 2021). In some cases, the pictures
produced appear mutually distant, almost alien to each oth-
er and yet they ask to be somehow linked by the thread of a
single story. At that point, the job is to uncover, like a detec-
tive, the story of the characters, to understand what led them
(or rather will lead them) to that sort of meeting-point. It is
therefore a question of adding an *a-posteriori* text, first simple
captions, then pieces of a dialogue and, little by little, every-
thing to the details, like an architectural project.

ASSOCIATING A TEXT WITH AN IMAGE

Associating a text with an image is a common operation
today. Consider the phenomenon of *memes*. One can take a
photograph or a short clip of a celebrity from a film or TV-show

and add a text, the meaning of which is facilitated by his or her expression. In this sense, the former narratives and emotional power of the picture, which is excerpted from the original context and placed in another, enhance the effect of the words. Kenneth Goldsmith (2019, p. 240) recently pointed out that the *meme* is anything but new. Inspired by the cinematographic techniques popularized by Guy Debord, the director René Viénet made two films according to the principle of 'detouring' by adding a new soundtrack to existing movies, in this case from 1970s popular cinema. But it is possible to go back and think of Marcel Duchamp's Dadaist *Readymade*, which revolutionized art with a few clever moves (Bonfante, 2017).

On April 10, 1917, Duchamp chooses and buys a ceramic *pissoir*, takes it to the first exhibition of the newly formed Society of Independent Artists in New York, turns it upside down, places it upon a pedestal, calls it *Fountain*, and signs it with the pseudonym of R. (Richard) Mutt (in agreement with both the *J.L. Mott Iron Works* plumbing and sanitary ware shop, where the *pissoir* was purchased, and the protagonists of *Mutt and Jeff*, a very popular comic strip). *The Blind Man* issue of May 1917 shows the photograph shot by Man Ray, unsigned, with the caption "The exhibit refused by the Indipendent". On the front page, a text reads:

Fig. 5 *The Blind Man* 2, 1917, pp. 4-5.
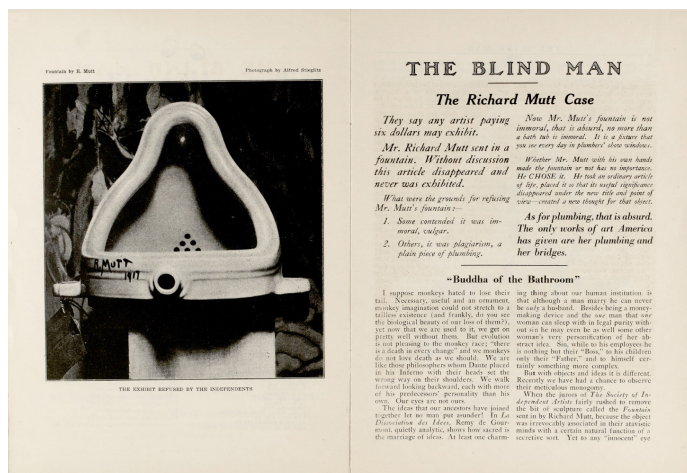
Whether Mr. Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not is irrelevant. He chose it. He has taken an ordinary element of existence and arranged it in such a way that the utilitarian meaning disappears under the new title and the new point of view – he has created a new thought for this object (*The Blind Man* 2, 1917, p. 5).

In addition to the de-contextualization and the podium, the title is fundamental to transform the meaning of the *pissoir.* In ancient times, works such as paintings and sculptures did not have a title. It was the need to describe them in the lists of the collections (and to move, buy, sell or inherit them) that led to the introduction of the titles (and then of captions on the museums' walls). In this sense, the fact that a building can have a 'name' but almost never a 'title' could be tied to its intrinsic immobility, besides its representative ambiguity (Rocca, 2009).

Although the titling of pictorial works is earlier, Gombrich noted that titration is a by-product of the mobility of images and that "the relationship between images and words, between works of art and their headings or titles, has undergone many changes in the history of art, but only in the 20th century has it really become a problem" (Gombrich, 1985, p. 213).

Obviously, this approach exalts the idea over the production of the work itself. The materiality of the work and the artist's technical skill suddenly become secondary, opening the door to Conceptual Art. But it also tells us that the world of shapes and images that we have before our eyes is available to be transformed and reused. The pictures without captions that Winfried Georg Sebald (2001) included in novels such as *Austerlitz*, which is incidentally dedicated to modern architecture, are an indirect example of the power of the artist's gaze. Sebald used to visit small markets, to buy these anonymous photos from old family photobooks, and to 'overwrite' their history with original narratives. In this way, he turned them into documents of a literary fiction that indirectly challenge the reader's faith in images. As Nicola Ribatti (2013, p. 1, my translation from Italian) writes, "the interaction and

Fig. 6 W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 2001 (Milano, Adelphi, 2002, p. 87).

no ancora molte scatole contenenti rullini, un'ab-
bondante scorta di carta da stampa e macchine fo-
tografiche alla rinfusa, tra le quali una Ensign, come
quella che più tardi avrei posseduto anch'io. In ge-
nerale, a suscitare sin dall'inizio il mio interesse so-
no stati la forma e il carattere conchiuso degli og-
getti: lo slancio verso l'alto di una ringhiera, la sca-
nalatura di un architrave in pietra, l'intreccio incre-
dibilmente preciso degli steli in un fascio d'erba
secca. A Stower Grange ho stampato centinaia
di queste fotografie, di forma per lo più quadrata,
mentre mi è sempre parso sconveniente volgere l'o-
biettivo sulle singole persone. Nel lavoro di foto-
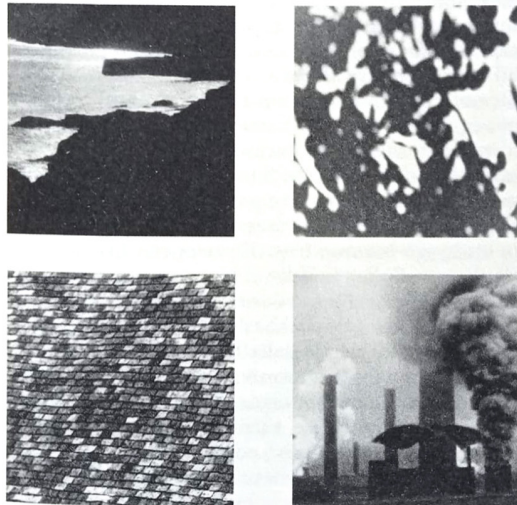
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interference between text and image open up a *Zwischen-
raum*, an intermediate (and 'intermedial') space in which the
extra-linguistic dimension of the drive finds its own 'plastic
form'". This gap between text and image "intends to question
the indexical function of photography and, at the same time,
highlights how the perception of images is closely linked to
the dynamics of desire" (Ribatti, 2013, pp. 17, 18, my transla-
tion from Italian).

IN DECEMBER 1927, ABY WARBURG

In December 1927, Aby Warburg begins to compile his encyclopaedic project called *Mnemosyne* in the rooms of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek, Hamburg. He composes a visual atlas with nearly 1000 pictures pinned on 40 wooden panels covered with black fabric. The pictures from all kinds of printed sources are organized into 14 categories with arbitrary titles, from *Coordinates of memory* to *The age of Neptune*. Above all, Warburg places no captions below the pictures but rather accompanies them with short texts, leaving great freedom of interpretation to those who observe them. *Mnemosyne* was certainly born as a reaction to the stimuli aroused by the increasing diffusion of printed images and their uncontrollable association in the pages of newspapers and magazines, but it also has the merit of promoting a deep reflection on the methods of art history.

Warburg's discourse on images (on their endogenous semantic value and on the exogenous value activated by the context) feeds Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology* and gradually shifts from the faculties' classrooms to the streets. Decades before inspiring the 1980s "Iconic Turn" and the rise of the Visual Culture (Mitchell, 1986), it is critically assumed by the Independent Group and its British counterculture activity in the post-war years, which was fundamental in opening the Pop Art season. The Independent Group's activity gains visibility thanks to the *Parallel of Life of Art exhibition*, held in 1953 in the space of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. It consists of 122 photographic panels with photographic images hung in various ways. The pictures come from numerous sources and present different modalities, from macroscopic to microscopic and x-ray; above all, they show no caption, which is provided instead in the catalogue.

Among the curators of the exhibition, who not surprisingly prefer to define themselves as 'editors', are Alison and Peter Smithson. As architects, they also exerted their influence during the *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne*

Fig. 7 Independent Group, Peter and Alison Smithson, Nigel Henderson, Luigi Eduardo Paolozzi, *Parallel of Life and Art*, Catalogue of the Exhibition, 1953, n.p.

(CIAM) in 1953, causing the split that led to formation of Team X. They declare that they

> have selected more than a hundred images of significance for them. These have been ranged in categories suggested by the materials [Architecture, Calligraphy, Geology, Landscape, Movement, Nature, Primitive, Science Fiction, etc.], which underline a common visual denominator independent of the field from which the image is taken. There is no single simple aim in this procedure. No watertight scientific or philosophical system is demonstrated. In short it forms a poetic-lyrical order where images create a series of cross-relationships (Team X, 1953, as cited in Byrne, 2011, n.p.).

In the same years (July 1950-April 1953), the Roman architect Luigi Moretti personally designs and edits the seven issues of *Spazio* (Tedeschi, 2010). Conceived as a tool for the synthesis of the arts, the over-sized magazine often shows large photographs of sculptural, pictorial and architectural details without captions, indirectly promoting his own plastic, Neo-Baroque architecture. In fact, Moretti places a small numerical scheme on each double page that connects the captions grouped in a single column to the images based on

Fig. 8 Luigi Moretti, Dettagli della Fontana dei Fiumi, *Spazio* 3, 1950, pp. 16, 17.

their position. This simple stratagem, which distances the text from the images, manages to free them from their statute of representation and open their content to imaginative speculations that somehow favor a 'transfusion' between architecture, visual arts and scientific illustrations.

IN OCTOBER 1989, HERMAN HERTZBERGER

In October 1989, Herman Hertzberger is invited to talk at the Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (National Urban Planning Institute) in Palazzo Taverna, Rome. The conference is illustrated by black-and-white photographs of urban spaces full of people, generally from Italian towns and villages that Hertzberger uses to illustrate the concepts and purposes of his residential and school projects. A few years later, the same photographs illustrate twelve chapters focusing on human relations in urban space in the Italian edition of his *Lessons in Architecture* (Hertzberger, 1996). Most of the 763 figures in the book are photographs that Hertzberger himself took to record the use that men, women and children make of urban space. In this sense, many of the figures have no caption because their purpose is not to represent a place but rather an idea. In particular, he is interested in the potential of architecture to inspire

Fig. 9 Herman Hertzberger, Untitled photo of a street of France (Paris?) from *Lessons for Students in Architecture*, 1991 (Hertzberger, 1996, pp. 2-3).

social behaviours that are not only collaborative but also innovative, divergent, 'outside the box'.

This also applies to his architectures, often photographed post-occupancy to show the users' customization of the space rather than naked architectural surfaces. This idea translates into a formal research oriented to polysemous elements whose abstraction, proportion, size and material quality invite the appropriation, personalization and acceptance of individual needs as well as the imagination of children. It is no coincidence that to present a housing prototype in 1959, he had built a model made of matchboxes, which is both a critique to the monotonous post-war housing models and a demonstration of the possibility of 'hacking' common objects to suggest divergent behaviours (Hertzberger, 1959; Colonnese, 2020).

Hertzberger is a pupil of Aldo van Eyck, another founder of Team X, and certainly feeds on the culture of the Independent Group. Yet this use of photographs as diagrams or ideograms used instrumentally to demonstrate a thesis, which inciden-

tally features Rem Koolhaas' coeval research on New York and most of his following editorial production, can be considered a legacy of Le Corbusier. Although in *Vers une architecture* (1925) the photographs of silos and vehicles have concise captions, words and pictures constitute two almost independent texts that complement each other. This approach returns in the early volumes of his *Oeuvre Complete*, where the captions often do not indicate the place or the element depicted but the functions, the ideas behind it or even unfulfilled potentials. For example, a key-concept of his architecture such as the *promenade architecturale* is expressed in the caption of a picture of Villa Savoye's *toit jardin* (Boesiger, 1995, p. 30), which is 'distracted' from its representational role and used to illustrate an idea. In this sense, Le Corbusier –but also Rem Koolhaas could be mentioned for similar reasons– shows an unnatural critical attitude toward his own buildings. The fact that Pierre Jeanneret was the main responsible of the construction stages might have contributed to allow Edouard 'Le Corbusier' Jeanneret to consider his works mainly as concepts: a sort of never-ending design process revealed in his famous talks (Quetglas, 2001).

Fig. 10 Herman Hertzberger, *Repeated Living Cells, Maquette with matchboxes*, 1959 (Hertzberger, 1959, p. 277).
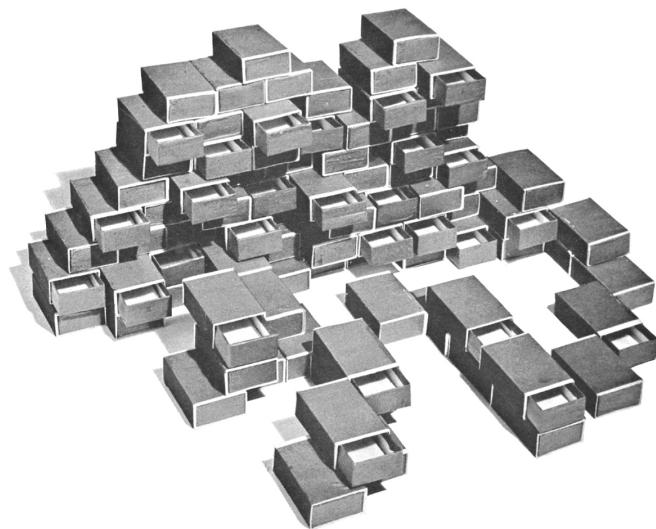
THE BRIEF EXAMPLES PRESENTED HERE

The brief examples presented here (and others could be found) are taken from different contexts and times and contemplate two different situations. In the former, the artists first create the pictures and then the story (and the meaning); in the latter, they appropriate and transform existing pictures by attaching a novel text. Architects work both ways. They create sketches and compositions and attribute them a place, a time and a program only later; or they appropriate existing places and figures, by drawing or photographing them, to introject them into their design process; they can also appropriate existing images and interpret them as analogical representations of the project itself. On the other hand, architects live in a constant liminal condition. They move on the threshold between art and science, oscillating between creative acts, in which they project fantastic images onto reality, and acts of rationalization, in which they geometrize and translate their visions into measured lines, data and numbers.

Architects' liminal condition is precarious and tiring. While industrial society asks them to formulate the design process in objective terms (and new tools come out every day

Fig. 11 Giancarlo De Carlo, Sketches of the subverting effects of the rock-cut architecture, 1989 (De Carlo, 1996).
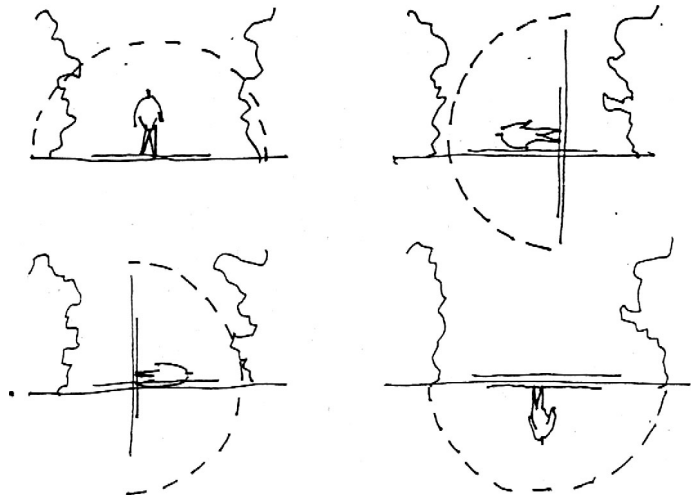
to optimize and speed up the engineering component), the creative thinking is often felt as an ambiguous, undefinable and unorthodox practice that require the subversion of consolidated hierarchies.

Enric Miralles (2020, n.p.) suggested the possibility that the beloved Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi was a character invented by the pen of Italo Calvino. This is obviously a temporal and dimensional paradox, a subversion of effective hierarchies, which however opens the doors to further possibilities, to paths not yet practiced. This is an example of the search for a key-image that is outside the conventional representations of reality and which contains the vision of a new world. Giancarlo De Carlo, an engineer-architect and Team X member, experimented with this sort of visions. Observing a huge tree covered with vines, once he said that, although it is obvious that the climber plants leans on the trunk, it would be much more interesting and fruitful for a designer to think the opposite, to think of the tree supported by the climber plants. This sort of static subversion is a way to ignore the force of gravity that will feed, for example, his projects for the museum in Salzburg and the Tower of Siena and the Urban Gates of San Marino (De Carlo, 1996, p. 39).

Jørn Utzon suggested to imagine the vision of an insect that flies between cups and bottles on a breakfast table to feel the space delimited by those surfaces (Weston, 2001). In this case it is a paradox of scale, quite common in architects who use models to explore their project. At the same time, it reveals the importance of using the shapes around us as models, as occasional, precarious representations of something that is distant or still in our mind. This approach had been explored by the Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters. In 1923, he constructed Haus Merz or *Merzbau* by assembling scraps and *objet trouvé*, which were intended to give them an aura through a new unity (Mindrup, 2014). The same approach is central in the work of architects such as Frank Owen Gehry, eventually acquiring an environmental connotation in recent decades. It is no coincidence that Olafur Eliasson argues that

Fig. 12 Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau, Hannover, 1933 (Mindrup, 2014).

the artist must have a gaze capable of transforming reality into models available to be transformed: "the idea that the world consists of a conglomeration of models carries a liberating potential as it makes the renegotiation of our surroundings possible" (Eliasson, 2007, p. 19).

THESE INVITATIONS TO SUBVERT

These invitations to subvert consolidated hierarchies are common in 20th century art and literature and became com-

mon in the post-war architecture research, when alternative and less-rational approaches to design were explored. In this sense, architects explored the opportunities provided not only by abstract compositions inspired by the vanguards' research but also by considering existing pictures out of their original context, depriving them of their 'natural' text and, somehow, of their 'statute of representation'.

The cases here presented concern with the production of original 'mute' pictures (Hertzberger and the comic artists), the appropriation of pre-existing objects (Duchamp) and pictures (Olgiati's colleagues and many others) to either open or readdress their interpretation and some techniques of re-orientation of their semantic potentials. Most of them share the ambition to involve the mind and body of the reader and, indirectly, of the designers themselves. Whereas a caption builds an expectation that orients the visual perception according to a comparison with a pre-existing concept, its absence calls for the reader's 'active cooperation' and individual intentionality, which have the power to modify the phenomenology of the perception itself (Searle, 2015, p. 37). Of course, each case shows a different way to hack the images and may hide different intents.

While Aby Warburg's and the Independent Group's experiments promote a contamination of the sources to test the artistic parameters and extend the visual culture to a larger audience, Moretti's photographic details contribute to reconnect the contemporary architectural research into the wake of antique and Renaissance masters. Generally, even when the caption is removed, another implicit and invisible caption is placed, like in the case of Hertzberger's photos associated to his projects or Le Corbusier's photo of his own building used to convey other interpretations. Although the architects' pictures Olgiati exhibited in Venice miss their caption, this is replaced by the name of the architect who chose them and this association (which implicitly requires that the reader knows about architect's ideas and production) does promote a multitude of thoughts and suggestions. It is no co-

incidence that on his professional website, Olgiati proposes a sequence of (his own) photographs of places and architectures made by others with no caption to explain this, eventually pushing himself to the borders of plagiarism to create a 'common ground' with (and intrigue) his potential clients. On the contrary, the captions of his second catalogue nail the pictures to their statute of representation, dampening their analogical or figurative potentials and actually betraying the anti-philological, 'hacking' modality the architects used them with. Eliasson's words are an implicit invitation to abolish prefigured captions and to conceive the world as an open work awaiting new interpretations and further interventions. An architect like Hertzberger shows how hacking a photograph, a pile of match-boxes or a canonical architectural piece are parts of the same rule-breaking attitude. The provocations of Miralles, De Carlo or Utzon are conceptual tools of such a creative agency, which implicitly implies the overwriting of a new caption over consolidated figures. In this sense, they may potentially work like the key-pictures of Moebius, Miyazaki or Fior, orienting the development of the design process and demonstrating that the eye of an architect engaged into a project is never 'innocent' and is always ready to manipulate reality or to invent a new one.

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UNSILENTLY *CRUSHING*: A DIDACTIC PROPOSAL THROUGH A WORDLESS NOVEL

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The article, moving from the preference of young people for stories that are characterized by crossmediality and multimodality, focuses on a genre that enhances the iconic code, setting aside the verbal one: wordless novel. Born in the 1920s, it continues to be widespread, allowing you to explore narrative universes in a new and inclusive way.

The article focuses on a pedagogical reflection on *Crushing*, a recent work by Sophie Burrows (2021), which addresses key issues for adolescents: fear of loneliness, lack of communication, desire to meet. Wordless texts have been promoted for years in the pedagogical field because they foster inferential processes and stimulate comprehension skills through the use of visual metaphorical constructs; they encourage the interpretive ability through five educational advantages: the adoption of a universal and democratic language; the activation of the reader's protagonism; hospitality understood as taking care of others; attention to diversity; and openness to beauty.

INTRODUCTION

When we think about *Wordless* books in the educational context, our thoughts inevitably turn to the legacy of the great maestro Bruno Munari. His *Pre-books* (2002) and *Unreadable Books* (2000) support parents and educators who are aware of the importance of introducing small children to books not only through the verbal code, but also through the iconic code: colours, forms and symbols that can excite them and immerse them in stories.

But pre-schoolers are not the only group we can work with to ensure that readers are fascinated by silent books: adolescents, too, whose daily communications assemble, observe, comment on and place the image at the centre of what has been termed the "society of homo videns" (Cambi, 2019, p. 126), are consumers of stories characterized by multiple languages. Young people are looking for polyphonic and polymorphic narratives and they are no longer tied to the verbal code alone, they need to see and to share. Out of this urgency arises the increasingly widespread contamination between genres, such as graphic novels, visual and audiovisual narratives, whose 'fluid' forms of fruition represent a way to re-establish the link between adolescents and reading. As Chambers (2020) has argued, the real novelties for adolescent readers emerge from literary techniques centred on crossmediality and multimodality.

What remains unchanged is their desire to find answers to the big questions and the identity-related issues typical of their age group in stories. In fact, adolescents, "liminal" individuals (Bainbridge, 2010), have a strong need to find stability and security and consequently they seek in narratives the emotions which are roiling that difficult period of transition, and of which they are not yet aware. They want to read about differentiation and autonomy, about anxiety, sadness, sex and love, but also about joy and epiphanies and spirituality, in order to understand who they are, what they want, and what they will become (Cortiana, 2021).

As evidenced by publishers' sales and attendance at book fair stands, comics are one of the most popular genres amongst young people today. The present contribution will focus on a genre of comic that is little known to non-experts but which lends itself to interesting pedagogical investigations: the genre of the wordless novel.

WORDLESS NOVELS

The wordless novel genre has its roots in the 1920s, when the German Expressionist movement chose this art form amongst others to protest against social injustices. The first book that can be ascribed to this genre is *25 Images of a Man's Passion* by Frans Masereel, successfully published in Europe in 1918. The genre also inspired the production of silent films, of which one of the most important was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) (Willett, 2005). Censored during the Nazi period, the genre resurfaced in the 60s and 70s, when wordless stories became a source of inspiration for several authors who have left their mark on the history of comics, including Will Eisner, the precursor of what today we call the graphic novel, and Art Spiegelman, whose acclaimed masterpiece *Maus* (1980) definitively consecrated the comic as a fully-fledged literary genre (Postema, 2014).

The wordless novel genre developed over the decades that followed in both America and Europe: some of these comics take the form of real graphic novels (Calabrese, 2017; Greco, 2014) that are stories of identity formation. One recent and particularly significant work, because of its reflections on intercultural identity formation (Forni, 2020, p. 101), is *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006): a story of emigration, in which the absence of words brings the reader face to face with the incommunicability the protagonist experiences, highlighting by means of that semiotic choice "exposure to the unknown, to the diverse, to the other, as well as acceptance of their space" (Vacchelli, 2019, p. 70).

Indeed, wordless novels have another specific characteristic compared to other types of graphic novel: the absence of the reference point constituted by the verbal code allows the images to reappropriate their intrinsic narrative potential, because "the visual information becomes the key communicator" (Postema, 2014, p. 314). Since comic book narration classically proceeds through the interaction and integration of verbal and iconic codes, the choice to entrust the entire weight of the story exclusively to the graphics, omitting dialogue altogether, is a compelling one. Which testifies to the expressive force of the images and their signifying power. And which also leaves greater space for interpretive freedom on the part of the reader, who is not guided or 'directed' by use of the verbal code but, on the contrary, is called upon to engage during the reading in a notable level of activity and participation in the process of constructing meaning. This acquires even greater value with stories of identity formation for adolescents such as *Crushing*, a recent work by the artist Sophie Burrows (2021).

CRUSHING

Crushing[1] is the story of two solitudes that brush against each other like millions of others in the indifference of a great metropolis. A romantic She who seeks love, a shy He who is afraid to face the outside world. The lives of the two protagonists run parallel, suffocated by the turmoil of city life to the point of shutting themselves away in the silence of their respective homes, where they are awaited by the only objects of their affections: a cat and a dog.

Burrows' choice of the silent novel is particularly interesting precisely because the story unfolds in a 'naturally' noisy context like that of a large metropolis.

The chaos of the city is entrusted entirely to the graphic code which represents sound effects, according to the typical

Fig. 1 The female character's pet (2021). Burrows, S. *Innamorarsi*. Milano: Rizzoli (2021).

Fig. 2 The male character's pet (2021). Burrows, S. *ibidem*.

convention of the comic whereby a written text effectively resounds only in the reader's head.

The total absence of dialogue also amplifies on the one hand, the feelings of loneliness and estrangement which the two protagonists experience; on the other hand, it reminds us of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of really talking to each other in a metropolitan context. Never has the expression 'deafening silence' been truly made visible the way it is in *Crushing*.

Fig. 3-4 Urban alienation generated by both noise and silence (2021). Burrows, S. *ibidem*.

Fig. 5 Red, the warm color of the man's beloved dog (2021). Burrows, S. *ibidem*.
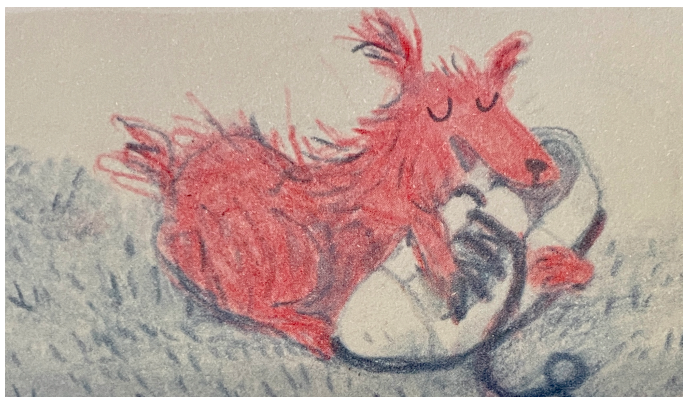
Particularly masterful is the use of the colour red to define all the emotional, or at any rate characterizing, elements of the two protagonists. These red elements literally light up the underlying greyness –graphic, psychological and existential– of the external and internal world the two future lovers inhabit.

Thus red is devoted to the only affection of the solitary male protagonist (his dog) or to the romantic dream of the female one. But red is also what makes the two characters

Fig. 6 Red, the warm color of the woman's romantic dream (2021). Burrows, S. *ibidem*.

uneasy, something that alters their colourless and repetitive daily lives, even if negatively, by 'setting them alight'.

Red is the singles chat from which she is hoping for a romantic encounter, but instead has to cope with explicit and offensive advances; red is the deafening atmosphere of the disco; and, finally, red is the chaotic and disordered traffic in which he and his bicycle find themselves trapped and from which the traffic accident that will lead to their meeting originates.

Fig. 7-8 Red, the disturbing color of the unwanted sexual advances and of the noisy, chaotic traffic (2021). Burrows, S. *ibidem*.

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The story narrated in *Crushing* opens to multiple reflections: on incommunicability, solitude, the tendency to withdraw into the world of social media, the isolation that is felt most acutely in a crowd and which worsened during the months of the Pandemic (it is worth noting that the work was completed in that period, as the author pointed out in an interview[2]), the desire for real human contact. All crucial issues for adolescents, who can find answers to the inquietude that accompanies them throughout this difficult phase of passage in this story.

The usefulness of a wordless novel is rooted, as explained in the introduction, in the appropriateness of choosing a genre which, because of its semiotic characteristics, is congenial to an age bracket of resistant readers, as adolescents appear to be today. The use of its iconic code, with its fluidity, malleability and openness, leaves ample space for the interpretive and expressive freedom young people claim today. Indeed, courses devoted to understanding wordless texts have been promoted for years in the pedagogical field (Batini, 2022) because they foster inferential processes and stimulate comprehension skills through the use of visual metaphorical constructs (Cardarello & Contini, 2012), thereby encouraging the interpretive differences that are fundamental for the creation of an inclusive discourse community (Fish, 1980) that valorizes different approaches and exchanges about the text.

To conclude, it is worth recalling the guiding principles of IBBY Italy[3], which puts into practice the idea of promoting reading in disadvantaged areas and with minors of different nationalities via the use of silent books. Zizioli (2017) reminds us that because of the way they are constructed and imagined, they present five educational advantages: the adoption of a universal and democratic language; the activation of the reader's

protagonism; hospitality understood as taking care of others; attention to diversity; and openness to beauty (pp. 45, 46). Silent books stimulate the initiative of the individual, by inclusively valorising their uniqueness and their interpretation, broaden their horizon of expectations and favour their acceptance of other points of view.

If this is possible in educational pathways with children who are non-literate because of their age or origin, it can equally be possible for young adults who choose to use words and images differently. The task of educators is to learn to observe and listen to this silent universe.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

1 The work was published in Italy by Rizzoli with the title *Innamorarsi* [Falling in Love] (2021) which rather banalizes the sense of the original English title.
2 *Crushing; A Conversation with Sophie Burrows*, Higher Education Channel TV (HEC-TV), available at: https://m.facebook.com/hectv/videos/crushing-a-conversation-with-sophie-burrows/1037481683765107/
3 www.ibbyitalia.it retrieved June, 28, 2022.

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VISUAL TELLING FOR A *BIBLIA PAUPERUM*
IMMERSIVE NARRATIVITY IN THE CHAPEL VIII AT SACRO MONTE IN VARESE

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Located along the slopes of the north-western pre-Alpine arc, the Sacrimonti, erected between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 18th century in the Piedmont and Lombardy areas, represent not only an important historical and artistic contribution to the Unesco World Heritage, but also some examples of real experiential, immersive and inclusive paths, designed to reach even the least literate users with a powerful didactic and catechetical message, without the need for any textual integration. The paper analyzes the architectural structure of the chapel VIII, *L'Incoronazione di Spine* [The Crowning with Thorns], and its interaction both with the total structure of the monumental path designed in 1604 by Bernascone on Monte Velate of Varese and with the sculptural group and the cycle of frescoes, revealing its nature as a real storyboard, aimed at narrating one of the most dramatic episodes of the Jesus' passion and at raising an empathic relationship with the faithful who observe the setting through the external openings.

INTRODUCTION

Located along the slopes of the north-western pre-Alpine arc, the Sacrimonti, erected between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 18th century in the Piedmont and Lombardy areas, together they constitute, not only an important historical and artistic contribution to the World Heritage Sites recognized by UNESCO for nine of them, an extraordinary testimony of the semantic power and didactic capacity that can be deployed with the sole use of visual communication. In fact, these monumental complexes show how landscape design, architecture, scenography composition, sculpture and painting can contribute to preparing what in today's language we would define as real experiential, immersive and inclusive paths, intended to reach even the least literate audience with a powerful message of a didactic and catechetical nature. In the spirit of the Counter-Reformation, a *Biblia pauperum* is therefore elaborated and effectively tested in the Sacrimonti, as an entirely iconological communicative model that, without any need for textual support, it is proposed as the Catholic answer to the claim of inclusiveness inherent in the German translation and Bible printed publication, which had supported and nourished the spread of Lutheran and Calvinist Protestantism in the lands beyond the Alps and in the Alpine valleys (Figure 1). This purpose is pursued through an operation of designing places that have very often been object of cult and popular devotion for centuries.

In 1565, just two years after the end of the Council of Trent, Galeazzo Alessi was commissioned to design the extension and transformation of a 15th century devotional path, which had been built in Varallo by the Franciscan friar Bernardino Caimi and the Valsesian architect Gaudenzio Ferrari, with the initial aim of proposing a substitute destination for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, in the face of the unexpected conditions of insecurity in the Mediterranean, now controlled by the Ottoman fleet and infested by Barbary pirates (Scotti, 2012). The articulation of the Varallo complex along a steep slope and

the consequent fatigue of the visitor in walking along it would have constituted, for the purpose of obtaining indulgences, the seal of its effectiveness as a replacement for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Alessi project sets off the end of this original topopoietic and topomimetic will of generate a 'elsewhere space' in the Sacro Monte, to transform it into a teaching and catechizing device at the service of Counter-Reformation orthodoxy, able to inculcate the Catholic faith's principles and dogmas even in the humblest classes (Quercioli, 2005).

In 1584, the year of his death, the Milan bishop Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, a prominent figure in the Counter-Reformation, visited Varallo and decided to place its construction under the direct control of the episcopal authority, together with the centralized management of devotional places in the Lombard-Piedmonts area. This control will then pass into the hands of

Fig. 1 In the spirit of the Counter Reformation, the architectural complex of Sacro Monte represents an entirely iconological communicative model of catechetical contents.
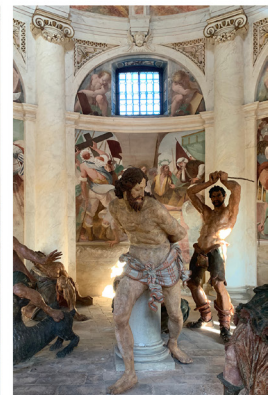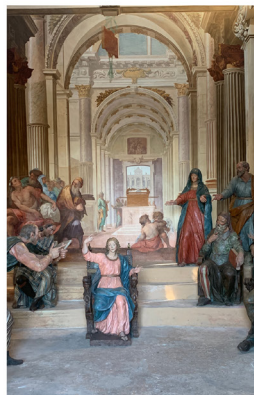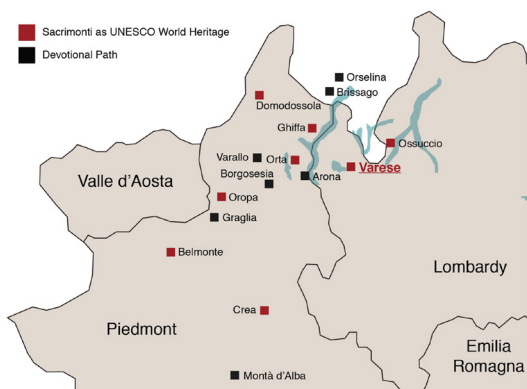
the bishop of Novara Carlo Bascapè, who will leave an even
more unified imprint on the spatial reorganization and on the
ways of using all the devotional paths, starting from the Var-
allo paradigm, albeit appropriately revised and modified. For
example, the exclusion of pilgrims from entering the chapels
and the obligation to observe the interior only from specific
points of view, corresponding to gratings and windows, is at-
tributable to the prescriptions of the Bascapè (Scotti, 2012),
an obligation that transforms the interior into real theatrical
sets, whose use is entirely governed by the laws of perspective
vision. From the point of view of the narrative contents, how-
ever, the *Libro dei Misteri* [Book of Mysteries], which collects the
corpus of Alessian drawings referring to the project for Varallo
(Alessi, 1974; Balestreri, 2012), already expresses in the title the
desire to translate into a precise architectural articulation the
prescriptions issued for the recitation of the Rosary by Sisto V
with the papal bull of 1571. Due to this adherence to the papal
dictate, this book ends up affirming itself as a real reference
handbook for the realization of the next Sacrimonti –Crea

Fig. 2 Front view of chapels and
the devotional path with the
main altitude value.
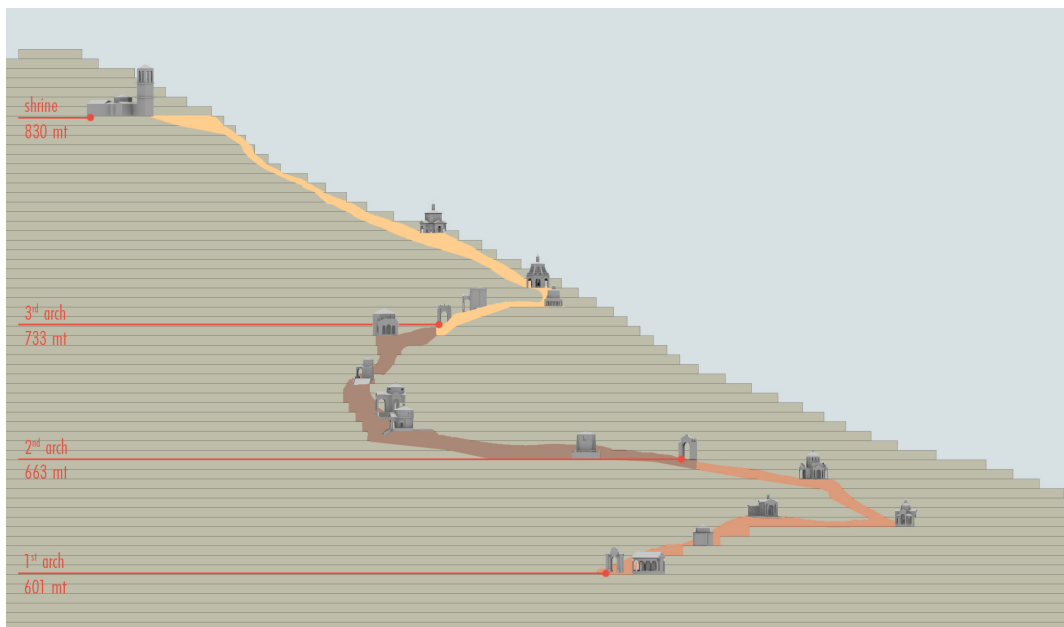
(1589), Orta (1591), Varese (1614), Oropa (1620), Ossuccio (1635), Ghiffa (1647), Domodossola (1657) and Belmonte (1712)– although only two of them, Ossuccio and Varese, are punctually referred to the Rosary Mysteries.

In fact, it is precisely the episodes of the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, as evoked in each of the 15 Rosary Mysteries –tripartite in Joyful, Painful and Glorious Mysteries– that constitute the theme of each 14 chapels in which the path of the Sacrimonti is articulated, until reaching a sanctuary on the top, generally dedicated to the Assumption of the Madonna, an event evoked in the fifteenth mystery, the one with which the recitation of the Rosary ends (Figure 2).

PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SACRO MONTE IN VARESE

The narrative organization codified by Alessi with the explicit reference to the Rosary Mysteries finds in Varese a particularly faithful declination to the dictates of Pope Sisto V's bull and the whole monumental itinerary's architectural articulation appears as an accurate transcription of this prayer in forms and images, produced as magnificent theatrical staging, thanks to the collaboration of the architects, sculptors and painters' skills, further enhanced by the specific landscape location of the complex. In Varese, the Sacrimonti typical urban and scenic component finds its most complete expression, since the relationship with the surrounding nature determines its dimensional expansion, while its location on Monte Velate, higher than the city, favors its observation from all the surrounding places (Langé, 1967). It is an arduous area, but object of devotion and pilgrimage since the 4th century, as it had been the scenario of a battle that had seen the Arians defeat by the bishop of Milan Sant'Ambrogio, who erected there, according to the legend, an altar consecrated to the Madonna della Vittoria, to thank her for the victory, which soon became the destination of pilgrimage for centuries.

Like in Varallo, in fact, also the Sacro Monte of Varese is the result of a series of successive interventions which, taken together, seem to reveal a tendency to the permanence of the sacred places. In 1474, Pope Sisto IV granted Giuliana Purricelli and Caterina da Pallanza to establish the Romite Ambrosiane Monastery on Monte Velate, near which a couple of chapels were then built, with statues and frescoes depicting three moments of the Passion and a sanctuary (Bertoni, 1992). The latter, following a significant expansion carried out already at the end of the 15th century assumed the structure of a building with three naves with a presbytery with three apses, enriched along the time by altars with statues and the construction of further adjacent buildings of worship (Bertoni, 1992; Rinaldi, 1992). The continuous presence through time of these buildings and artefacts seems to suggest the precocious presence of a sort of Sacro Monte *in nuce*, consisting of some votive shrines, object of worship and manifestations of popular religiosity, a circumstance already described with reference to Varallo, but also found in Ossuccio, in Oropa and in most of the Sacrimonti.

But, even within this place's sacred vocation continuity, the choice to build a devotional path, mainly conceived as a religious training tool, marks a discontinuity and a so clear desire of change, such that it requires the drafting of an overall project, capable of making cooperating, in view of the new purpose, the many artisanal and artistic skills necessary for its realization. It is therefore with this spirit that, at the end of the 16th century, the Capuchin father Giovanni Battista Aguggiari, spiritual guide of the Order of the Ambrosian Romite, commissioned the architect Giuseppe Bernascone to create a path of access to the sanctuary flanked by chapels (Quercioli, 2005). Bernascone designed the entire complex –whose construction began in 1604 and was concluded only in 1717– regulating the relationship of the path with the surrounding nature and with the individual aedicules' architecture by scanning the path into three parts, corresponding to the three groups of Mysteries of the Rosary, each preceded by a monumental arch. The path takes on the structure of a real avenue, which climbs from

an altitude of about 600 meters above sea level of the entrance up to 830 meters of the sanctuary, alternating protective stone parapets of the steep slope below with fountains, porticoed pitches and panoramic terraces, often placed as a mediation between the avenue and the external pronaos or ambulatory of the single chapel (Figure 3).

From the *Ragguaglio* of 1623, preserved in the archiepiscopal archive of Milan (Lutze, 1992), it is clear that on that date the wall structures of all the chapels were finished, except the fifth and the three triumphal doors, while the twelfth chapel and the three fountains used for the refreshment of pilgrims had not yet begun (Lutze, 1992). It is not clear that these last artifacts are entirely attributable to Bernascone, who died during the plague epidemic of 1630-1632. However, there is no doubt that he was able to give the entire Varese complex

Fig. 3 Abacus of chapels and arches composing the Sacro Monte.
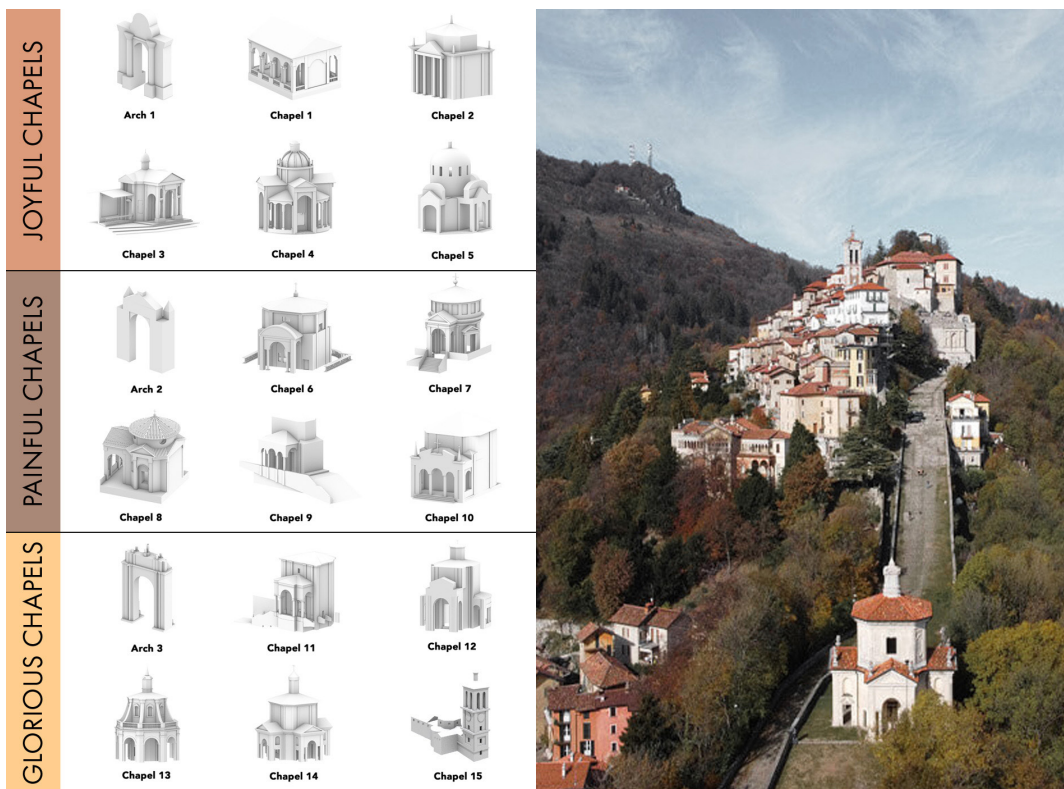
a strongly unitary imprint, recognizable even in the creations
certainly implemented after his death, such as, for example,
the plastic and pictorial decorations inside the chapels, in
most cases datable around 1640 (Bianconi et al., 1981). With
particular reference to the internal frescoes, there is a substan-
tial difference between them and their similar constructions in
the other contemporary Sacrimonti's chapels, where they are
declined as simple backdrops to the sculptural compositions.
In this sense, the frescoes perform a scenography function not
devoid of a certain figurative conventionality, which seems to
refer to the Serlian classification of tragic, comic and satirical
theatrical scenes (Iarossi, 2016) or, they introduce some specif-
ic buildings as a key to reading the catechetical message of the
chapel, as in chapel II, *La Visitazione* [The Visit] in Ossuccio with
the representation of the cross vault of the Filaretian hospital,
as an emblem of the welcome given to the pilgrim (Iarossi &
Santacroce, 2021).

In general, in these frescoes the human presences are very
scarce and, even when they appear, they are nothing more
than simple extras with almost only ornamental value. In Va-
rese, instead, the wall frescoes cannot be considered simply
backgrounds of the statuary groups, but they constitute real
autonomous pictorial compositions, crowded with characters
and as more analytically described later, they interact with the
typological characters and the architectural language of the
building in which they are located, building a real storyboard
of the evangelical event to which each chapel is dedicated.

ARCHITECTURAL-TYPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS
OF THE CHAPELS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE
CROWING CHAPEL

Chapel VIII belongs to the group of Painful Mysteries, lo-
cated in the north-west area, the most inaccessible and arid
of the mountain (Langé, 1967). After the Second Arch, called
Porta di San Carlo and flanked by a fountain, proceed towards

the chapel VI, *Orazione nel Getsemani* [Orison in Gethsemane], and after a sharp bend, the path becomes straight and the narration tight, with the chapels: VII, *La Flagellazione* [The Whipping], VIII, *L'Incoronazione di Spine* [The Crowning with Thorns], IX, *La Salita al Calvario* [The Ascent to the Calvary] and X, *La Crocifissione* [The Crucifixion]. The avenue adapts itself both to the surrounding nature and to the story told inside the aedicule, visually connecting the chapels to each other. The pilgrim, therefore, in addition to having an overall vision of the Painful Mysteries, from this section also sees Monte Tre Croci and the Sanctuary of Santa Maria del Monte, the destination of his journey as well as a symbol of salvation and ascension. With the Third Arch, the Porta di Sant'Ambrogio, the portion of the Painful Mysteries ends, and it proceeds towards the Glorious ones, which constitute the final stretch of the devotional path (Figure 4).

From the typological point of view, all the aedicules are with a central plan, developed in different variants, from the simple circular body preceded by a pronaos to the circular or octagonal plan with ambulacrum. However, there are also

Fig. 4 Digital model of the path's portion corresponding to the painful mysteries, elaborated on the basis of the DTM-Digital Terrain Model of the Lombardy Region, with the position of the relative chapels. Retrieved June 16, 2020 from https://www.geoportale.regione.lombardia.it/servizi
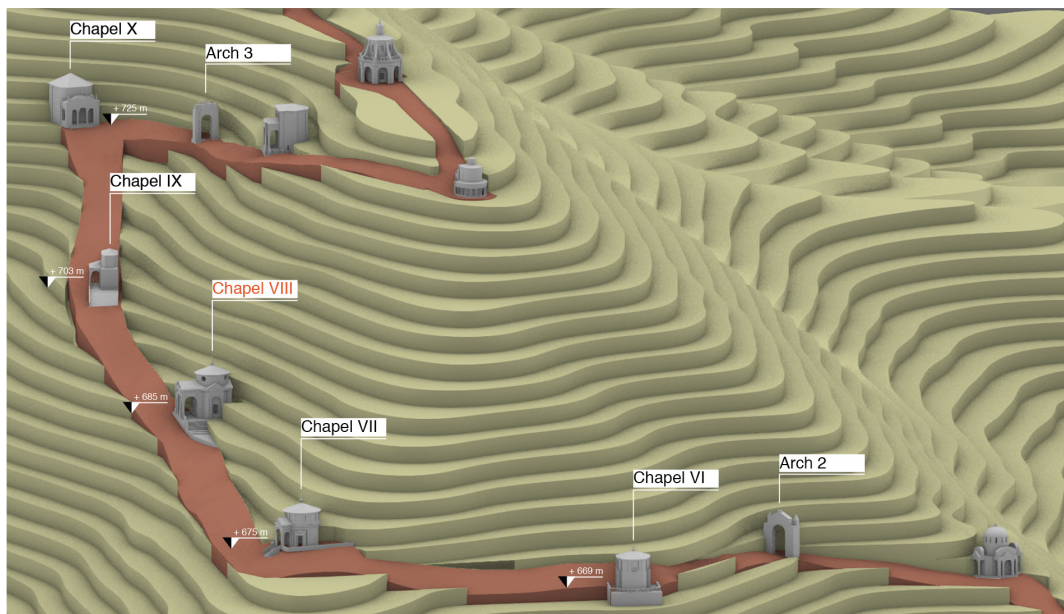
Fig. 5 Chapel VIII, photographs
of the relationship with the path.

hall-shaped chapels, with a square or rectangular plan, often
surmounted by elliptical roofs (Langé, 1967). As Squizzato
(2004) points out, their structure often takes into account the
proposed Mystery and the position of the artefact, favoring
more complex solutions for the most salient events, such as for
the chapel V, *La Disputa nel Tempio* [The Debate in the Temple]
and, precisely, the VIII, *L'incoronazione di Spine*.

This chapel stands on a podium that absorbs a difference in
height equal to 2 meters and can be reached via a large stair-
case located to the south, with the ascent direction parallel to
the avenue, while to the north the pronaos connects through a
short ramp of modest slope to the path main, which continues
towards the next chapel (Figure 5).

The pronaos is bordered by a balustrade and articulated
by round arches and Tuscan pillars, surmounted by a massive
pediment. On the counter-façade there are the three windows
and a small half-hidden door, used for access by maintenance
staff only. Externally, three main volumes can be defined: the
massive pronaos in front of the west elevation, the octagonal
prism corresponding to the main body of the chapel and the
cylindrical tambour surmounted by a rather flattened conical
roof containing a hemispherical dome (Figure 6).

The central octagonal plan establishes a dualism between
exterior and interior, since the volume described differs from
the internal one: the cylindrical lantern without moldings, in
which there are four oculi that illuminate the interior, conceals
a cover composed by a vaulted ceiling pavilion set on an oc-
tagonal base. The peculiarity of this chapel is also revealed in

Fig. 6 Chapel VIII, main elevation and cross section (above), plan (below).
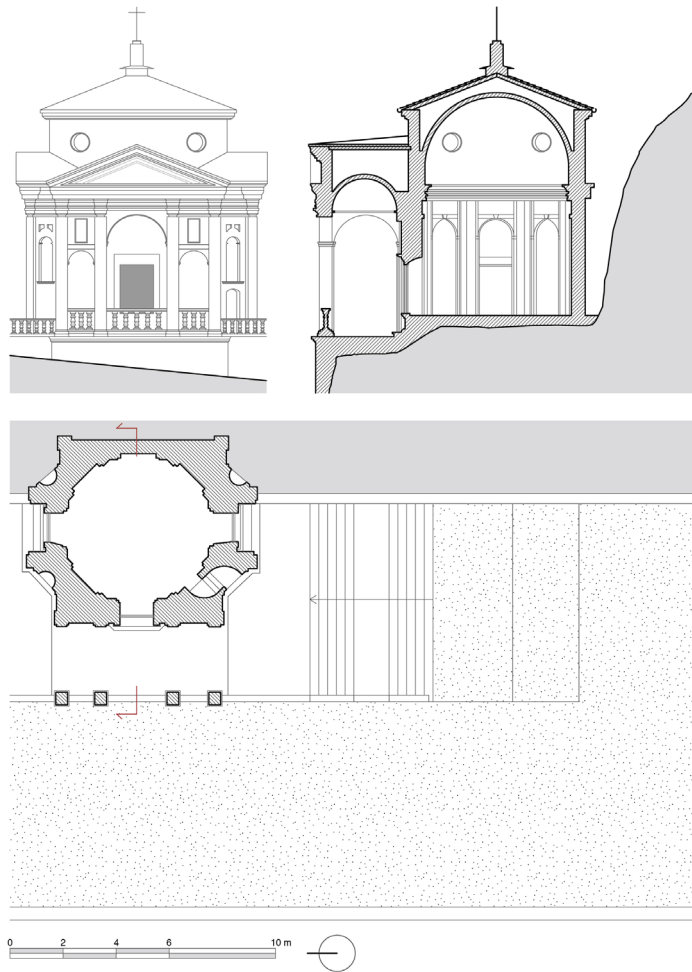
the presence of the three windows placed on three different façades, while on the other hand, in the other Sacrimonti the openings, when there are more than one, are all located on the main facade, determining almost frontal points of view.

Instead, Bernascone's project had already arranged three different points of view for chapel VIII, from which it is possible to observe the interior set up at an elevation of three steps above that of the pronaos. While the side openings are framed by a porch with lateral Tuscan pilasters, the main opening, also glazed and with the presence of decorated gratings on the outside and a kneeler, represents the main and frontal point

of view to the scene, emphasized at a geometric level by the presence of the dome in the pronaos' roof which in a central plan scheme could define a main axis (Figure 7).

From these three windows the scene is visible, consisting of a group of ten terracotta statues made by Francesco Silva (Quercioli, 2005), while on the walls and in the dome, there are painted squares that evoke scenes and spaces with different articulations from the physical space of the chapel. The chapels' interior, as result of the integration of sculptural, pictorial and scenography art, present a certain linguistic and stylistic homogeneity between them. After all, as a result of the realization of all the Sacrimonti within a rather limited time, specialized workers have come to train, moving from one Sacromonte to another, often belonging to the same family of painters or modelers (Gatta Papavassiliou, 2013) –like the Silva family, the Prestinaris and the Rezios– helping to create a quite common style and a language. In particular, the sculptors specialize in the creation of hollow terracotta sculptures –thanks to the use of the wax technique– about one third larger than the reality (Lotti, 1992) and with an accentuation of the expressive characters with the aim to characterize and make contrast between good and bad. The colors used are often of the same shades used also in the frescoes on the walls so as to give unity to the various scenes, performed by painters of the Lombard school such as Nuvolone, Morazzone and Recchi.

THE INTERIOR LAYOUT OF CHAPEL VIII AND ITS NARRATIVE CHARACTER

The iconographic program of chapel VIII is based on the theme of *L'incoronazione di Spine*, which is part of one of the five sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. The construction of the interior set-up takes place temporally after the interruption due to the plague epidemic of 1630, as evidenced by a plaque painted inside, which shows 1648 as the year of execution of the frescoes by the brothers Giovan Battista and
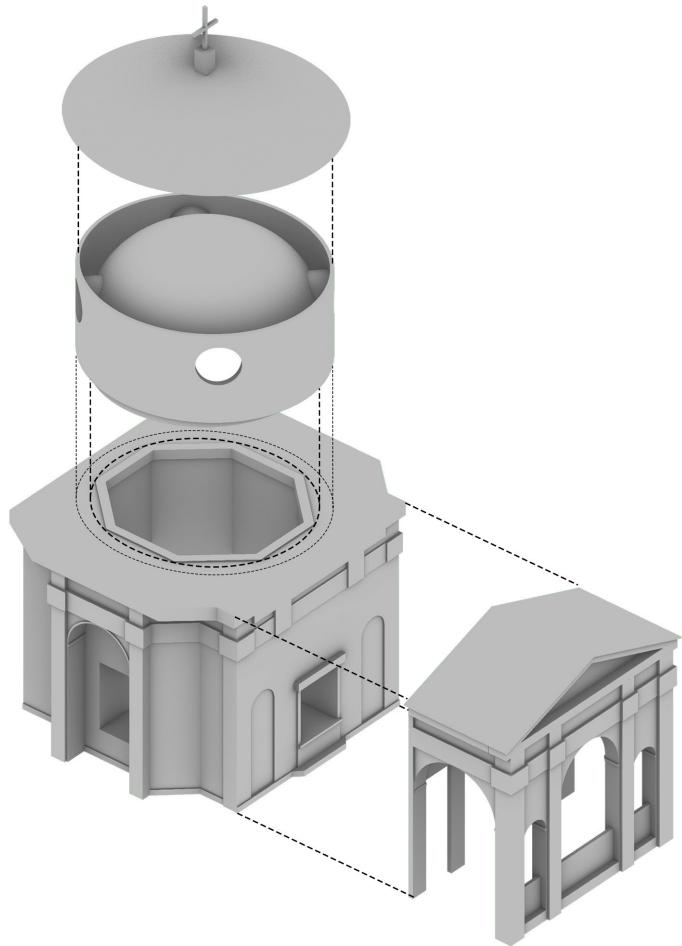
Giovan Paolo Recchi[1]. The entire decorative system is the result of an accentuated interaction between figurative art, sculptural and architectural art, which in this chapel gave rise to a strongly coherent narration, creating a particularly engaging scenic effect, starting with the sculptural group by Francesco Silva who stages the crowning with thorns, continuing with the squares present on each of the eight vertical walls of the chapel. Here are reported episodes taken from the Gospels and related to the condemnation of Christ and his thorns coronation. The hemispherical dome is grafted on the upper surface, on whose internal surface, through a skill-

ful perspective composition, an octagonal umbrella vault is simulated (Iarossi, 2016), surrounded by a lantern with a balustrade from which eight characters appear intent on looking at the scene below (Figure 8). Unlike the other Sacrimonti, where the pictorial wall decoration is aimed only at simulating different spaces than the chapel's physical one, in all the chapels of the Sacro Monte in Varese it has the role of narrating the episode inherent in each chapel through images, according to narrative methods similar to those that today could be used for the arrangement of the storyboard for a short film, articulated in the 8 perspective squares and culminating in the scene represented by the sculptural group that dominates the central area of the chapel. In particular, in chapel VIII, *L'incoronazione di Spine*, in the wall frescoes there are a large number of characters who interact with the architectural structure of the chapel, suggesting that these frescoes were painted in support of a narrative that entrusts the task of telling the story not only to the sculptures, but also to the painted images and their scenography composition.

If we compare these wall paintings with those of the corresponding eighth chapel in Ossuccio, it can be seen that only 19 characters are portrayed in the latter, while in that of Varese there are a total of 82, of which 57 in the quadratures, 8 couples of angels in the rectangular frames above each quadra-

Fig. 8 Chapel VIII, frescoes and sculptural group.

ture, to support the cartouches containing verses from the Psalms[2], and finally the 9 characters portrayed as if looking out from a balcony under the dome. With reference to the catechetical role of the Sacrimonti, compositional analogies can be detected between the eight squares present on the walls and the practice of narrating through the sequential juxtaposition of small scenic spaces typical of medieval theater[3]. The study was conducted through the reconstruction of the storyboard as a scenic and temporal sequence of the frescoes, analyzed in relation to the interaction of the frescoes with the chapel's architectural articulation and with the morphology of the entire devotional path. A previous study (Corsini, 2000) formulated an interpretation of the reading sequence of the eight squares, highlighting how the Recchis brothers interpreted and represented scenes taken from all four Gospels together, without adhering to a specific one. This is observed in particular for those scenes that narrate the processes to which Christ is subjected –before Caiaphas, Pilato and Herod Antipas– which are extrapolated above all from the Luke's Gospel, while the scenes representing the preparation of the crown and the coronation, are more faithful to what is described in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

Thanks to the presence of the scrolls with extracts of the Psalms[4] frescoed above each quadrature and the iconographic similarities found with the previous chapel frescoed by Morazzone, teacher of the Recchis brothers, it is possible to identify the subject of each quadrature. The frescoed episodes appear to be the crowing with throns, Christ in front of Caiaphas[5], Christ in front of Pilato, request of crucifixion[6], Christ in front of Herod Antipas[7], Pilato washes his hands, undressed Christ and preparation of the throns' crown. According to Corsini's interpretation, the initial scene of the sequence would appear to be the one placed on the main axis of the chapel, directly behind the statues, depicting the character of Caiaphas (A), also present in chapel VII, *La flagellazione*, frescoed by Morazzone, in the act of judging Christ[8]. Again, according to the Corsini hypothesis, one would con-

tinue to the right and the second scene would refer to the first interrogation of Pilato (B)[9], character depicted in the lunette above the window with the kneeler, and then continue with the invocation of the crucifixion (C) by the chief priests and the crowd[10] and the sending of Christ to the governor of Galilee Herod Antipa (D)[11], to be recognized by him as guilty. Although the fresco here is very damaged, it is certain that the scene depicts this particular episode due to the garments worn by Christ, quoted from the excerpt of Psalm 68 shown above the scene that evokes the verses of Luke[12]. Once interrogated by Herod, Christ is sent back to Pilate who, having failed to save Jesus for the third time, washes his hands (E) and leaves him to the judgment of the crowd and the chief priests. From here on, the narration becomes more rapid and hard, with the undressing of Christ and the laying of the purple mantle of kings (F)[13], the preparation of the thorns' crown (G)[14], the crowing (H)[15]. The storyboard ends with the scene set up three-dimensionally with the statues, in which with a high level of drama, the crowd and the soldiers beat and mock a suffering Christ, crowned with thorns and ready to be taken to Calvary.

This reading, closely linked to the chronological succession of the events described in the Gospels, is however not very convincing, assuming that the preferential point of view is placed inside the chapel and that the sequence takes place in a clockwise direction, starting from the fresco placed behind the sculptural composition. However, this interpretation does not take into account either the impositions of Bishop Bascapè regarding the methods of using the devotional paths and the prohibition of access inside the shrines or the architectural features of the chapel itself which, as mentioned above, it has three windows from which the pilgrim could only look inside from the outside. In fact, if we consider the three windows as standing points from which to observe the interior of the chapel, Corsini's interpretation would imply that the visitor would first stop in front of the central window the kneeler (2), the one on the
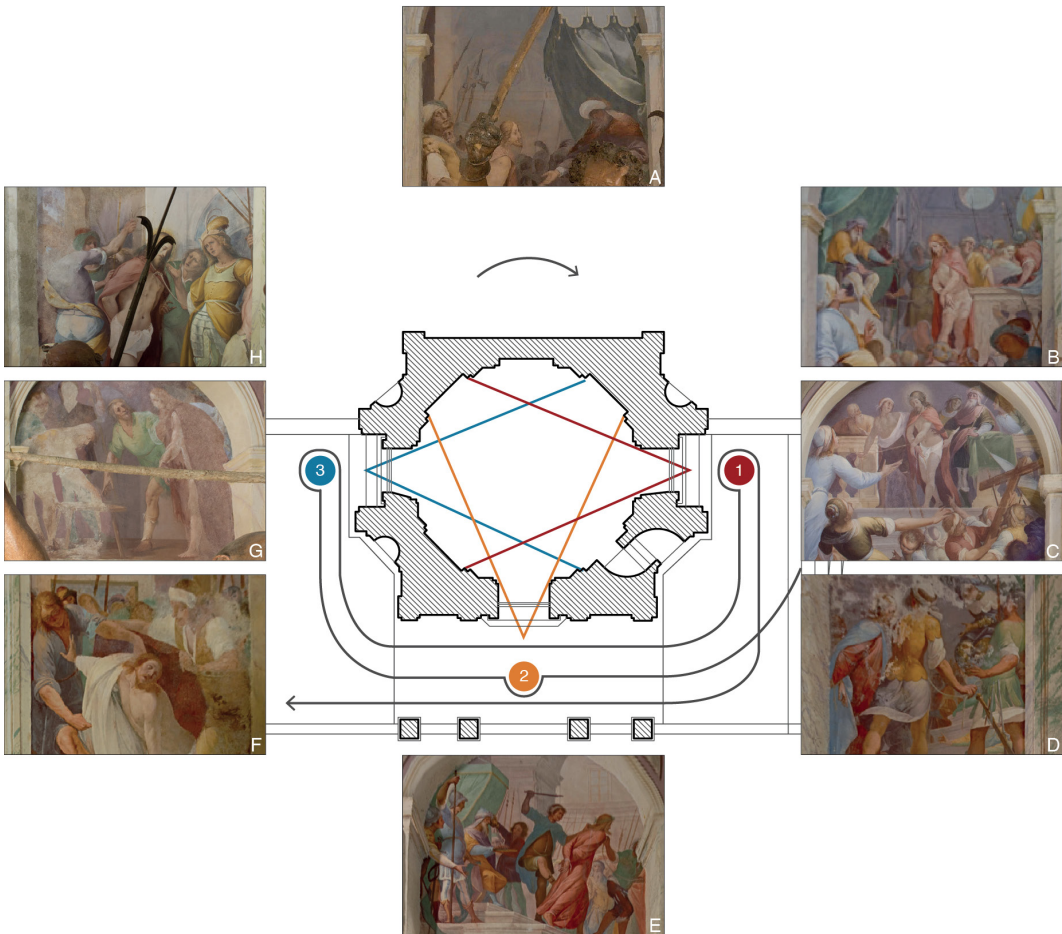
Fig. 9 Corsini's hypothesis of the path for contemplation of the internal set-up.

left facing the next chapel IX (3), to finally return to the one on the right downstream (1), which corresponds to the one placed immediately in front of the staircase from which it arrived coming from the chapel VII. Therefore, again according to the Corsini's reading , the observant should at this point come back to his steps and walk again under the chapel's pronaos, and then continue the devotional path up to the next chapel (Figure 9). In addition to the obvious irrationality chapel's use path presupposed by the interpretation already proposed, it fails to consider the close interrelation between architecture, painting and sculpture in the catechetical nar-
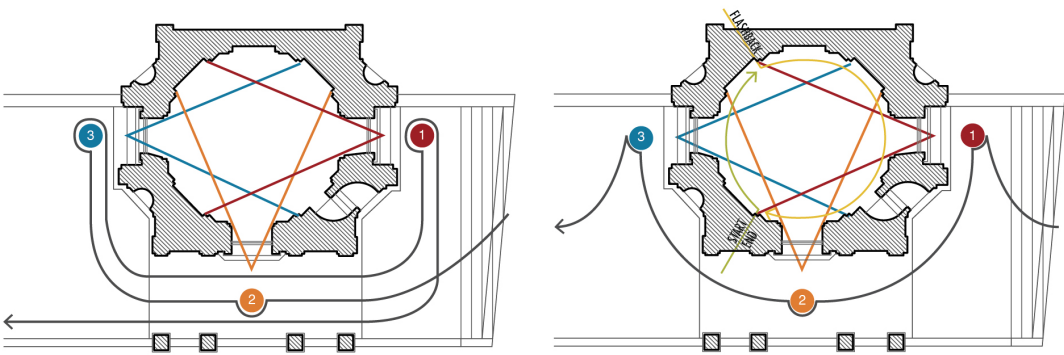
Fig. 10 Comparison between
Corsini's hypothesis and the one
referred to the architecture of
the chapel.

ration of the Sacrimonti's chapels in general and the relation between them and the itinerary of the observants who go through the entire devotional complex. Indeed, the VIII chapel, placed parallel to the devotional path in continuous ascent, is accessed through a long staircase which, arriving at the first window on the right, leads to the pronaos on which the main window opens with the kneeler, to continue then to the third window on the left and, from here, reconnect to the path towards the next stage through the small connecting ramp (Figure 10). However, this sequence of use, imposed by the typological structure of the chapel, requires that the sequence of the preferred observation points for the internal set-up starts from the right window –the one that the visitor is in front of after having climbed the staircase– continues stopping in front of that center one with the kneeler and, finally, move in front of the left window upstream, from which the visitor can then descend through the ramp and go to the next chapel (Figure 11).

This requires a different interpretation of the storyboard, which would include the beginning of the sequence with the rapid succession of frescoed scenes regarding the undressing, the preparation of the crown and the coronation, in a dynamic and dramatic crescendo, which finds its full conclusion in the action described by the sculptural group (I) visible from the central window with the kneeler, and emphasized by the presence in the frescoed dome of the medallion showing the Isaac's sacrifice and the woman pointing to the scene

Fig. 11 Preferred points of view's sequence from which to look at the interior of the chapel, corresponding to the window on the right (1), the central one with the kneeler under the pronaos (2) and the one on the left (3).
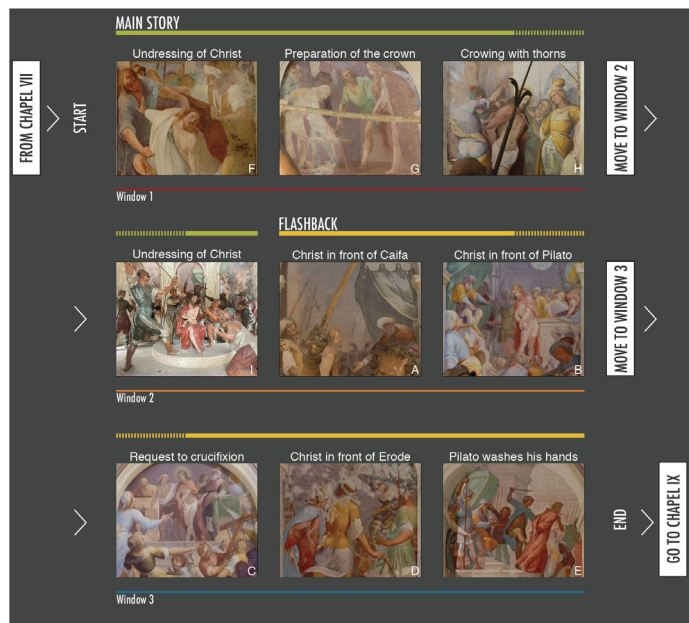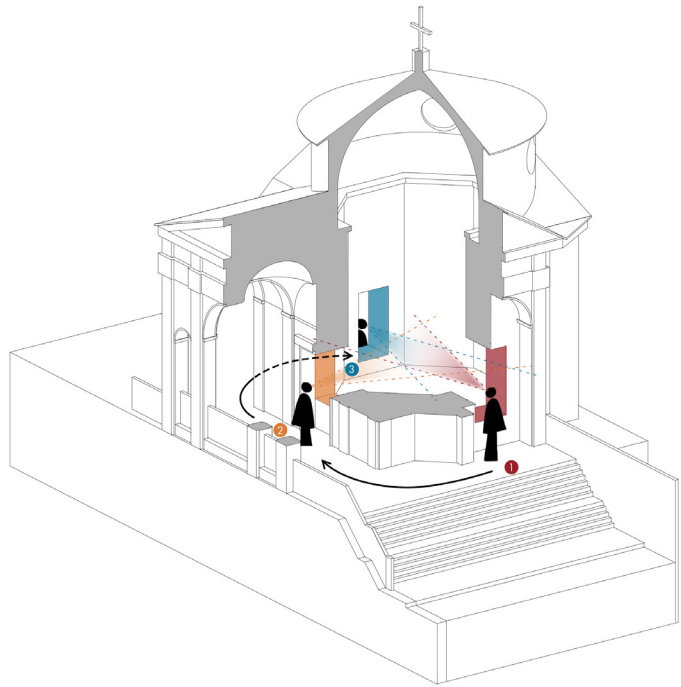
Fig. 12 Reading of the storyboard composed by the chapel's frescos, highlighting the use of flashback technique.

below. Finally, in the continuation of the devotional path, from the same standing point of the central window and from the third point of the left window, the user can watch the scenes that narrate the causes that led to the coronation of Christ, as it happens in a cinematic flashback that unfolds the events that have previously occurred and which turn out to be the key to deciphering the dramatic events theatrically staged (Figure 12).

CONCLUSIONS

The presented reading of the frescoes, subordinated to the chapel's use, is therefore revealed as a dramatic, exclusively iconographic narration of the story of the God's Son and the process that leads to his crucifixion, told with acceleration of the story and even with the recourse to the flashback technique, with the aim of supporting the catechetical message, stimulating Christian adherence to Christ's pain through the empathic involvement of even non-cultured visitors as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

1 The plaque, placed on the left pilaster of the access door to the chapel, reports the following wording: "IO BAPTISTA ET IO PAVLVS FRATRES DE RECHIS COMENSES P. ANNO 1648".
2 In particular, reference is made to the Psalm of David, king of Israel, from which Joseph, the father of Jesus, descends.

3 We refer to the typical set-up *à maison* of the cycles of *Mystères de la Passion*.
4 The state of conservation of the frescoes does not allow the correct reading of the Psalms. Despite this, of those that present a good state of conservation, it was possible to understand that they were extracted from Psalms 22 (Psalm of the suffering servant) and 68 (Psalm of lament).
5 Here is Psalm 22, 8: *Omnes vedentes me deriserunt me, torquentes labia moverunt caput* [Those who see me mock me, twist their lips, shake their heads]. Reference is made to the mockery and blows that the Sanhedrin and the guards perpetuate against Christ.
6 Here is Psalm 22, 7: *Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo: opprobrium hominum, et abjèctio plebis* [But I am a worm, and not a man: the opprobrium of men, and the rejection of the plebs].
7 Here is Psalm 68, 12: *Et posui vestimentum meum cilicium et factus sum illis in parabolam* [I wore a sack as a dress and became an object of ridicule to them]. The reference is to the Luke Gospel 23,11 in which Herod, before sending Christ back to Pilate, dresses him with a splendid mantle.
8 Mt 26, 57; Mk 14, 53; Jn18, 13.
9 Mt 27, 11; Mk 15, 2; Lk 23, 3; Jn 18, 33.
10 Mt 27, 11; Mk 15, 2; Lk 23, 3; Jn 18, 33.
11 Lk 23, 6-7. Only in the Gospel of Luke is there a reference to this particular episode. Pilato, once he knowed that Jesus is a Galilean, therefore of the jurisdiction of Herod, sent him to him, who was in Jerusalem in those days.
12 As we read in Lk 23:11, Herod dresses Jesus in a splendid mantle before sending him back to Pilato.
13 Mt 27, 28; Mk 15, 17; Lk 23,11; Jn 19,2.
14 Mt 27, 28; Mk 15, 17; Jn 19, 2.
15 Mt 27, 28; Mk 15, 17; Jn 19, 2.

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SILENT BOOKS
A SPACE
OF IMAGINATION
WHERE THE LANGUAGE
OF ILLUSTRATION
AND PHOTO-LITERATURE
MEET

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LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
PHOTO-LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN
ETHICAL COMPONENTS IN IMAGES
VISUAL COGNITION
MULTILINGUAL PEDAGOGIES IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

By reading silent books with pictures and photographs, a space of imagination is created, that is suitable for the development of thought, logics and critical judgement already at an early age. I will show, by means of a case study, what happens within a visual book club in a European, multilingual primary school in Berlin.

The article draws a seamless line between some editorial projects implemented in Italy in the 1970s and more recent research and cultural mediation experiences in this field. In addition to the practical value of these initiatives, the ethics of vision is emphasised. Which material and reading methods can be used to affirm visual models that can help children freely define the relationship between images and the interpretation of reality?

Finally, silent books include tactile and multisensory books. How can a visually impaired person participate in the visual reading experience based on wordless, tactile and multisensory books? Starting from this question, which may sound paradoxical, my article comes close to an extreme limit, a turning point and, at the same time, a bridge between the study of silent books and the latest developments in the field of reading accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Silent books can be both with illustrations, with photographs, and with both features at the same time. By reading this very specific kind of literature, an imaginative space is created, suited for the development of thinking, logics and critical judgement since an early age. How can we mediate this cultural heritage, both material and immaterial, in such a way as to pass it on to those who go through the stage of perceptive, emotional, cognitive and social development in childhood?

My paper draws on two types of visual texts:

1. Silent books with photos
2. Silent books with illustrations

The 'book' element and the 'reading' element are to be viewed as intertwined. Out of these two elements, books represent the material used for the study and research work at the centre of this article. Reading, on the other hand, is the method used to communicate the general aspects of the above study. This research work is then complemented by observation, analysis, historical and archival research, and case studies. In the near future, I hope to extend this research method to video recording, photo-documentation and neuroimaging, also taking into consideration eye-tracking, electroencephalography, and electromyography.

Let us consider for a moment the existence of a third kind of material suitable for practising wordless visual reading: visual cards (Munari & Belgrano, 1977)[1]. In 1977, the publishing house Danese promoted an initiative that is still worth studying today, to recognise some fundamental connections between childhood development and learning and the practice of reading wordless visual narratives. The title of this initiative is: *Progetto Scuola - Strumenti/gioco per programmare in modo creativo l'attività didattica* [School Project - Tools/Games for Creative Planning of Teaching Activities], and is designed for pre-school and early primary school. It is a series of games consisting mainly of silent visual cards, both with illustrations and photos. The project was curated by Giovanni

Belgrano, together with a research group set up by the same publisher and including Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari, IARD and Gruppo Materiali Didattici. The research team stated in the leaflet enclosed with the material that "it works in close collaboration with teachers and pupils" and "proposes the development of teaching material targeted to the different aspects of cognitive development, with particular attention to language and mathematics learning".

The choice to focus my research work on silent books came about by carefully listening to the observations included in the introductory notes of *Progetto Scuola*. I will quote one of the paragraphs that best emphasises the awareness of the role of visual perception:

> An important area of research concerns the activities of children with regard to visual perception, imagination, and communication through images. The widespread use of electronic communication tools has profoundly changed the lives of human beings, thereby significantly increasing the role of visual perception in the process of thought formation, logics and critical judgement. It is important to offer children objects that can stimulate their creativity, so as to help them freely define the relationship between images.

To date, the most useful study addressing the topic of silent books is *Meraviglie mute. Silent books e letteratura per l'infanzia* (Terrusi, 2017). I consider this essay as a starting point in an area of research that still has many steps to make, including so-called multiliteracy practices and multilingual pedagogies in early childhood. The study of the sources is based on examples of silent books from different countries and continents, in a global perspective, as the absence of written text indicates the disappearance of a dominant language. One further element should be considered: silent books also include tactile and multisensory books. A key example is *I Prelibri* (Munari, 1980).

In recent years, research activities and experiments in this field have had as their main reference the national competition *Tocca a te!* [It's your turn!] and the international biennial compe-

tition *Typhlo & Tactus*, at its 15th edition in 2022, and launched by the French publishing house *Les Doigts Qui Rêvent* in 2000.

This specific segment of wordless narratives focuses on a fascinating and problematic research field: the issue of blindness in relation to the experience of visual literature provided by silent tactile and multisensory books. My question about this topic is: How can a visually impaired person participate in the experience of visual reading? Starting from this question, which may sound paradoxical, we are moving closer to an extreme limit, a turning point and a link between the study of silent books and the latest research in the field of reading accessibility.

The history of photo-literature for children is currently in the making. The most recent studies in this field of research go back to Laurence Le Guen (2022). In Italy there is no such systematic work, although there are explicit signs of a growing interest, as seen in a number of conferences and publications concerning the pedagogical dimension of photography. In this regard, the *MuFoCo, Museo della Fotografia Contemporanea in Cinisello Balsamo*, plays an important role (Zannelli et al., 2021).

At the same time, some museums and libraries, through specific exhibitions and archives both at a national and international level, are emerging as leading actors focussing on this bibliographic repertoire in greater depth and based on scientific research tools. This is why the general focus on photo-literature as an area of cultural production and research is evolving and growing. An example of this is the exhibition *Vogelschau und Froschperspektive. Fotografie für Kinder,* scheduled at the *Museum für Fotografie* in Berlin from October, 9 2022 to February, 19 2023, and curated by Kunstbibliothek-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Kühn, 2022).

In Italy, *FOCUS, Fund of Photographic Books of the Trentino Library System,* set up in Trento in 2016, is the first fund focussed on the preservation, promotion and study of children's photo books. There is currently no publication that reflects the value of this heritage and its characteristics. I would also like

to mention the photography exhibition *Guardare è un gioco. I libri fotografici di Tana Hoban*[2], the first exhibition in Italy dedicated to the photo books of photographer Tana Hoban. In the field of photo literature, Tana Hoban's books (more than fifty titles published since 1970) are among the most comprehensive examples of 'primary school of the eye sight', performed through narratives that are predominantly wordless. At the same time, we can use Hoban's photo-literature production to work on the relationship between images and images of reality, from a perspective that gives the ethics of vision a key and unique meaning.

Both the studies by philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum (2012)[3] and those by philosopher Marie José Mondzain (2017, 2018)[4] are important sources that help understand the connection between visual literature, imaginative capacity, and empathy. One of the reasons behind my special interest in silent books is the choice to investigate which materials, research tools and practical methods can be used to foster reciprocity between imaginative capacity and public life, with an impact the well-being of society.

CASE STUDY

In 2022, I started to work as Italian mother tongue language mediator at the European bilingual Finow Grundschule SESB (Staatliche Europa Schule Berlin) primary school in Berlin. Here I have the opportunity to run an afternoon workshop in the second term. It is held every Tuesday from 2.30 p.m. to 4 p.m. It is called *Chamäleon Buchclub* and is made up of six eight-year-old children: Leonardo, Alumine, Zoe, David, Letizia, Anton.

Chamäleon Buchclub is one of the optional activities the school offers from grade I to VI. The courses are called *AG-Arbeistgemeinschaft* (literally 'working community') and cover a wide range of activities. The AGs are not part of the school syllabus, they are however subject to a final assessment (Figure 1).

Fig. 1 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

Fig. 2 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

The name *Chamäleon Buchclub* refers to the eyesight of the chameleon, an animal that has a 360° view. Our way of getting to know each other and communicating in several languages involves an object of mediation: the book with pictures. I select the books; in most cases they are silent books, with illustrations and photos. From time to time, instead of reading pictures, we have a talk with authors, artists, or publishers (Figure 2).

One Tuesday we got connected with the *Topipittori* publishing house and interviewed Giovanna Zoboli and Paolo
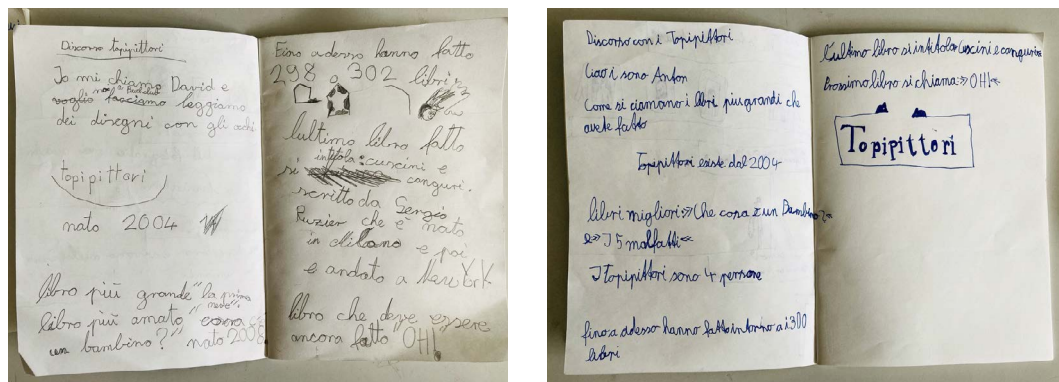
Fig. 3 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

Fig. 4 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.
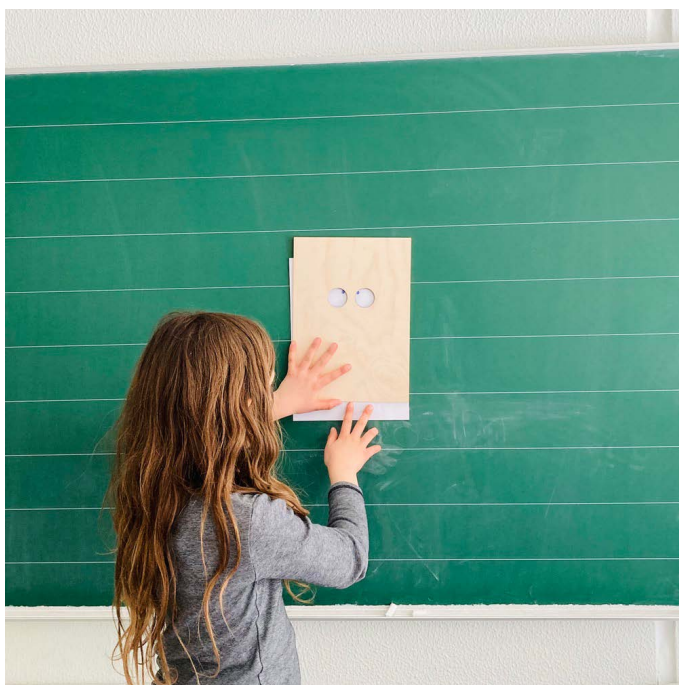
Canton. On another Tuesday, we welcomed to school Ingrid Hora, author of the *libro-gioco* [play-book] *Con la testa con i piedi* (Figures 3, 4).[5]

There are readings that engage us for a single session, others that can last several weeks. There are books that work as a warm-up for us, or others that we use as a basis for a meeting with the author(s).

The workshop usually starts with this series of actions: we put our hands over the eyes, massage them a little, open and close them first quickly, then slowly. We keep our eyes closed for a few moments, leaving the eyelids relaxed; finally we open them, ready to begin.

Below are some examples of situations within the club, based on the use of silent books, both with illustrations and photographs.

First example: THE LINE (Steinberg, 2011)

The book we use in this session consists in a single black and white image that opens and closes like a *leporello.* The image is several metres long, when the *leporello* is fully open. The children have never seen such a book before and are impressed by it.

We read this silent book starting with this question: "What do you see?"

Each child is asked to voice out an item and then hand over to the child next to them. This word-of-mouth exercise takes place at a certain speed.

- *I see an arrow and a hand holding a pencil and drawing a line.
- I see a tiny village, the sea, a boat and not a line, but a clothesline.
- I see a small green village, a meadow and a train passing through, so the line is a railway.
- Here, I see windows and a woman with a flower.
- Then there is the desert with the sphinx.
- There is no longer a line but sand.
- Ah! It's not a pear, it's a man! No, it's a mouse! There's the face!
- I see a woman on the balcony, playing guitar and her shoes are too high.
- Maybe it is a bridge because behind it there are a boat, trees, and a lake. We don't know.
- There's a cat here. A window from which you can see houses, trees, towers.*

- Here I see a little house and a bridge that takes two pages.
- Again three women as always with too high shoes.

Second example: CHIUSO PER FERIE (Celija, 2007)

We make a circle. We read the cover image together. We continue reading one image at a time, with this rule: each child, from their own place, reads the image I hand them while moving around. It is a different image for each child and, another rule, at this stage you must not say aloud what the image shows.

The children comment on what they see in their own personal way, showing either wonder, disbelief or a laugh. The round comes to an end and after closing the book, I ask them to describe what they saw. At this point, we take the book and resume the reading from the beginning. Everyone now has the opportunity to link the image they saw with those seen by the other children. In this way, together, we 'edit' aloud the story that, as we realise, has a start, a development and an ending (Figures 5, 6).

Third example: THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG (Beretta, 2008)

I show the book to the children, who note that it is a silent photo book. I ask them to read the inside pages, without saying aloud what they see. I warn them that at some point they will notice something strange. It takes a while for the eye to perceive the visual game on which the book is based.

When this happens, the children raise hands up, widen their eyes, make big sighs that mean "I got it!" I give them the word: "It's an alphabet made out of the things that I see!" Let's read together all over again, let's check if the assumption is valid, let's check single and sequential images to confirm that it is an alphabet. We decide to perform a similar experiment in the schoolyard. At the end, we put together our own alphabet made of images collected by the children and photographed by me on the basis of their input.

Fig. 5 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

Fig. 6 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

The outdoor experiment is based on the following rules: both lowercase and uppercase letters are valid. Everyone is free to search/find any letter. We repeat this outdoor activity three times, at different moments and for different purposes: the first purpose is to experience how this way of looking and seeing works; the second is to collect as many alphabetical letters as possible; and the third purpose is to search only for the missing letters. We figure out that some

Fig. 7 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.
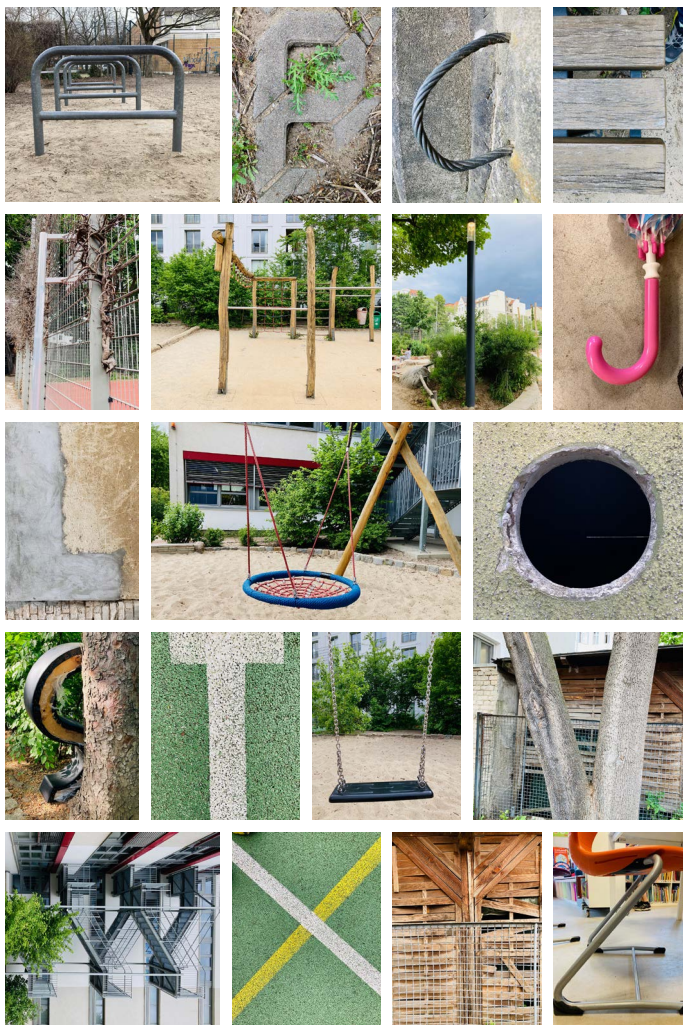
letters are easy to find, others are difficult. Some letters are found more than once, some only once, some others never. Sometimes while searching for a letter, I don't find that one, but I find another that I was not looking for (Figure 7).

Fourth example: CON LA TESTA CON I PIEDI (Hora, 2020)
The book is chosen for its unusual characteristics: wooden pages, loose sheets, fixed handle, rubber band instead of bookbinding. This object allows us to experience the read-

Fig. 8 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

ing of a *libro-gioco* [play-book], which involves making use of all the senses, not just eyesight.

The presence of unusual features is surprising, but no one doubts that it is a book. The children in turn open the 'book door', grabbing the red handle. Body and mind, simultaneously, begin their journey that is both play and discovery. The book is read using the whole body and can give rise to games to be played in pairs and in groups. Some examples: the page with the hands drawn on both sides suggests placing your hands on both sides of the paper and getting into a push position. Similarly, the page with the drawing of the feet requires you to read the page while lying down and with your feet on the paper, on both sides; the page with the dotted ear suggests listening to what the book is saying by physically placing your own ear on one side and that of another person on the opposite side. In this case, I ask the question "what did the book say?" (Figure 8).

One answer, in particular, is quite telling of the unfolding mechanisms that can be triggered by reading this book. The girl answers: "the book told me to play more with A. and then said that I will follow this workshop from beginning to end, I

Fig. 9 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

Fig. 10 Photo by Giulia Mirandola.

didn't say that, the book said that." Two holes drilled in the back cover remind L. that they can be used to draw many eyes, with different expressions. The game in this case involves changing the book's face from time to time.

The following Tuesday, we have the pleasure to welcome to school the book's author Ingrid Hora. The author and the club talk together about the discoveries made by the children who

have read/played the book. The author expresses great interest and proposes that the club should make a new edition, enriched by the new ideas put forward by the club's children.

CONCLUSIONS

In a regular visual reading workshop in primary school, based on silent books, we have learnt that many different things can happen that appeal to children, make them feel good, make them think and enable them to build a more informed and free relationship with images. The continuity factor is essential.

Learning to read images is not so different from learning to play a musical instrument or walk on stilts. It takes time to gain confidence. It is necessary to repeat the same gestures many times until they become fluent. Over time, moreover, it is possible to see the relationship between the members of the club develop and grow, how children learn to trust images, as they experience confidence in themselves and in their schoolmates (Figure 9).

At the end of the school year, the club received an unexpected invitation: to participate as interviewers in a public meeting with author Antje Damm, in the framework of the exhibition *Vogelschau und Froschperspektive. Fotografie für Kinder*, at the *Museum für Fotografie*, curated by *Kunstbibliothek-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (Figure 10).

The workshop held in the primary school can thus go out of the classroom and step into the sphere of public cultural life in the city of Berlin. It will do so with the help of two landmark institutions in the field of visual culture: the *Kunstbibliothek* and the *Museum für Fotografie*.

The assumption whereby silent books and photo-literature come together, not only finds its practical application, but is also recognised as valid within the workshop and just as valid outside, thereby suggesting an active role of imagination in the cultural processes of a community.

NOTES

1 "L'enorme diffusione degli strumenti elettronici di comunicazione ha modificato profondamente la vita degli uomini accentuando in modo determinante il ruolo della percezione visiva nel processo di formazione del pensiero, della logica e del giudizio critico. È importante proporre al bambino per i suoi giochi degli oggetti capaci di stimolarne la creatività così da aiutarlo a definire liberamente il rapporto fra le immagini […] Questi giochi non determinano schemi precostituiti che si sovrappongono alla libera ricerca del bambino, al contrario gli forniscono, per così dire, un catalogo degli strumenti per la costruzione di modelli visivi che egli utilizza liberamente nell'interpretazione della realtà. (Munari & Belgrano, 1977)"
2 The exhibition is organised by Mutty and curated by Giulia Giazzoli and Élisabeth Lortic, in cooperation with *CNAP/Centre National des Arts Plastiques*, Paris and is based on the Les Troises Ourses Fund.
3 "Ma il bambino che si diverte ad ascoltare storie e filastrocche si fa l'idea che non tutto nella vita umana debba servire a qualcosa. Impara a stabilire un rapporto con il mondo che non è centrato esclusivamente sull'idea di utilità, ma che permette anche di apprezzare le cose per quello che sono. E impara ad assumere lo stesso atteggiamento nelle relazioni con gli altri esseri umani. (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 81)"
4 "Non c'è nessuna immagine che non sia tempesta o figura di pericolo. Nella tempesta bisogna saper governare la nave. Tocca a ciascuno di noi rispondere delle visibilità che mostra, che fa conoscere e che desidera condividere. […] Difendere l'immagine vuol dire resistere a tutto quello che elimina l'alterità degli sguardi, costruendo l'invisibile del senso. La forza dell'immagine è commisurata alla potenza delle voci che la abitano. (Mondzain, 2017, p. 135)"; "Le operazioni immaginanti sono dei gesti energici che possono impadronirsi di tutti i materiali e di tutti i segni, per darci la parola e renderci insaziabili forgiatori del possibile […] un altro mondo è pensabile. (Mondzain, 2018, p. 16)"
5 The book is published by *Les Cerises*, an editorial project which bases its catalogue only on artists' silent books.

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EX-MOVÈRE
NARRATING PLACES WITH IMAGES

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Through paintings, engravings, short texts it is possible to know a place and at the same time discover the propensities, interests, ideological inclinations of each author. Engravings, paintings, photographs, clips are indispensable materials for the architect who intends to recompose places fragmented by the events of history, such as archaeological sites. The drawings of Jean-Pierre Houël, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the photographs of Josef Koudelka and the reworkings of Massimiliano Gatti, although distant in time, have in common the story of the natural harmony between architecture, archeology, and nature. The *Percorsi architettonici* of Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn introduce the way of doing architecture of Dimitris Pikionis and Pierre-Louis Faloci: editing is used as a method to compose sequences of spaces. The conclusion refers to the role of drawing as a tool in architecture with reference to a research project underway at the PhD 'Architecture, Arts and Planning' of the University of Palermo.

INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the word 'emotion' is due to the Latin *emovère*, composed of the preposition *ex* that invites you to go out and the verb *movère* that evokes par excellence a motion; literally means 'to take out, move', in a broader sense 'shake, shake'. The word indicates that momentary affective state that upsets the souls, that excites the mind in the presence of a work of art. Emotion is often linked to the recognition of the meaning we attach to things. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Saggio sull'origine delle lingue* (1781/1984), supposed that it was easier to speak to the eyes and not to the ears. In literature, the writer or poet uses words to produce images, creating a metaphor, evoking a memory. In the visual arts, just as effectively, the artist uses shapes and colors. Jean-Pierre Houël's trip to Sicily (1776) aims to build a repertoire of images that can illustrate all aspects of the island. His forty-six *gouaches* have the lightness of the note taken live, in which the artist manages to engrave the levity of the air, the reflections of the waters, the spray of the waves of the sea and the powerful porosity of the Greek ruins. Ethnological interests are evident in the representation of civil or religious festivals, in peasant rites against the background of the landscape. Compared to other eighteenth-century travelers, Houël does not frequent the palaces of the nobles, nor the scholars and their libraries: he follows the most impervious trazzere, he stays in country inns. Karl Friedrich Schinkel considers the vestiges of the ancient world a whole to be lived and evaluated with the landscape of which it is part. This point of view emerges from the approximately four hundred pen and pencil drawings, sketches, and watercolors of his trip to Italy (1803). It pays exceptional attention to the peasant world. Most of the European architects –after having stopped in Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Paestum to systematically study the Doric temples– took care to draw up analytical reconstructions of the temples, of the most famous theaters. Schinkel designs the theaters of Taormina

and Syracuse, the *Temple of Concordia* in Agrigento (Figure 1), not as monuments to be noted for archaeological vocation, but as a fascinating presence in the whole of a landscape and an environmental context in which the colossal bulk of architecture has the same weight as hills and mountains, bushes and trees, of the resignations and houses scattered throughout the countryside.

The artist Josef Koudelka collects in *Radici* (2020) the results of a research begun thirty years ago in almost 200 archaeological sites and in about twenty countries, from France to Italy, Syria, Morocco, Spain, and Turkey (Figure 2)[1]. These landscapes represent an ode to the historical vestiges of the Mediterranean Sea: it is in front of this 'common sea' that Europe and its founding values were born. This work is not only intended to document history, but it also wants to recover the meaning of a world that we risk losing (part of some sites photographed have now disappeared, destroyed by wars). The archaeologist Alain Schnapp called it a unique journey because no one had

Fig. 2 Author, year, sites visited and photographed by Josef Koudelka between 1991 and 2019.

tried with such obstinacy to provide, using photography, such a complete representation of what remains (ruins, works of art and remains of the past) of our ancient history. In these images the artist does not intend to 'freeze' the ruins in a romantic vision but, on the contrary, to investigate them with his gaze, returning several times to the same places until he is able to record the passage of time, the effects of human action and the imposition of nature, which claims its rights. The sumptuousness of the alternating sunrises and sunsets emphasize exactly the columns, the sculptures of the bas-reliefs, the paved floors and, in general, the wonderful geometry of the sites. The choice of elongated framing enriches the composition, a combination fine-tuned with a visual grammar made of inclined and fragmented visions, sometimes without horizons, with a powerful black and white that gives strength to the grandeur of the ruins. *Le nuvole* (Gatti, 2019) is the publication of Massimiliano Gatti's research work that took place in the last ten years, during trips for various archaeological missions, as a reporter. It is a narration conducted by diptychs, composed by Gatti combining their photographs of the ruins of Palmyra with other photographs made from a still image of different videos of archaeological destruction. Explosions fade away acquiring the form and interrogative substance of clouds (Figure 4). From this

DONNAS / ITALIA

PONTE DEL GARD / FRANCIA

Fig. 3 Author, year, *Donnas in Italy* (above), *Ponte del Gard in France* (below). In Josef Koudelka, 2020.

linguistic comparison springs a reflection on communication in our time, too often characterized by the ferocity of ignorance. As often in his work, the fulcrum is time, its flow, its strength both constructive and destructive, iridescent. The title comes from a comedy by Aristophanes, a traditionalist intellectual of the fourth century BC, opposed to philosophical clouds, who lived in an extraordinary moment for ancient Greece, which unites the impalpable lightness of the clouds to that of the new currents of thought. Gatti starts from ISIS, but the situation to which he refers is widespread: culture is frightening, and fear is a key identity element of our era that generates the rejection of the different, of the other. Works of art and literature are often a source of inspiration: they help to convey

meanings using implicit references. Piero Guccione, for example, says:

> The lines of the sea that I have painted many times derive from a distant and unique trip to Pompeii. From the sudden emotion caused by observing the friezes of the Pompeian walls, enraptured by the beauty of their geometry, by the permanent density of their material [my translation from Italian[2]] (Goldin, 1998, p. 18).

The beauty of buildings is understood in the harmony of their relationships, relationships that contain a meaning: our emotion is linked to the recognition of that meaning "If in a forest we find a mound six feet long and three feet wide, arranged with the pyramid-shaped shovel, we get serious, and something says inside us: here a man is buried. This is architecture" (Loos, 1972, p. 255).

ARCHITECTURAL PATHS
SERGEJ MICHAJLOVIČ ĖJZENŠTEJN,
DIMITRIS PIKIONIS, PIERRE-LOUIS FALOCI

Movement is both a cognitive and compositional act: man honors space not only by moving inside, but by opening and experiencing all his senses in doing so. For Steen Eiler Rasmussen "the architect is a kind of theatrical producer, the one who arranges the scenography for our lives" (2006, p. 28). The operation that combines technical perfection with the effectiveness of an involvement, which demonstrates a strict motivation and, at the same time, opens up to authentic pleasure in the field of the arts, has as its common matrix the practice of assembly. Each of us has his own way of knowing and interacting with the world: the perception of things takes place in fragments, for delimited glimpses that lead to grasping the structure of reality. Francesco Casetti, in the introduction to the text *Teoria generale del montaggio* by Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn (1937/1985), suggests that to have an intelligence of things, whatever they are, it is

Fig. 4 Author, year, *Palmyra*. In *Le nuvole* by Massimiliano Gatti (Gatti, 2019).

not enough to describe their contours, but it is necessary to 'grasp the entire design', dismantling them in their different components and reconstructing them immediately afterwards with a scheme or a diagram that gives us the overall structure and the supporting dynamics. To grasp a reality, it is not enough to represent it episodically, but it must give an exemplary image through a game of comparisons and stratifications, dismemberments and redistributions, accumulations and correlations, in short, through a formal intervention. The assembly is precisely the main tool of such an intervention, but to grasp the reasons and the functioning it is necessary that it too, like everything else, is worked thoroughly, thanks to a continuous decomposition and recomposition of its presences. Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, in his famous treatise on editing (1985), refers to the Acropolis of Athens as a perfect example for the calculation of framing, for the alternation of scenes and even footage. In the chapter Percorsi architettonici, Ėjzenštejn writes that "it
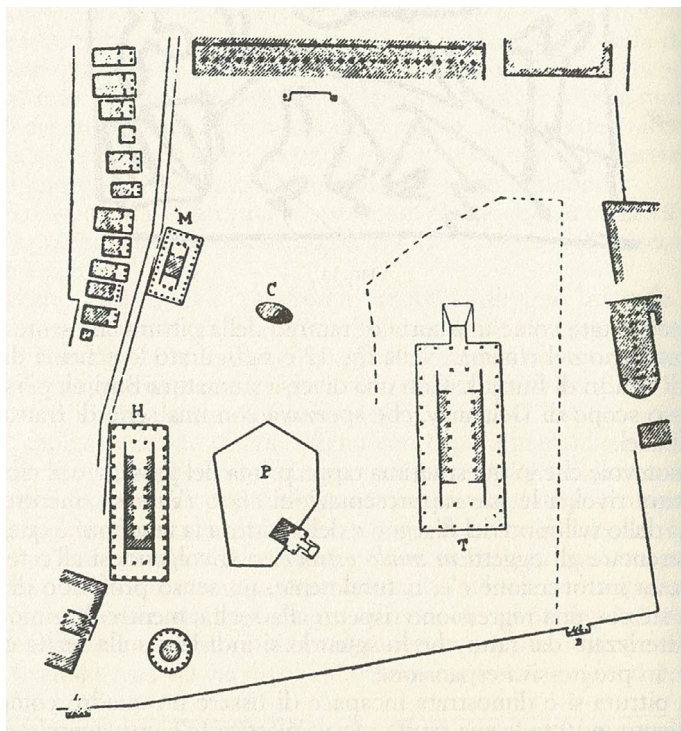
is difficult to think for an architectural ensemble of a more refined editing sheet in its shots than what here looks like a path between the buildings of the Acropolis" (Ėjzenštejn, 1985, p. 79) having as a reference a passage taken from the *Histoire de l'Architecture d' Auguste Choisy*. In Choisy's description, the Acropolis of Athens is presented in a sequence of preordained views (Figure 5). In front of the Propylaea, raising the head, one can see a symmetrical central body and two remarkably different wings: the widest right and the smaller left. At first glance there is nothing more irregular than this planning, but in fact the whole thing looks like a very balanced whole, in which the overall symmetry of the masses is accompanied by a refined diversity in details. The optical symmetry is impeccable (Ėjzenštejn, 1985, p. 82). Going up you enter the square and here the perspective widens to embrace, at a single glance, the Parthenon, the

Erechtheion and the statue of Athena Promachos. At each of the main station points of the city tour route, only one monument dominates. In the end, we return to the starting point (Ėjzenštejn, 2021, p. 85). In the Acropolis of Athens, architecture supports vision, punctuates through a syntax of suspended orthogonal planes, of shots (partial, total, close-up, panoramic) each view, accompanies the 'transitions' through the modulation of space, times, and materials, making the transition between inside and outside complex and expressive. When in 1954 Dimitris Pikionis began working on the arrangement of the archaeological area around the Acropolis of Athens, it was clear from the drawings that attention was paid to everything that is placed between the buildings: the resulting spaces, those intended for social life, the section of the streets. The routes are designed in hierarchical relationship, variable in width and by type of traffic (Ferlenga, 1999). A network of relationships, visual and physical, creates the common space. The architect carefully studies the qualities of the terrain, the course of the roads, designs minimal aspects such as fences, sidewalks, pavements attributing a particular value to each attack on the ground. Starting from the characteristics of the place, each component designed has the 'task' of re-establishing relationships, of involving the visitor. Pierre-Louis Faloci in his work has offered a contribution of appreciable rigor and sensitivity by operating within the historical-artistic heritage of France[3]. He has designed small museum devices in the territory, away from the cities and the main circuits of international tourism. Museums are the project area that Faloci has been able to better explore and, in particular, museums that work with history, that is, those institutions that articulate their mission around the presentation of events, testimonies, places that have participated in the construction of a collective narrative of our past. A first recurring element is the difficulty of the contexts and stories that Faloci often finds himself confronted: the memory of battles or traumatic events. Another type of complexity concerns the

museographic work that is confronted with fragments. In many cases the architect finds himself working with documents, partial collections, fragmentary, but above all with places that although they are recognized as depositories of important memories no longer preserve material traces of the events of which they were the theater or where in any case these forms of time are fragmented, unable to express themselves. To describe these echoes of the past, which represent the main substance from which his constructions take shape, Faloci coined the formula of *histoire sourde du lieu*. These places lie in a silent condition, which lives in the mental dimension of witnesses and scholars, in the archives and artistic transcriptions, that is, in the pictorial or filmic works that have fixed these memories on canvas or on film (Biagi, 2020). The architect's work has a fundamental task: to give coherence to the fragments of the narrative and above all to give them a voice so that they can be understood and become the tools through which the story is told and shared.

Faloci's method derives from a multidisciplinary approach: from the synergy between the history of architecture and art history, between poetic and technical instances; it puts architecture, construction, landscape, and narration in dialogue. Cinema has determined this way of reading space: as a boy, attending a cinema in Nice, he undertook a personal education of the gaze, which would later feed his vocation as an architect. These were the years of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, of the *Nouvelle Vague*, the period of the new generation of French directors: Truffaul, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette, Malle, Resnais (Biagi, 2018). Faloci's architecture refers to the image-movement (1983/2016) or the image-time (1985/2017) of Gilles Deleuze and, above all, brings into play the dimension of the body and what Peter Eisenman called 'affective involvement' of the viewer with architecture and landscape.

I never think only about the body, but also about the mind. For example of our Berlin project –the Memorial

to the Murdered Jews of Europe, commonly referred to as the Holocaust Memorial– you don't just have to understand its meaning and narrativity. As you walk in space, your body feels something, you feel what I call an empathetic involvement, something affective, which does not only concern the mind [...]. The project I made in Berlin is the most significant for me because there I left the world of the virtual, of not being: in that city it is very important to feel the concrete, its weight, the color of the material, its temperature [my translation from Italian[4]] (Purini, 2014).

In the museum intervention of the site of the Nazi concentration camp Natzweiler-Struthof (2005-08), in Alsace, Faloci's project aims to turn off the gaze to retrace in the dark the geography of annihilation. The principle of the 'darkroom' is applied, an almost braille reading experience (Figure 6). The method, inspired by the work of Alvaro Siza in Evora and Rafael Moneo in Merida, suggests the idea of "an inverted archeology" based on the knowledge of places (Biagi, 2018, p. 14). The forms of architecture constantly refer to something else. The *Archaeological Museum* of Mariana (2013-2021) consists of two overlapping orthogonal volumes, both in concrete. One, laid on the ground and intended for research spaces, is arranged on the east-west axis, parallel to the bed of the Golo river; the other, suspended, faces the archaeological park. The project will find full completion in the years to come, when the work of the scholars will return the buried stratigraphy of the Roman *insulae* and the Christian and medieval superfetations, creating the physical, as well as optical, connection between the museum and the park (Figure 7). In his architecture, Pierre-Louis Faloci tries to stage places, through paths, through framing, framing of situations so that the experience of places takes on a meaning, has a meaning and is not a random passage. The architectural object is not the purpose of design, nor of observation, but a link between the invisible order underlying and the phenomenal visibility that to constitute itself in

experience requires an order and a direction. Architecture,
according to Faloci, can become the tool of such a visual re-
organization of the ecosystem of which it is part. The per-
spective discovered and applied by Faloci, is not that of the
painter, but that of the filmmaker, who orders the space in
terms of images-movement and images-time, structuring a
narrative that binds architecture to the place, natural or an-
thropic. Living space is 'an exercise', a continuous attention
to places, buildings, the sea, the movement of clouds, night
noises. The phenomenological exercise aims at returning
to the essence of things. Combining a careful reading of

Fig. 7 Pierre-Louis Faloci, *Archaeological Museum of Mariana*, project sketches (Biagi, 2018).

Esperienza dell'architettura (1958), by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, with that of the *Diario fenomenologico* (1961) by Enzo Paci, is sufficient to identify the influence of phenomenology on architectural studies.

DRAWING AS A PROJECT TOOL[5]

Drawing is a way by which the mind by means of the arm makes physical contact with the blank sheet of paper in order to seek, through design, a critical interpretation

of reality and a poetic response to it. And in this operation the direct connection between mind and hand, the relative convergence and divergence, the starting point of the line, its tracing are the beginnings of the design inquiry. The sheet of paper is also, like the pencil, an instrument of the exercise of architectural design. An instrument that accommodates and fixes all that is continually corrected and rehearsed [my translation from Italian[6]] (Gregotti, 2014, p. 25).

For research in architectural design it can be said that drawing is a central and indispensable tool. The construction and structure of the research work in progress at the PhD 'Architecture, Arts and Planning' of the University of Palermo, entitled *Interactions. Kamarina and the rural territory of Ragusa*[7], is based on a process consolidated over the years and that can be summarized with three infinite "writing, designing and rewriting" (Sciascia, 2012, p. 21). Using the architectural project can be the main way to study, to understand architecture and consequently to address the specific theme of research. The thesis investigates the relationship between archeology, rural pre-existence, and contemporary architecture, choosing as a place of experimentation the territory of Kamarina (Figure 8). Conceiving drawing as a tool of investigation means highlighting the ability to directly connect thought with the representation of forms, sequences, and relationships. An integral part of the research portion carried out so far has been the redesign activity, based on the interpretation of some recovered graphic drawings. The comparisons between the paper by Tiburzio Spannocchi (1577-78) (Figure 9), the engraving by Jean-Pierre Houël depicting the Temple of Athena transformed into a church (1787) (Figure 10), the planimetry by Julius Schubring (1864) (Figure 11), the planimetric sketch by Arthur Evans (1889) (Figure 12), the planimetric sketches and photos by Paolo Orsi (1899), the layout on plan IGM 1:50.000 and the *Archaeological Map* on an IGM 1:100.000

Fig. 8 The territory of Kamarina in Greek Sicily.

Fig. 9 The Camarine coast in the map by T. Spannocchi, 1577-78. In Uggeri, 2015.
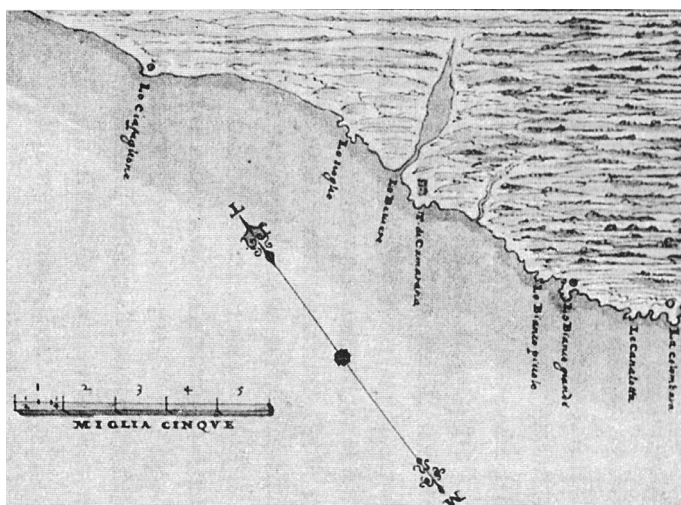
basis by Biagio Pace (1927), the aerial views of the territory of the first half of the twentieth century, the documentary of the *National Institute of Light Dunes Verdi* (1955)[8], the *Map of Italy* IGM scale 1:50.000 (1970), the planimetric reconstructions of the city of Kamarina by Paola Pelagatti (Pelagatti, 1973) (Figure 13) and Giovanni Uggeri (Uggeri, 2015), the PRG Susani (1988), the *Landscape Plan of the Province of Ragusa* (2016) with the state of affairs of the places,

Fig. 10 J. Houel, 1787, *Tavola CCXIII. Resti di un Tempio dell'antica città di Kamarina presso il piccolo porto chiamato Scoglitti; disegno e incisione*. Retrieved from <http://www.museoviaggiatori.it/incisione_houel2.php?inc=23>.
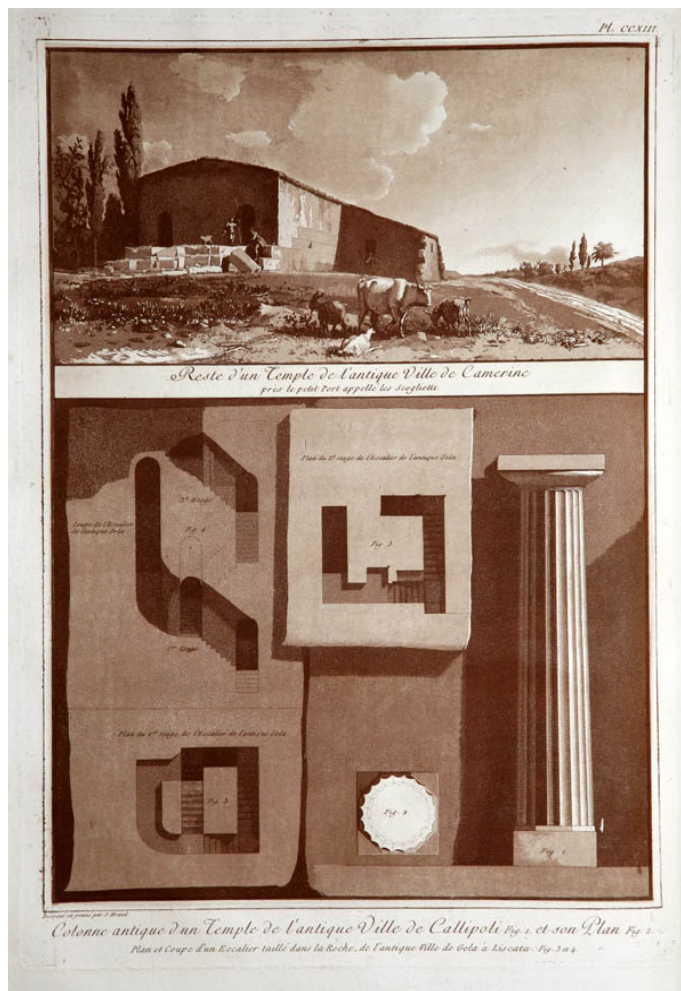
have made explicit some traces that had not emerged during the inspections. The redesign activity constantly stands as a means of contemporary interpretation of the whole, where newand visions relate ancient remains and traces with the views of the landscape (Figure 14). These combinations were essential to build the intermediate stage, go beyond the relief and define the project of the ground (accessibility, parking, free spaces, areas of common use), the vegetation project (green areas, equipped

Fig. 11 Kamarina, plan by J.
Schubring 1864. In Uggeri, 2015.
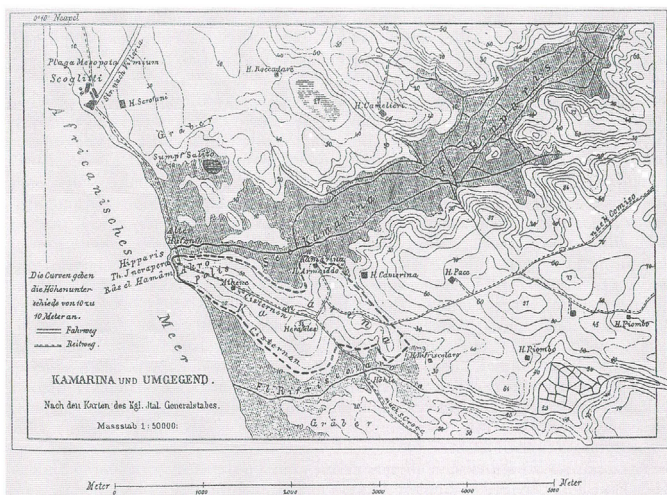
Fig. 12 Kamarina, planimetric
sketch by A. Evans, 1889.
In Pelagatti, 1973.
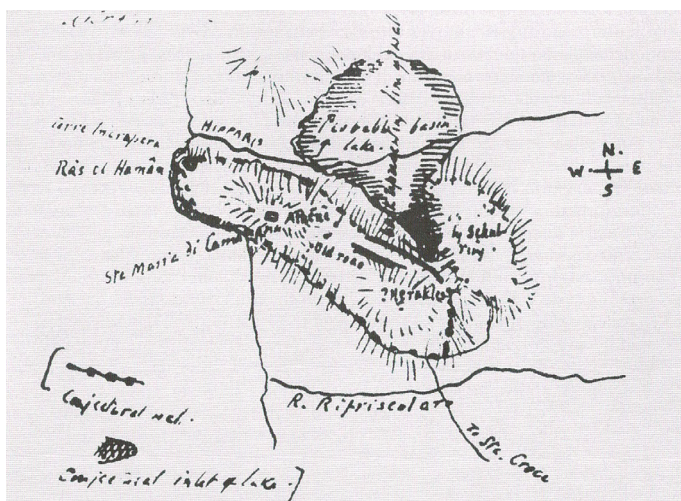
green, productive green), new ways to inhabit archeology
(guest house for students, canteen, cafeteria, archeology
workshops, reuse of a millstone of 1903). In the specific
case, working in an archaeological context, the herme-
neutic capacity of the drawing is leveraged, constantly
verifying the consistency with the starting hypotheses
along the research path. The project is progressively fo-
cusing on how an unprecedented interaction between

Fig. 13 Kamarina, planimetric diagram (Pelagatti, 1974).
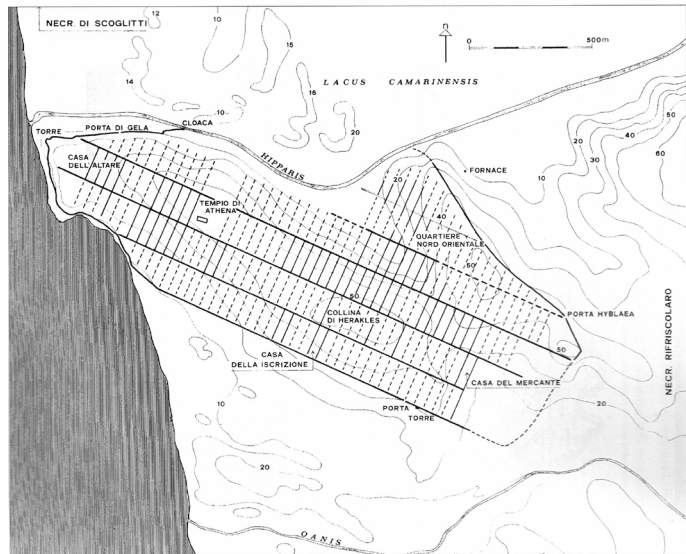
Fig. 14 Kamarina and the rural territory of Ragusa 2022.

archeology, rural and coastal landscape and low-skilled pieces of cities can also redeem these places. Investigating on the narrative character of contemporary architecture, the goal that is intended to achieve is to bridge the distance between archeology, the context and the inhabitants.

Over the past thirty years, digital technologies have provided enormous advantages in the reproduction and popularization of architecture, however they have also

changed the approach and even the purpose of drawing. Today its use is mainly aimed at communication to gain the favor of a large clientele. According to Vittorio Gregotti,architectural design as a project investigation:

> It is what can be considered the furthest from representation realistic: it can be considered at most as provisional realism of thought, of imagination and its memory even if it moves progressively towards an internationalized interpretation of necessity of use and absolutely real contexts [my translation from Italian[9]] (Gregotti, 2014, p. 17).

From this point of view, drawing is a particularly flexible investigative tool to verify the consistency of a principle at various scales. John Ruskin in *Prefazione a Gli elementi del disegno writes*:

> I am particularly convinced that when we know how to see with sufficient sharpness, there is very little difficulty in the draw what we see. But even assuming that this difficulty is still considerable, I believe that the vision is more important than design. As for me, I prefer teach drawing so that my students learn to love nature, than teach to look at nature why learn to draw [my translation from Italian[10]] (Ruskin 1857/2009, p. 17).

To the word drawing the Italian vocabulary gives the double meaning of proposal and representation of a figure, proposing the meaning of a completed act that does not take into account its role in the process of making architecture. Other languages use different vocabulary to give different shades of meaning to this term: draw, pattern, sketch, design, project in English; *zeichnung, zeichnen, entwurf, plan, skizze* in German; *dessin, croquis, esquisse, ébauche* in French. In ancient Greece, the words *graphè* or *skeriphos* were used, referring to the act of engraving. The design had, in the design process, different roles and ways according to the different conditions and the different foundations of the history of architecture: from Villar de Honnecourt to the great architects and theorists of the Rinascimento, such as Leon Battista

Alberti or Andrea Palladio, tothe travelers of the *Grand Tour*, to the protagonists of the Avanguardia of the first half of the XX century. Although expressed in the form of a note, of a sketch, drawing represents a process that binds the mind to the hand: the sign traced on the sheet is a symbolic language that dates to prehistory, it is not a simple means, but it is something that is established with thought, memory, desire, dialogue for the construction of the image of the project. It is a process that selects from infinite possibilities and chooses those necessary to achieve specific goals.

NOTES

1 The sites visited and photographed by Josef Koudelka between 1991 and 2019 are: Albania (Antigonea, Apollonia, Butrint, Byllis, Durres, Elbasan, Phoenix, Kamenice), Algeria (Cuicul, Lambaesis, Madaura, Medracen, Tiddis, Timgad, Tipasa), Bulgaria (Nessebar, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Plovdiv, Sozopol), Cyprus (Bellapais, Famagusta, Kourion, Paphos, Salamis), croatia (Pala, Salona, Split), Egypt (Alexandria, Cairo), France (Arles, Nimes, Orange, Saint-Chamas, Saint-Remy-de-Provance, Vaison-la-Romaine, Vers-Pont-du-Gard), Jordan (Amman, Gadara, Gerasa, Pella, Petra, Rufana, um el-Jimal), Greece (Athens, Cape Sounion, Corinth, Delos, Delphi, Dion, Dodona, Ege, Eleusis, Epidaurus, Philippi, Heraion of Samos, Messene, Mycenae, Mount Olympus, Nemea, Olympia, Orcomeno, Pella, Prèveza, Rhodes, Sparta, Tiryns, Vravrona), Israel/Palestine (Caesarea, Herodion, Jericho, Jerusalem, Lachish, Masada, Megiddo, Nabi Musa, Scitopoli), Italy (Agrigento, Aosta, Baia, capri, Cuma, Donnas, Ercolano, Gran San Bernardo, Himera, Ostia Antica, Morgantina, Paestum, Palermo, Piazza Armerina, Pompei, Pozzuoli, Roma, Segesta, Selinunte, Siracusa, Solunto, Tivoli, Trieste, Torino), Lebanon (Beirut, Biblo, Heliopolis, Niha, Qalaat Faqra, Qasr Hammara, Tiro), Libya (Cyrene, Leptis Magna, Tolemaide, Sabratha), Morocco (Volubilis), Portugal (Evora), Slovenia (Ljubljana), Syria (Aleppo, Apamea, Bosra, Krak dei Cavalieri, Palmyra, St. Simeon Stylite), Spain (Italica, Merida, Segovia), Tunisia (Ain Tounga, Bulla Regia, Carthage, Chemtou, Gafsa, Haidra, Kasserine, Mactaris, Sufetula, Thuburbo Majus, Thugga, Thysdrus, Utina, Utica), Turkey (Alexandria Troad, Halicarnassus, Alinda, Aphrodisia, Apollon Symintheion, Aricanda, Asklepion of Pergamon, Aspendos, Ace, Aydin, Cauno, Cibira, Claros, Cnidus, Didima, Ephesus, Euromos, Ezani, Faselide, Iaso, Hierapolis, Labranda, Laodicea al Lico, Latona, Limira, Magnesia al Meandro, Mileto, Myra, Nysa, Olympos, Patara, Pergamon, Perge, Pinara, Rodiapoli, Sagalassos, Sardis, Selcuk, Seleucia, Selge, Side, Sidyma, Simena, Stratonicea in Caria, Telmesso, Teo, Termessos, Troia, Xanthos).

2 "*Le linee del mare che ho tante volte dipinto hanno preso corpo e sostanza plastica durante un lontano e unico viaggio a Pompei. Dall'improvvisa emozione provocata osservando i fregi delle pareti pompeiane, rapito dalla bellezza della loro geometria, dalla corposità permeante della loro materia*" (Goldin, 1998, p. 18).

3 Works realized: Winery, Cacela Velha, Portugal 1983-87; *European Centre for Archaeology*, Mont Beuvray, *Glux-en-Glenne*, 1993-2019; Mediateca e piazza, *Meudon-la-Foret*, 1998-2001; *Museum of Art and History*, Rochefort-sur-Mer, 2003-2007; *Rodin Museum*, Paris, 2003-2007; *Palace of Justice*, Avesnes-sur-Helpe, 2003-2008; *European Centre of the Resistant Deportee and Struthof Museum*, Natzweiler, 2005-08; *Muslim Cultural and Worship Centre*, Boulogne-Billancourt, 2009-2011; *Historical Museum of the Battle of Valmy 1792*, Valmy, 2010-2015; *Civic Center, Fosses*, 2011-2015; *Recovery of Wendel Castle as a Regional Civic Center*, Hayange, 2011-2016; *Mediatheque of Architecture and Heritage*, Charenton-le-Pont, 2012-2016; *Andrée Chedid Foundation*, Issy-les-Moulineaux, 2013-2015; *Recovery of the sugar warehouse in Learning Center*, Dunkirk, 2013-2016; *Prorel Catwalk*, Briancon, 2014-2015; *War Museum 1914-18*, Lens, 2014-2016; *Recovery of the Château de Laboissière* at the school of music and dance, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 2014-2017; *Archaeological Museum of Mariana*, Lucciana, 2013-2021.

4 "*Non penso mai solo al corpo, ma anche alla mente. Per esempio del nostro progetto di Berlino – il Memoriale per gli ebrei assassinati d'Europa, comunemente detto Memoriale della Shoah – non devi capirne solo il significato e la narratività. Mentre cammini nello spazio il tuo corpo sente qualcosa, senti quello che io chiamo un coinvolgimento empatico, qualcosa di affettivo, che non riguarda solo la mente [...]. Il progetto che ho realizzato a Berlino per me è il più significativo perché lì ho lasciato il mondo del virtuale, del non essere: in quella città è molto importante sentire il cemento, il suo peso, il colore del materiale, la sua temperatura*" (Purini, 2014).

5 The title of the paragraph refers to refers to Gregotti, 2014.

6 "*Il disegnare è un modo con cui la mente per mezzo del braccio prende contatto fisico con il foglio bianco per cercare, per mezzo del progetto, un'interpretazione critica della realtà e una risposta poetica ad essa. Ed in questa operazione la diretta connessione tra la mente e la mano, la convergenza e divergenza relativa, il punto di inizio della linea, il suo tracciato sono gli inizi dell'indagine progettuale. Anche il foglio è, come la matita, strumento dell'esercizio del progetto di architettura. Uno strumento che accoglie e fissa tutto quanto continuamente si corregge e si prova*" (Gregotti, 2014, p. 25).

7 The research project is underway at the PhD 'Architecture, Arts and Planning', University of Palermo, Department of Architecture, tutor: prof. Andrea Sciascia, co-tutor: prof. Luciana Macaluso.

8 Retrieved September, 2022, from <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000088464/1/-4197.html?startPage=80&jsonVal={%22jsonVal%22:{%22query%22:[%22dune%22],%22fieldDate%22:%22dataNormal%22,%22_perPage%22:20}}>.

9 "*è ciò che si può considerare il più lontano dalla rappresentazione realistica: si può considerare al massimo come realismo provvisorio del pensiero, dell'immaginazione e della sua memoria anche se esso muove progressivamente*

verso un'interpretazione intenzionalizzata di necessità d'uso e di contesti assolutamente reali" (Gregotti, 2014, p. 17).

10 "Sono particolarmente convinto che quando sappiamo vedere con sufficiente acutezza, vi è ben poca difficoltà nel disegnare ciò che vediamo. Ma anche supponendo che tale difficoltà sia comunque notevole, ritengo che la visione sia più importante del disegno. In quanto a me, preferisco insegnare il disegno affinché i miei allievi imparino ad amare la natura, che insegnare a guardare la natura perché imparino a disegnare" (Ruskin 1857/2009, p. 17).

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THE OPERA IN IMAGES
ICONOGRAPHY
OF THE *MISE-EN-SCÈNE*
IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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The project of the *mise-en-scène* has a highly visual nature and is expressed in images. The digitization of many archives of historical theatres made available a vast repertoire of images, the analysis of which allows us to understand the phenomenon of the *mise-en-scène* in its historical roots and evolution. The present research focuses on the repertoire of stage images investigated in their intrinsic nature as visual and communicative artifacts, classifying them according to the purpose of the representation and the techniques of execution to reconstruct the role that images played in defining a theatrical imaginary of places and costumes. The articulation of the paper will distinguish three different types of images, each investigated in its visual and technical characteristics. The first concerns the visual component of the project, which was expressed through the sketches, both regarding set design and costumes. The second typology is that of visual witnesses of the stage for dissemination purposes, whose distribution was mainly entrusted to illustrated periodicals. Finally, the third typology includes the images for promotional purposes of the nascent poster advertising.

> Per far scena di teatro ci vogliono pittori di teatro. Pittori
> che non abbiano la vanità di far valere soprattutto la loro
> bravura, ma di servire il dramma (Giuseppe Verdi).

INTRODUCTION

We are used to think about opera as text, music, performance. But text and music need a *mise-in-scene* to become spectacle, and the *mise-en-scène* project has a primarily visual nature and is expressed in images. The digitization of many archives of historical theatres made available a vast repertoire of images, whose analysis allows us to understand the phenomenon of the *mise-en-scène* in its historical roots and evolution. These are wordless images showing costumes and scenography, whose analysis suggests multiple interpretations, bordering between illustration and theatre history, proof of the evolution of image distribution techniques and artistic creation. The period considered here is the nineteenth century, of which the richest iconographic repertoire is preserved, testifying a phase in the history of theatre when realism became a fundamental element of *mise-en-scène*. Much has been written about nineteenth-century theatre, (De Angelis, 1938; Povoledo, 1961; Trabucco, 1988; Perrelli, 2013) but the research, even where it addressed the subject of costumes and scenography, mostly considered the point of view of the history of theatre and costume design, rather than graphics and illustration. In the field of representation, the subject of scenography was mainly addressed with studies on the use of perspective in the design of the stage space, conceived by the set designer with the sketch of the scene to produce the desired illusory effect (Pagliano, 2002).

The present research instead focuses on the repertoire of stage images investigated in their intrinsic nature as visual and communicative artefacts, classifying them according to the purpose of the representation and the techniques of execution, and attempting to trace the role that images played in

defining a theatrical imaginary of places and costumes, up to the transition towards the new modes of visual communication that gave rise to the first advertising posters, which took their first steps in the field of performing arts.

THE SCENE SKETCHES

The first distinction that emerges from an analysis of the theatre's iconographic material is between the design drawings and the visual evidence of the spectacles to inform the audience. The design was expressed through the sketches, both for scenography and costumes.

In scenography, the sketch, realised in perspective, contained all the necessary indications for the staging of the scene, whose exact transposition into the space of the stage had to be guaranteed, and made use of the accelerated solid perspective as a tool to simulate a perceived space deeper than the real one (Pagliano, 2009). The sketches were mainly made in pencil on cardboard, and eventually coloured with different techniques: watercolour, tempera, oil paint. At a later stage, the drawings could be placed on a three-dimensional scale model, to better verify proportions and visual effects. The interesting aspect for the present study is the definition of archetypal models of stage sets, which during the 19th century gave rise to an iconographic repertoire that was reproposed in the visual component of other performances, using very precise relationships between the scenic image and the dramatic situation staged. This process started from the theatre treaties of the late 18th century, in which the need for realism in scenography and costumes had been codified, according to a historical correspondence with the period in which the opera was set (Milizia, 1794). The sources available to 19th century set designers were literary, pictorial, illustrative, documentary and theatrical, but were used with a certain freedom. Alongside these, tangible testimonies such as the ruins of past architecture were also available. The synthesis of these

sources led in many cases to a fantastic archaeology, where certain elements stood as symbols of the scenic situation they wanted to represent, accentuating its meaning on a visual level. Emblematic in this sense is the use of medieval architectural forms to connote the presence of the sacred or its negation through a symbolic form. An example is the Gothic cathedral in Goethe's *Faust* (Figure 1). In the first Parisian edition of the opera, in April 1867, the scenographer Philippe Chaperon depicted the interior of the church using all the well-known medieval stylistic elements to make the reference immediately recognisable: pointed arches, cross vaults, statues, pinnacles (Biggi, 2018). Similarly, the 19th-century staging of *Romeo and Juliet* (Figure 2) was characterised by sepulchral views and dungeons with tombs, taken from medieval aesthetics and adapted to the sensibility of Romanticism, which were configured as coded symbols of the afterlife, and were repeated by various scriptwriters in various theatres (Viale Ferrero, 1988). The sketches themselves, once made, became in fact a powerful tool for codifying the spectacular vision, creating a repertoire of models available to the scenographers for consultation and representation. It is evident how in this way a

Fig. 1 Auguste Rubé and Philippe Chaperon, *Faust*, Act IV, scene 2: the church. Model of the scenography in volume, 1869. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Fig. 2 Philippe Chaperon, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act V: underground crypt. Sketch of the scenography, 1872. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

symbolic imaginary was increasingly delineated, associating visual elements with scenic situations. In the case of natural settings, some correspondences were created between the atmosphere and the feelings expressed in the scene, following the Romanticist conception of nature as a witness and participant in human events.

The same process can be seen in the analysis of the costume sketches. Here too, the design took place through drawings showing the initial idea of the costume designer, often free from material constraints. As for the attempt to achieve historical realism in scenography, late 18th century treatises began to prescribe the permanent presence of a costume designer in the theatre, and the need for the clothes not to reflect the personality of the actor, as occurred until then, but to fit the character to be staged in a verisimilar manner (Marini, 1771). The costume thus assumed a symbolic role, becoming an essential sign of the *mise-en-scène*, making a character recognisable. In the 19th century, documentary research for the creation of stage clothes found philological rigour in environmental and epochal representation, so that, according to Roland Barthes, it signed the beginning of the costume history.

A true history of costume only begins with Romanticism, especially among theatre people, from the moment that actors want to play their roles in period costumes, painters and draughtsmen begin to systematically search for the historical truth of appearances (clothes, scenery, furniture, accessories), i.e., precisely everything that has to do with costume (Barthes, 2006, p. 27).

From a figurative point of view, the sketches made by theatre costume designers correspond to the definition of fashion plate, intended as costume portraits, that is, a portrait that does not show the characteristics of a particular individual, but illustrates the type of clothes that can be dressed (Holland, 1955). As for the coeval fashion plates, one or, more rarely, two figures were portrayed on the pictorial plane, arranged frontally or three-quarter-length to show the dress in its maximum visibility. The only spatial marker, in the absence of a background, was a horizontal line or a small area of shadow at the figure's feet. The poses were rather artificial, aimed at the correct perception of the model of the dress in all its details, according to the iconographic style borrowed from the portraiture of the time. They were mainly made on paper or cardboard and coloured with watercolour or tempera (Figure 3). The drawings were often characterised by bright colours, used for a better effect on stage, considering that theatres were still lit by the feeble light of candles (Niccoli, 2014).

The consolidation of musical repertoires towards the end of the century, with the most prestigious titles being replicated in all major European cities, further contributed to the formation of a visual repertoire of staging through the reproduction of successful productions. Evidence of these staging began to circulate thanks to the new tools for reproducing images.

THE VISUAL EVIDENCE OF THE STAGE

The 19th century marked a gradual expansion of the audience for theatrical performances from court theatres to

a larger number of private and public theatres, which were also frequented by the emerging upper middle class as well as aristocratic spectators. In parallel, there was a multiplication of the vehicles for disseminating images, with the invention of numerous technical processes that made faster and cheaper the mass production of lithographs or line engravings. These two factors led to the diffusion of a second type of images to document the mise in scene. Whereas in the case of the previously analysed sketches we are dealing with single drawings intended for the execution of the scenography or costume, in this case we are

Fig. 4 Henri Paillard, *Théodora*, sixth scene: the imperial box, (scenography by Rubé and Chaperon), Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, 1885. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

dealing with images intended for reproduction in multiple copies, to document the performances and inform a public interested in following the life of the theatres and operas. In rarer cases, the images could be made by the same scenographer who drawn the sketches, from which they differed in the presence of the characters within the scene, captured during the action on the stage as in a photographic shot. More often the draughtsmen, either on site or from memory after a performance, reproduced a draft of the scene with the actors in their roles, and then the engraving houses transcribed their drawings with techniques that allowed a wide circulation (Figure 4). Also, regarding the representation of stage costumes, the difference from the design sketches was the reproduction technique, which was usually the engraving. Moreover, as they were

Fig. 5 Stage costumes for *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*, 1867. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

intended for the audience and not for tailoring, we often find not the sketches of a single dress, but illustrations containing the costumes of all the characters brought on stage in a performance, each one depicted in a pose consistent with the character's gestures (Figure 5).

The dissemination of these evidence of the stage was entrusted above all to the illustrated periodicals, which experienced a great development in this era. The presence of illustrations in journals was in fact a powerful incentive for circulation to a broader and more differentiated public. The reasons for this success were in the new social and cultural climate and in the technological development that invested the publishing world in those years. The contents of the periodicals were varied and could include literary texts, theatre reviews, etiquette recommendations, information on current affairs and customs, events and society

news, art and travel (Gigli Marchetti, 1997). After 1870 in
Italy, following the example of France, the idea of autono-
mous instruments to improve and deepen knowledge of the
event-performance began to appear. Thus, the first maga-
zines arose entirely dedicated to the world of the theatre,
to the life of the companies, and to the actors, documenting
events and performances in detail through the publication
of visual material related to the stage settings and, above
all, the performances (Barbina, 2009). The theatrical agen-
cies liaised with newspapers and specialised magazines to
disseminate the content, to increase the interest of an ever-
widening public. The circulation of these images contributed
to the definition of a visual imaginary linked to the mise in
scene, to which the performances then had to adapt to meet
the expectations of the audience.

Over the century, an evolution of the illustrative typol-
ogy can also be noted, which increasingly assumed the fea-
ture of a visual narrative. In addition to the single scene, we

Fig. 7 Jules Chéret, illustrations for the pantomime *La Fée du Rocher*, 1894. Source: gallica.bnf. fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

can find the publication of illustrations consisting of several frames, each containing a scene from the opera. The images read in sequence gave a visual understanding of the development of the story as in a modern graphic novel, but often without words and entrusted exclusively to the visual power of representation (Figure 6). A second novelty concerns the detachment from fidelity in the reproduction of the scene in the direction of a synthesis of the atmosphere of the stage emphasizing the spectacular effect, to engage and intrigue the audience. This is the case of Jules Chéret's illustrations for *La Fée du Rocher* (Figure 7), in which he proposed an unprecedented co-presence of music, text and image, where it is the latter that captures the attention in a festive whirlwind of dances and colours, a distinctive feature of his posters (Weill, 1977). It is just the presence of one of the fathers of advertising poster art in the creation of the stage materials, together with other illustrious names such as Mucha or Hohenstein, that makes it clear how short the step was from

the creation of spectacular images to visually illustrate an event with the aim of capturing the audience's attention, to the use of images for overtly advertising purposes.

THE SPECTACLE IN ADVERTISING POSTERS

The origins of the modern poster as an instrument for visual communication are to be searched in France in this era of optimism and unconventionality in the fields of entertainment and arts, characterised by a great freedom of expression and a desire to experiment. In particular, the lively Paris, with its spectacles and nightlife, centre of an avant-garde artistic and cultural environment, was its natural cradle. In this context, the poster was the ground for innovative experimentation by many successful artists, with results of great interest and originality, to the point of becoming an autonomous artistic genre with its own peculiarities (Brunelli, 2004). The great novelty of Chéret's posters compared to previous ones was the substitution of informative content with illustration, which became predominant in the communication while the text became an accessory element, a part of the illustration: through its positioning within the field, the shape, the colour, it began to intertwine with the figures in a composition that was unified and harmoniously designed to achieve a visual balance. The style became functional to the content to be conveyed: colours, images, texts had to contribute to conveying first an atmosphere, within which the characters moved. The colour of the background of the posters created a strong contrast with the foreground, accentuating the scenic presence of the characters, who stood out and captured the scene as if a performance was taking place on the poster itself (Piscitelli, 2016).

Remaining in the Parisian context, Alphonse Mucha was another artist who began his career in the theatrical field with a contract with the famous actress Sarah Bernhardt, for whom he designed scenography (Figure 8), costumes
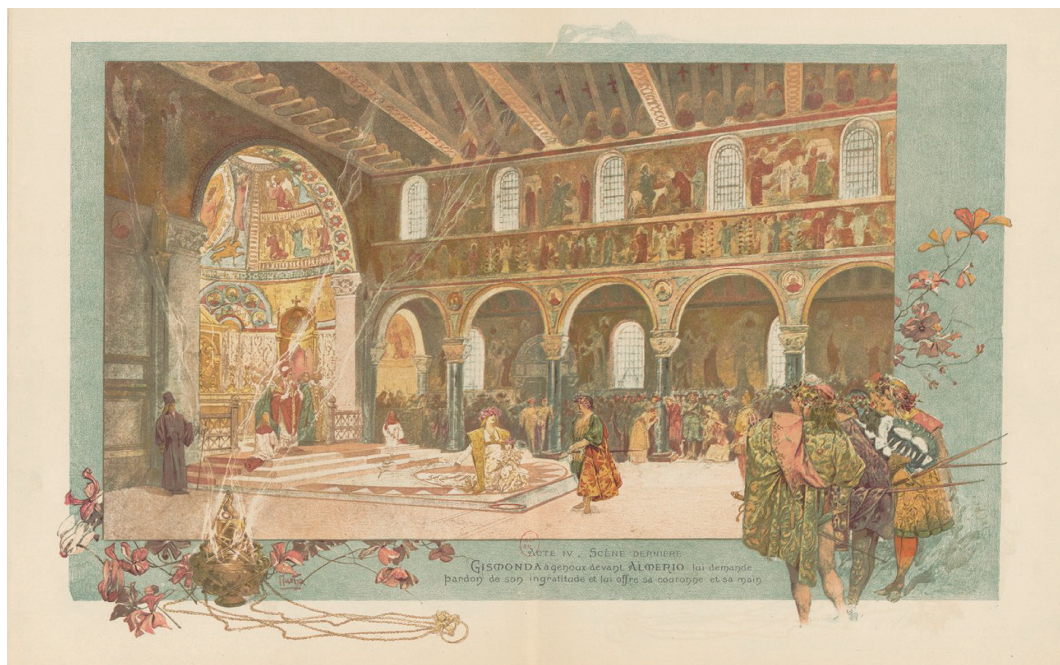
Fig. 8 Alphonse Mucha, scenography for *Gismonda*, act I, scene VII, Theatre of the Renaissance, 1894. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

and jewellery, as well as the advertising posters for *Gismonda* (1894), *La Dame aux Camèlias* (1896), *Lorenzaccio* (1896), *La Samaritaine* (1897), *Mèdèe* (1898), *Hamlet* (1899) and *Tosca* (1899). The background of Mucha's posters was filled with a rich profusion of ornamental motifs typical of the liberty style: floral and geometric motifs, buds, arabesque motifs, mosaic inlays, mixed with other symbols (Sato, 2016). In the posters dedicated to Sarah Bernhardt, it is interesting to note how the depiction always makes use of a symbolic element present in the culminating scene of the work, which becomes an iconographic element that, together with the costume, immediately links to the imagery associated to that work, differentiating posters that were otherwise characterised by a strong stylistic and compositional uniformity (Figure 9). This is the arrival point in the process of defining a symbolic imagery linked to the performance, in which each work becomes recognisable to the public through certain visual elements associated with it.

Fig. 9 Alphonse Mucha, promotional poster for: *La Samaritaine* (1897), *Mèdèe* (1898), *Hamlet* (1899), Theatre of the Renaissance. Source: gallica.bnf. fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

These characteristics are also found in Italy, where opera posters were the first genre in which artists of the late 19th century engaged, starting with Hohenstein, artistic director of the Officine Ricordi from 1889 (Sangiorgi, 1967). His posters of this period display a photographic realism in the accurate description of the characters, depicted on brightly painted backgrounds, alternating with pronounced light and shadow effects. The proposal of an evocative image of the opera and the reduction of textual elements to a minimum broke with the traditional information poster that had

been used in theatres until then, in which the programme was presented using only the text.

The themes expressed in the promotion of the opera were the starting point for the poster art of the nascent cinema, which also made use of allegory and figurative realism in the creation of the first posters. The opera poster artwork became the model from which the representation was taken in a scenic-visual synthesis emphasising the emotional aspects of the film. In fact, a process had been consolidated whereby the poster designer selected elements belonging to the performance (characters, objects, situations, scenes) and organised them in a precise composition. Through an often-hierarchical arrangement of the selected elements, he guided the viewer's gaze along a linear or reticular visual path guided by plastic vectors (lines, shapes, colours) or figurative vectors that conveyed the understanding of the representation by the viewer, who was led to perceive and recognise the figurative subjects and decode the visual symbols (Della Torre, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the extremely rich visual heritage linked to theatrical mise in scene in its period of maximum popularity, described here in a synthetic manner for space reasons, permitted to understand the staging phenomenon in the entire process from design to documentation and promotion of the performance. It is interesting to note how images have developed an increasingly strong semantic link with the content of the work, to the point of defining iconic signs to characterise scenography and characters, enriching the narrative with symbolic elements carrying further levels of meaning. The images demonstrate how the figurative component took on an increasingly essential role in the staging during the 19th century, for an audience that was increasingly demanding for the visual aspects of the performance. The experiments

due to the artists who worked in the theatrical field played a fundamental role in the development of graphics, laying the foundations, from a semantic and compositional point of view, for advertising posters in general and cinema posters in particular. Finally, we can note that since the mise in scene is linked to what the artist considers to be closest to the sensibility and interests of the audience, these testimonies are also an important tool for interpreting the contemporary society, its cultural level, identity models, visual and theatrical culture.

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THE MUSIC VIDEO PERFORMANCE *ENCOUNTER ACROSS BORDERS* AS A CREATIVE COMMUNITY-BUILDING EXPERIENCE FOR SOCIAL COHESION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE THE EUROPEAN PROJECT *COMMUNITY*

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ART-BASED APPROACHES
MUSIC
VIDEO
'COMMUNITY'
SOCIAL COHESION OF YOUTH

One of the most widespread problems among young people, leading to serious forms of social unrest, is the lack of a sense of social inclusion and belonging. For this reason, the Project *CommUnity. Build Communities - Create Peace!* (2019-2021) involved eleven partners from seven European Countries –Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Croatia– in order to build up and develop a cross-generational intercultural dialogue through the creation of communities of people who share a passion for the arts and music.

A group of seven persons, chosen among students, graduates and junior researchers of the University of Florence, was created for the development of a musical and theatrical video performance on the issue of an of intercultural dialogue among peoples.

The intercultural music band worked under the supervision of the University of Florence research team, through the implementation of art-based methodological approaches, and the 'design thinking' process.

This paper focuses on the importance of creativity and art-based approaches in building communities, while it underlines the relevance of the artistic and cultural contexts within which their members can share visions and experience. Through the video images the evocative power of Florence landscape is clearly emphasized: when the performers meet different people in the midst of monuments, squares, ancient buildings and real or metaphorical bridges across the Arno River.

THE EUROPEAN PROJECT *COMMUNITY*
FOR THE SOCIAL COHESION OF YOUTH

The program (2019-2021) involved eleven partners from seven European Countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, and Croatia) that —through the 'Harmony CommUnity' campaign— worked to improve cross-generational intercultural dialogue and create communities of persons who love and practice arts and music. The overall goal focused on improving social cohesion/inclusion by using music and storytelling in such a way that people could choose to take up conflict-free expressions of their identity and beliefs. This was promoted by enhancing the harmonious coexistence among young generations, despite their differences of cultures and religious faiths, in order to foster a sense of belonging and reduce the sense of marginalization for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Art and music allow young people to be brought closer together by enthusing them about an activity that requires them to adopt the same language beyond individual differences. As a matter of fact, one of the most prevalent problems among teens that lead to serious forms of social discomfort is, precisely, the lack of a sense of social inclusion and belonging (Biagioli, 2015).

The idea behind the research work is based on the conviction that the isolation of individuals from society, their feeling of being subject to discrimination, or the habit to consider others as potential threats or even enemies can lead to radicalization and extremism (Huion et al., 2021). Therefore, the Project placed at the center of the acted practices the need to define safe spaces to enable participation, interaction, sharing, expression of thoughts, and dialogues among stakeholders in a free and spontaneous way through 'artistic languages'. The pedagogical perspective that oriented the research work stemmed from the idea that music can foster the control of emotions and solicit positive social bonding, by means of a shared cultural tradition or

through the encounter of different cultures that allow a fusion of artistic knowledge aiming at the creation of shared meanings (Moscato, 2012). Indeed, as Cambi (2008, p. 49) argues, "music is aesthetic culture. It is historical culture. It is internalized culture. It is cultural fruition".

The University of Florence research team[1] designed and implemented a musical performance with the involvement of seven people chosen among students, graduates and junior researchers[2] who collaborated, for the first time, on this specific project, creating an intercultural music band that, through its performance, was able to experience the benefits of artistic methodologies in fostering a sense of belonging and the free expression of personal identity and values. The intercultural approach was retrieved not only in the Italian and Spanish origins of the band participants but was mainly represented by the multicultural references that inspired the original music compositions, the lyrics and the literary contributions selected by the band performers with the research team support. The co-design of the performance also prompted the protagonists to reflect on the importance of an intercultural dialogue among peoples, of a peaceful coexistence and the building of creative communities that communicate through musical expressiveness. The University research team supported the young artists in the development of their performance, coordinated all project meetings and musical rehearsals[3], supervised the video making.

ART-BASED RESEARCH & DESIGN THINKING: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The implementation of artistic and creative approaches in educational and social research has intensified since the 1990s in a transdisciplinary context because of the technological and media progress (Guerrini & Proli, 2022). Therefore, today it is possible to trace music, visual art, film, theater, dance,

performing arts, and digital arts, in various areas of research, particularly in the educational and social ones (Chilton & Leavy, 2014, cited in Guerrini & Proli, 2022). In these contexts, in fact, the arts can express the rich feeling-based relational entanglements that animate communities, can highlight the complexity of lived experiences, and induce researchers and stakeholders to see and think differently. In this perspective, the artistic approaches have the power to evoke, inspire, kindle emotions, awaken visions and imaginations, as well as facilitate researchers in bringing out untold stories (Cole & Knowles, 2001, cited in Guerrini & Proli, 2022).

The methodology applied within the *CommUnity* Project was qualitative, with feedbacks being gathered from all those involved through interviews and reports related to the artistic activities. The research activities were developed according to a laboratory approach through a series of online meetings, carried out during the period 2020-2021. In addition, the ABR (Art-Based Research) methodology and the 'design thinking' –as pathway for solving critical and wicked problems in professional and educational contexts
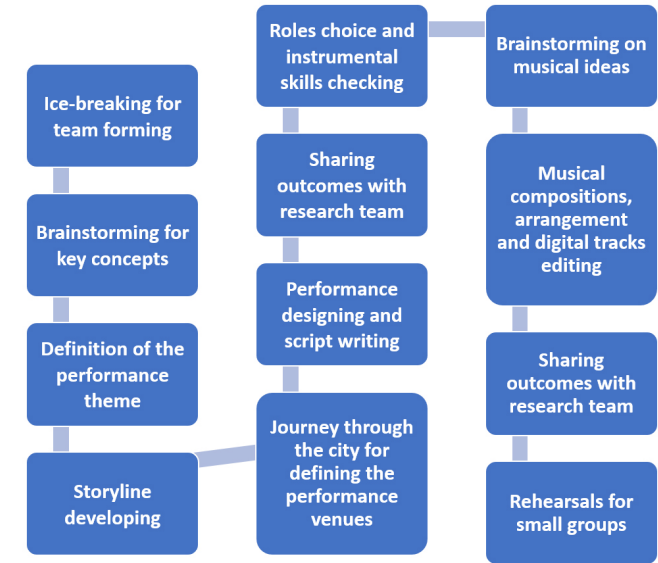
Fig. 1 Outline of the creative process[4]. Graphic elaboration by the author.

(Buchanan, 1992)– were implemented to promote and give value to the participants' experiences (Huion et al., 2021).

As reported in Figure 1, the main stages through which the creative process was articulated. Following the initial meetings centered on the performance design, the research team proceeded to define the roles that the participants themselves chose to play, according to their artistic experiences and skills. Moreover, the performance theme, "encounter among peoples", inspired the music and lyrics composed by the young artists involved.

The first approach to the musical creation was made by studying the traditional songs and compositions of the partner Countries and by tracing an ideal cultural itinerary from the southern coasts washed by the Mediterranean Sea, to the North and East of Europe. The principal outcomes were seven digital music tracks inspired by traditional music from Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and an original gospel song for choral singing placed at the end of the performance. The young artists then composed original lyrics to transform the musical tracks into songs. The music and songs, together, prompted the idea of drawing on the literature of the Countries mentioned above, to select literary extracts that could interweave narratives with songs and dance. In this way, a complex and richly evocative tale was produced to evoke the theme of encounters and dialogues among peoples. The workshop model was maintained at all stages of the creative work, in such a way that all the performers remained active and fostered a continuous confrontation that enriched the final product.

THE EVOCATIVE POWER OF URBAN PLACES AS SPACE OF ENCOUNTER WITH OTHERS

After composing the musical structure of the performance, all the band components and the research team began to study the venues of the performance itself through site visits

Fig. 2 S. Cini and F. Pinzani sing No more tears, "Wanna delete the fears, I have no more tears" (songwriters: S. Cini, F. Pinzani). On the ancient bank of the Arno.

Fig. 3 F. Pinzani and a performer sing *Ephemeral life*, "We are like flowers, we move slowly at times, but we adapt and then we blossom" (songwriter: F. Pinzani). Ospedale degli Innocenti, Piazza SS. Annunziata.

Fig. 4 F. Pinzani and a performer sing *Caminan a mi lado*, "Hijos de una misma tierra abrigados por el mismo sol con la esperanza en las estrellas con suenhos ahogados en dolor" (songwriters: P. Feijoo Reis, F. Pinzani). Piazza Leopoldo, northern suburbs of Florence.

in Florence that became an opportunity to "encounter" the city, its public spaces, and monuments. The protagonists imagined that their singing, storytelling, and dancing could stitch together the spaces chosen as a background for the video recording into a set of emotions and sensations that could easily reach the audience. At this stage, the research activity was based on the interpretation of the city's places, capturing the "vertigo of urban voids, the resonance of ancient stones, the flowing of the Arno River, and further, the life that animates the suburbs dense with humanity. (Figures 2-3-4-5)

These built spaces live and speak through their forms, surrounded by silence, which only in rare moments, during the day or at night, allows the possibility of grasping the meaning of the scene deprived of words and sounds. Meaning thus lies in the forms themselves and in the relationship among them (Focillon, 1943/1987). Thus, the sound of the instruments, the voice and gesture of the performers converse with places, with works of art and peripheral architecture, weaving new relationships, creating new stories even if transient.

Fig. 5 F. Pinzani sings *Seeds of Beauty*, "I am looking for love and unity, I look for beauty in diversity, I look for food for my curiosity to enhance my life" (songwriter: F. Pinzani). University of Florence, Campus of Social Sciences, northern suburbs.

Fig. 6 F. Pipparelli is acting out a passage from *The Giufà Project*, "If you look at it from the Bosphorus, or from the Pillars of Hercules, the Mediterranean Sea looks like a lake. A big one, yet a lake. You see coastlines everywhere. Your sight can never really get lost on a flat horizon. At least not there. You need to go to the high sea if you really want to be at sea". <https://thegiufaproject.com/it/team-2/ >. San Miniato al Monte.

Fig. 7 The Violinist plays a melody inspired to Belgian traditional music, Piazza della Signoria.

As masterfully expressed by Paul Valéry (1923) through the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus in *Eupalinos ou l'architecte - L'Âme et la Danse - Dialogue de l'Arbre*, music and architecture make us think of anything but them, and the urban space in the performance becomes the place of the relationship between music and architecture, beyond words and in the absence of words. In this perspective, art can be understood as a system of formal relations rather than a symbolic representation of reality (Kubler, 1976/2002; Focillon, 1943/1987; Langer, 1950/2017). Therefore, from the top of Piazzale Michelangelo, in front of the church of S. Miniato al Monte, the narrator is the only one who makes words resonate to guide the audience beyond the images towards other places, evoking perilous journeys of men in search of freedom (Figure 6).

The images rendered by the video capture the incessant flow of tourists through the narrow streets of the historic center of Florence, and music becomes an opportunity to converse with spaces and people passing by.

Fig. 8 The Dancer, Carolina Braus, improvises a choreography inspired by the flamenco tradition on the song *Caminan a mi lado* (songwriters: P. Feijoo Reis & F. Pinzani). Loggia of Filippo Brunelleschi, Piazza SS. Annunziata.

The absence of words gives way to the flow of music played by a violinist standing alone in front of the majesty of the Palazzo Vecchio immersed in the emptiness of Piazza della Signoria (Figure 7). Not far away, the dance of another performer enlivens the silence of Brunelleschi's Loggia in Piazza SS. Annunziata (Figure 8).

All participants showed extreme involvement in their performances and, regardless of the skills they possessed, worked with great dedication and awareness of the importance of their roles.

The final product is a 45-minute video[5] entitled *Encounter across borders. Narratives and Music for Intercultural Dialogues between Peoples*[6], where music and songs alternate with narration and dance, in an emotional flow enriched by the suggestions evoked by the squares, streets, gardens, river and bridges of Florence. The research team documented all the encounters and conducted a text analysis of some significant passages of dialogues written by the young authors during the first phase of the creative process.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Thus, the main results achieved were the production of a video performance; the emergence and the enhancement of the participants' skills; the cohesion and cooperation within the intercultural music band; the performance design as an opportunity to share intentions and values. Unexpected results were achieved: the emergence of artistic skills possessed and not fully expressed and the development of new artistic interests that will be a stimulus for new projects and self-training paths, as stated by some of the participants.

The belief in the importance of art approaches for social cohesion and the development of a sense of belonging and community building was surely strengthened. The work on *Encounter Across Borders* project facilitated the creation of a group of youngsters who felt they were a community through a shared passion for music and arts. The ultimate artistic goal of creating a performance transferred to a video was the glue that motivated the group to work independently with greater commitment and dedication than expected. The participants themselves declared that working together meant a great improvement of technical and artistic skills.

It is important, therefore, to multiply art-based research experiences in education by facing the challenge of being able to incorporate such methodological approaches into rigorous scientific processes regarding collection and analysis of data together with their wide spreading.

NOTES

1 The research team of the Education and Psychology Department was directed by Prof. Raffaella Biagioli and included Dr. Valentina Guerrini and Maria Grazia Proli.
2 The intercultural band performers have university backgrounds in various disciplines: education sciences, engineering, architecture, political

science, and nursing. Their specific artistic backgrounds are singing,
playing percussion, guitar and violin, songwriting, electronic and digital
music composition, acting and dancing.

3 In some periods, meetings and rehearsals took place online, due to
the Covid-19 pandemic. This condition led the project towards different
perspective because the digital environment used for sharing the artistic
experience, represented more than an obstacle, but –at the same time– it
was a new input to improve creativity.

4 This scheme represents only the main steps of the creative process, the
nature of which was reflexive and recursive.

5 The video was shot by professional operators (April-May 2021).

6 <https://sites.google.com/forlilpsi.unifi.it/public-engagement/home-
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IMAGES
AVANT LA LETTRE
THE MYSTERY OF INK BLOTS IN PSYCHOLOGY, DESIGN, AND ART

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The paper starts out with a figure of speech –*avant la lettre*– and points, through a review of literature, to a variety of disciplinary explanations regarding processes before language was ever spoken. This leads to three categories regarding the relationship of images and language in the context of visual arts and visual communication. Some images depend on the linguistic message, some are framed by a linguistic message, and some are independent of a linguistic message. Images which are independent of language are used in the paper to differentiate processes *avant la lettre* in two case studies. The first case study is an in-depth discussion of the projection of individual traits through the ink-blot images of the Rorschach test. The 10 plates of this psychometric test are supposed to reveal processes *avant la lettre* that are characteristic for an individual psyche. The second case study shows how ink-blot images are used to train communication designers and how the projection of individual traits is a means to develop a unique result. To conclude the discussion, projection, as a process *avant la lettre*, is employed in order to describe the effect of ink-blot images as a dimension of any aesthetic experience.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and images has been extensively discussed in order to describe the characteristics of both systems of representation (Mitchell, 1995; Boehm, 1994; Krämer 2003). The majority of messages in daily communication rely on a combination of both systems (McNeil, 2005). This speaks for their basically complimentary relationship. The existence of images without words points to the equality and independence of both systems. Images without words show that they can create meaning without a verbal addition. Beyond the description of images and language as opposites, we can also think of them as distinct points on a continuum within a process of generalization (Heidegger, 1997). In this model, an experience is the starting point for its generalization. An image, an image schema and, ultimately, a word are further steps on one and the same continuum. But what happens before we can name or recall an experience with language? What are processes *avant la lettre*? Can we shed light on them? These questions are discussed in the following three sections. A literature review on the topic of *avant la lettre* is followed by a first case study focusing on ink-blot images of the Rorschach test. In a second case study, images as projections of individual traits in the context of educating communication designers are presented and discussed.

AVANT LA LETTRE: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE TOPIC

Avant la lettre is a figure of speech, literally translated from French as 'before the letter', 'before writing', or 'before the letter is written'. Historically, it is often traced back to printing processes, where the early prints of a print run are not signed until they reach a quality approved by the artist (Waldow, 1884). In a generalized sense, the phase of doing, becoming, or existing before we can address it with words is described with the figure of speech of *avant la lettre*. There is a broad

spectrum of disciplinary approaches which address what happens before a linguistic utterance is finally formulated.

Jacques Derrida, for instance, gave the first part of *Of Grammatology* the title of *Writing before the Letter*. He analyzes the omnipresence of language, widely understood as an epistemological means to assess the truth in the Western history of thought (Derrida, 1997). Derrida refers to Aristotle, who stated that we have different writing systems and different sounds of speech, but speech is derived from images which are the results of experiences (Derrida, 1997). Derrida contests Aristotle's idea that speech is considered closer to the origin of language and writing is understood as a secondary system. He proclaims 'grammatology' to be a science addressing the entire scope of language, including its visual notation in writing. If we continue the inquiry into the topic of images without words and, therefore, have a closer look at the relationship of images and language, we find a number of attempts to explain images based on semiotic theories (Barthes, 1977; Goodman, 1976; Mitchell, 1986). Roland Barthes draws a clear line in his essay *The Third Meaning: Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills* "the filmic is exactly here, at this point where articulate language is no more than approximative and where another language begins – a language whose 'science' cannot therefore be linguistics, soon discarded like a launching rocket" (1973, p. 65). On the one hand, we can infer from the above that the image can be considered closer to experiences than language –Aristotle– and, on the other one, images are obviously able to address other aspects of our experiences than language – Barthes. The contribution of art history to the debate on the relationship between image and language is revealing as well. The capacity of some images to explain themselves and create meaning without a linguistic addition has been addressed by Thomas Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1995) and other authors of the iconic/pictorial turn. That meaning can be created beyond mere signification has been elaborated on with a close reading of *Nonsemiotic Elements in Pictures* by James Elkins (1995).

Paleoanthropological research on the development of human language describes the pointing gesture and the 'iconic' gesture as the means of communication before the capacity of language had been developed (Tomasello, 2008). Additional research on the relationship of gesture and speech claims that gesture is the iconic complement of speech, is necessary to formulate spoken sentences, and occurs just before speech can be formulated (McNeil, 2005).

If we turn to cognitive sciences with the quest of what happens before an utterance in language is actually formed, we again find a wide range of theoretical models. Antonio Damasio's distinction of a dispositional space and an image space is useful for the further analysis of images without words in general and ink-blot images in particular (Damasio, 1999). He describes the dispositional space as 'traits' below the threshold of consciousness which influence our actions and reaction. These 'traits' are formed by three layers: inherited dispositions, experiences in the first three years of childhood, and the continuous experiences we make. The dispositional space is engaged in a continuous exchange with the image space, where mental images, concepts, language, and actions are created and become accessible to conscious thought. The interaction is continuous since our body is continuously exposed to changes in the environment and receives continuous stimuli from our senses. Images are one kind of stimulus which we encounter in different contexts. Their occurrence as a visual event, most of the time in two-dimensional form on a restricted plane, defines them as an offer of an interpretable message or a starting point for a dialogue between images and their beholders.

Their material constellation allows a range of interpretations in a beholder's cognitive process involving the interaction between dispositional and image space. Some images in the context of communication –e.g., interface design, information design, editorial design– maintain a close relationship between the linguistic and the visual layer of the message. I cannot use an interface if I cannot read the linguistic

signs indicating the functionality of a button. Other types of images develop their effect through the process of interpretation – e.g., images in the context of art, images in film sequences, or documentary photographs. But they are also framed by a linguistic message such as the title of the image or the film or the photograph. There are images that are not framed by a linguistic message at all. Ink-blot images for example are situated in the process between unconscious cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) and linguistic approximation. They are truly images without words and used with a variety of goals in psychology, design, and art.

CASE STUDY 1: THE RORSCHACH INK-BLOT TEST

Hermann Rorschach (1884-1922) was a Swiss psychiatrist who developed a set of ten specific ink-blot plates. They were published in 1921 as part of a study he had conducted, one year before his early death on April 2nd, 1922. The cards are used as stimuli for the Rorschach psychometric test by psychiatrists around the world to this very day. But the test is also decried as a methodology to assess an individual psyche. Rorschach had been given the nickname *Klex* –German for 'ink splotch'– by his schoolmates at high school (Blum, 2008; Galison, 2004). He finished his medical studies in 1909 at the University of Zurich with the goal to become a psychiatrist.

While working on his PhD from 1909 onward, he was also an Assistant Psychiatrist at the Psychiatric Clinic Münsterlingen (1909-1912). During this time, Rorschach read the association studies by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) and started his own experiments in the field of ink-blot images with patients of the clinic and school children of a local school. His studies were suited to contribute to psychometry, the attempt of measuring individual dimensions of the psyche, a field of psychological research since the foundation of the discipline in the middle of the 19th century (Germann, 2019; Galison, 2004). Ink-blot images were widely used in psychology at

the end of the 19th century. French psychiatrist Alfred Binet, for instance, used them in 1895 in order to evaluate an individual's psyche in ten different dimensions (Galison, 2004). Ink-blot images were also used by E. A. Kirkpatrick in the United States in 1900 to assess children's imaginative capacity in different phases of their development (Galison, 2004). Upon Rorschach publishing his PhD thesis in November 1912 *On Reflex-Hallucinations and Kindred Manifestations*, he was taking a break from his studies of ink-blot associations. Most likely inspired by the dissertation by Szymon Hens with the title *Phantasy assessment with formless blots by school children, adults, and mental patients*, published 1917, also supervised by his PhD supervisor Eugen Bleuler, Rorschach once again took up his ink-blot experiments (Blum, 2008; Galison, 2004).

Holding the position of head psychiatrist at the Heil-und Pflegeanstalt in Herisau –Eastern Switzerland– Rorschach again experimented systematically with ink blots and altered the seemingly accidental images in several steps with the goal of triggering a limited number of standard interpretations by healthy test persons plus triggering reliable deviations from the standard interpretation depending on specific mental conditions such as depression or schizophrenia. It is remarkable to see how Rorschach has developed the final plates of the test going through several iterative cycles, altering phases of design with phases of testing (Figures 1, 2).

The results gleaned from the experiments were prepared for publishing in a study along with ten selected ink-blot plates from 1919 onwards. The publication process was managed by Rorschach's colleague Walter Morgenthaler (1882-1965). Since the results of the test were expected to gain reliability based on the accumulation of statistical results, Morgenthaler and Rorschach had to develop a printing process with the publisher, which was stable and of high quality for all editions. Besides solving these problems over a period of two years, Morgenthaler suggested that Rorschach should change the name of the study from *A Perceptual-Diagnostic Experiment?* to *Psychodiagnostik-Test*.

Fig. 1 Hermann Rorschach, early version of ink-blot plate 10, 1918. Archive and Collection Hermann Rorschach, Bern (CH).

Fig. 2 Hermann Rorschach, printed version of ink-blot plate 10, 1921. Archive and Collection Hermann Rorschach, Bern (CH).

Reflecting Rorschach's modesty and attempt to keep a neutral position between the current schools of psychology at the time, he replied to Morgenthaler as follows

Expressions such as 'Psychodiagnostik' [...] Go too far. I don't want to give the impression that one can make general psychodrams with the experiment, and in that context, I have tried to put the brakes on that idea in several places in the text. Perhaps later, when there is a norm created through controlled investigations, such an expres-

sion can be used. For now, though, it strikes me as too pompous. (Galison, 2004, p. 272)

But after additional interventions by Morgenthaler, the title 'Psychodiagnostik-Test' was used in the publication and the ten plates were printed with a remarkable quality of reproduction as to texture, colour, and the range of tones. Especially since the Rorschach test did not intend to describe specific dimensions of the psyche but tried to capture the overall reaction of a beholder confronted with an ink-blot stimulus, the test was compatible with the major schools of psychology at the beginning of the 20th century.

It was Rorschach's intent to describe an 'Experience Type' –*Erlebnistyp*– which was inferred by the emphasis of the test person's projections triggered either by movement (M), colour (C), or form (F). The test procedure was standardized, further developed, and refined by several psychologists after Rorschach's early death – e.g. Morgenthaler 1941. The most extensive instructions and coding system was introduced by John E. Exner in his publication *The Rorschach, A Comprehensive System* (1974).

Exner describes the test-procedure in great detail. In a first step, the psychiatrist informs the patient of the overall goal of the Rorschach test and sits next to him/her on a table or on two comfortable chairs with a clip board. The patient is handed the first card and is asked 'what do you see?'. In the following response phase, the examiner records all the verbal utterances of the patient 'verbatim'. Exner describes extensive possibilities of questions the patient might ask and proposes the answers for the psychiatrist. He emphasizes that the psychiatrist must avoid directive answers and directive encouragement.

After the projections of the patient, triggered by the ten cards, have been recorded with ideally about eight answers per card, the psychiatrist goes through the protocol with the patient again and asks him/her, what his/her spontaneous interpretation was based on. In addition to the verbal records of the response phase and the inquiry phase, a location sheet

is developed which locates the answers that refer to a specific part of an ink blot. In the third phase, the psychiatrist codes the records made in the response and the inquiry phase according to a given index of codes, without the presence of the patient. The codes are derived from the statements of the response-and-inquiry protocol.

This accumulation of codes is then used as the basis for the interpretation of the results based on the outcome of test data collected with other patients beforehand. The critique of the scientific value of the Rorschach test is focusing on the contradiction between the belief in an objective process of codification, executable mechanically, and the intuitive, qualitative interpretation apparent in the observation of the patient, handled by an experienced psychiatrist (German, 2019; Galison, 2004).

We may ask how Herman Rorschach has defined the methodological approach and how much he was relying on codification and how much on his own experience. The lack of answers on plate 9 of the test by a specific patient is commented by Rorschach as follows "suppression of color responses as expressed in color shock is a pathognomonic sign of neurotic repression of affect" (Galison, 2004, p. 278). The interpretation of the observation directly relates to his experience and knowledge as a psychiatrist.

We can say that the ink-blot images of the Rorschach test are images *avant la lettre*, since they are not influenced by a linguistic level. Used in the test, they point through verbalization to a beholder's projections, to processes below the threshold of consciousness, guided by his or her traits and dispositions. They trigger the projection of the 'Experience Type' of a beholder.

Beyond the mix of methodologies taken from the natural science –quantitative interpretation– and the humanities –qualitative interpretation– Rorschach also saw a link of his test to the arts. For him the 'Experience Type' becomes also evident in an individual's preference of one artistic style over another one (Galison, 2004).

CASE STUDY 2: INK-BLOT IMAGES IN THE EDUCATION OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND ART

If we leave the psychological perspective behind and look at creative processes of communication design, a designer is going through the same processes Hermann Rorschach has employed in the development of his ten ink-blot plates. Through the creation of an experimental field of visual variations, a trained communication designer evaluates the meaning of a single variation in a comparative process of differentiation, after the experimental phase of the creation of visual possibilities is halted. As described above, this evaluation is guided by the individual projections, preferences, dispositions, and traits of the designer.

To say it with the words of Hermann Rorschach, the evaluation depends on the 'Experience Type' of the respective designer who also projects his/her preferences into the process of design. In contrast to the psychometric test, these projections are not interpreted in order to describe an individual psyche. The preferences of a designer, the choice of a visual form is the starting point of understanding how a visual message is perceived by a broader audience. It is the 'standard interpretation' which is at stake.

Even though the evaluation starts with an individual designer's traits and dispositions, it is usually extended and discussed with colleagues and clients or even assessed with the help of empirical methodologies. Also, in the context of design the assessment of a visual message follows a qualitative methodology –interpretation of the effect of an artifact– or an empirical approach of the social sciences – focus groups, interviews, and usability testing. The preference for a specific methodology strongly depends on the two seemingly opposite criteria an artefact of communication design should be measured by: the transfer of information and the deviation from what a beholder has seen and expects in order to create an intriguing and surprising effect, catching the attention of a passerby (Lyotard, 1997). If we look at basic exercises in the

Fig. 3 Hermann Rorschach, Ink-Blot Plates 1 to 10 of the Rorschach Test, 1921. Verlag Hans Huber, Hogrefe AG, Bern (CH).

education of communication design, they strive to strengthen these two requirements of a visual message. Ink blots are also used as a starting point in order to find the form of a visual representation of an object which can be widely understood by an audience (Figure 3).

Davis Sless describes the difficulty to assess the most likely interpretation of an ink blot by a wider audience

The experiments I performed were very simple. I asked students to look at an ink blot and make a prediction about how someone else would see the blot. I then took the blot to another group of students and asked them what they saw. In every case there were large discrepancies between the predictions and the actual readings. I then asked the original students to modify the image just sufficiently so that readers would see it in accordance with the original predictions they had made and again tested the modified blots on a second group of students. In all cases it took the students at least three cycles of modification and subsequent testing before they achieved optimal results. Most of the students found it increasingly difficult to believe the persistent variability of readings after the second modification. The reading which the design students projected on the blots made it progressively harder, and eventually impossible, for them to see the blot from anybody else's point of view. Their position and their projections determined their reading. (Sless, 1987, p. 7)

It seems a simple task to find an understandable representation of an object. But the understandability depends again on our individual projections, preferences, dispositions, and traits in processes *avant la lettre*.

There are different pedagogical approaches to make students aware of the processes below the threshold of consciousness, their individuality in perceiving as well as in creating a visual message. The ink-blot exercise emphasizes the aspect of varying interpretations of a visual artefact and has as its goal to gain experience in the transfer of information and to raise awareness as to individuality (Figure 4). But the individual point of view is presented as an obstacle that avoids the reliable transfer of a message. Academic art and modernist design curricula have handled individuality in this manner. Striving for objectivity was a major goal in the Swiss design education in the middle of the 20th century (Müller-
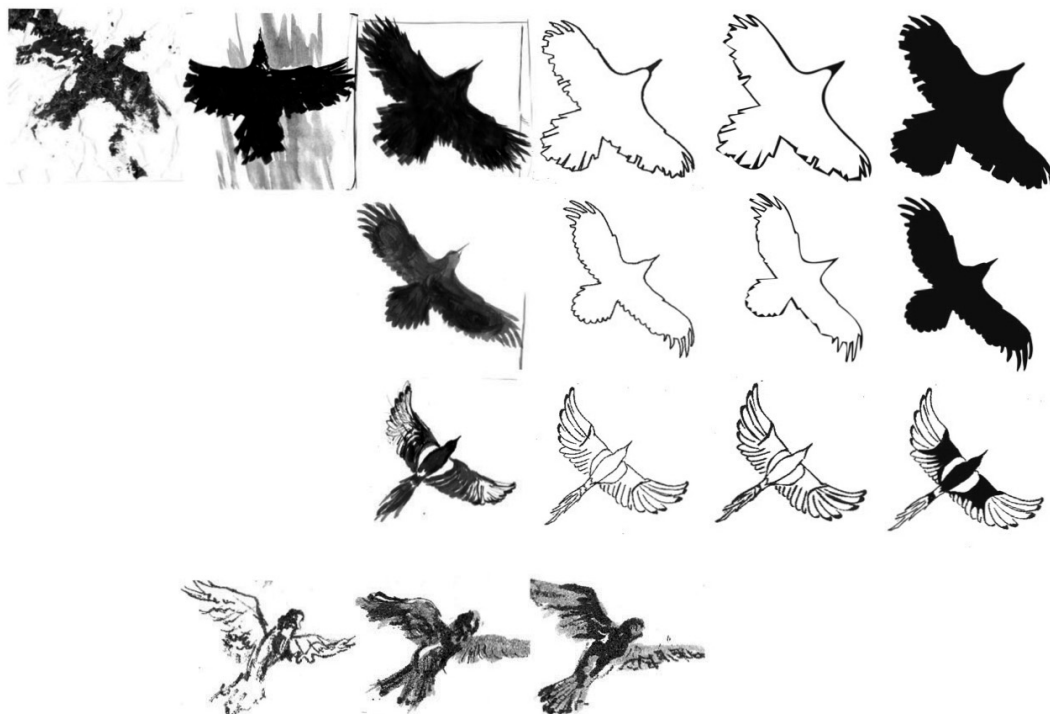
Fig. 4 Malgorzata Malysiak (student), ink-blot exercise, Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. Class conducted by Dr. Piotr Michura. Archive of Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts.

Brockmann, 1961). If we go beyond the transfer of information and focus on the second criterium a visual message has to fulfill, we may ask how the deviation of the expected occurs and how students can learn to create intriguing and surprising messages.

It is again the individuality of the projection, preferences, dispositions, and traits of the student which is the basis for the following exercise.

The drawing experiment described (Renner, 2018; 2022) is conducted with a group of about 15 students with, ideally, diverse cultural backgrounds. They are asked to draw compositions of horizontal and vertical lines using ink and brush on large sheets of paper mounted on the drawing board of an easel. The declared goal consists in achieving an interesting or aesthetically pleasing result.

The participants in the experiment are given plenty of time to engage in this search for a favourable composition.
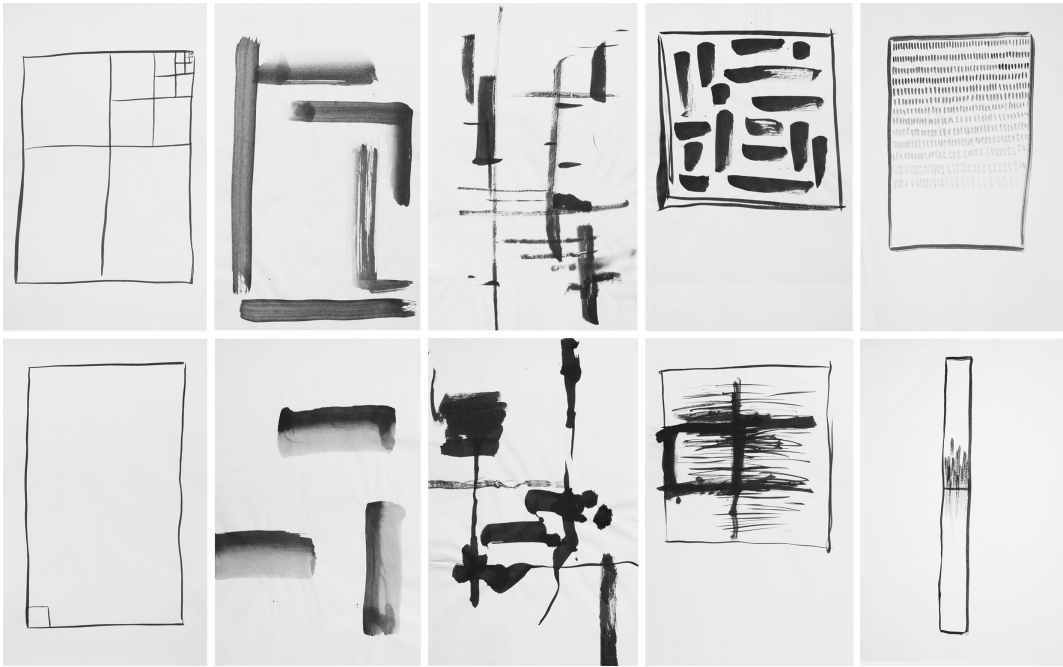
Fig. 5 Class project, compositions by five participants, Institute of Visual Communication, Basel School of Design HGK FHNW.

After many attempts have been made, approximately after one hour, the students are asked to select and mark their two favourite examples (Figure 5). The selected image pairs of the participants are laid out –see the example in Figure 5, left to right, participants A, B, C, D, and E– and already show a variety of individual approaches. They can range from compositions following a predetermined strategy of dividing a plane –Figure 5, left column, participant A– to a planned use of the tool and its ability to hold ink – Figure 5, right column, participant E. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are compositions which are the result of a process that is not preconceived, but a sequence of actions following the setting of the first stroke – Figure 5, middle column, participant C.

In a second task, the participants are asked to draw objects such as pumpkins and lilies with brush and ink. In a comparative analysis of the abstract composition and the representation of the still life developed by one student, the compositional preference and the individual use of the tool become evident and can be addressed in the group (Figures

6, 7). In this setting, the awareness of the individuality of processes *avant la lettre* is not defined as a problem for communication, but as a means to develop the deviation, which allows a visual message to go beyond the mere transfer of information. Also, exercises of writing can be employed in order to let students experience the individuality of the processes *avant la lettre* and to show how the projection of individual preferences can be employed to create visual innovation (Renner, 2020).

Fig. 6 Class project, abstract compositions and drawing of lilies by participant A, Institute of Visual Communication, Basel School of Design HGK FHNW.

Fig. 7 Class project, abstract compositions and drawing of lilies by participant C, Institute of Visual Communication, Basel School of Design HGK FHNW.

CONCLUSIONS

After the discussion of the psychometric promise of the Rorschach test and the discussion of ink-blot images and of other exercises addressing the individuality of processes *avant la lettre* in the context of art and design education, the mystery remains.

Why are the ink-blot images of the Rorschach test still widely known to this day? Why does art and design use images which are coming across as images of chance throughout their history? Is it Leonardo's often quoted advice for painters to look at stains on the wall to come up with new ideas? (Da Vinci, 1877) We may assume that it is the trigger of imagination which is the fascination of ink blots.

The term 'projection', as it is used in psychology, allows us to differentiate another aspect of the fascination related to ink-blot images. As described above, dispositions are formed throughout our individual history and become apparent through the projection and viewing of chance images. Since these images go beyond representation, they can be compared to music, addressing, on an abstract level, basic structures of our past experiences (Johnson, 2007). Music as well as ink-blot images allow us, on an abstract level –*avant la lettre*– to relive the past by making our traits and preferences in the processes of projection apparent. Ambiguity is, to a certain degree, part of any image, but especially evident in ink-blot images.

What has been described as an aesthetic experience includes the projection of our preferences, traits, and dispositions into an actual experience of perceiving an image.

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IMAGES VS WORDS
A STUDY FOR
A VISUAL RHETORIC

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The universality of figurative arts underlines the expressive potential of images, while ideograms document the origin of writing in drawing, demonstrating its ability to configure itself as a language through the development of recognizable codes. The relationship between word and image results from the common ability to conform in language thanks to their complementary roles: the precision of words and the immediacy of images.

Advertising was the first to apply the communicative effectiveness of images, deepening their study with reference to the articulations of words. Verbo-visual rhetoric underlines the common intent to make the message convincing through recognizable structures such as coded figures. The parallel between rhetoric, art and technique of verbal language, and the construction of images goes beyond advertising, but this represents the starting point in finding new applications for this powerful union.

The effectiveness of images is the reason for the growing importance of visual communication in digital media, made accessible precisely by the development and adoption of intuitive graphic interfaces, which encourages the development of a new visual rhetoric.

This study collects the first results of an experimentation conducted in the didactic field, aimed at verifying the possibility and modalities of the visual transposition of rhetorical figures, overcoming the need for textual elements.

WORDS AND IMAGES

Digital evolution is deeply changing and influencing roles and expressions of visual communication. Images are relevant in many domains that require specific skills; like Maldonado affirmed in the Seventies, science and technology both transform the specializing process, while the most innovative disciplines demand new expertise (Maldonado, 1974).

This phenomenon also concerns the domains that seem settled, like the visual communicative one, which branched out in very different and specific applications during the past century. In this overview, digital development tends to combine these new functions into new representations free from media's restrictions, that characterized the different branches originating from the Drawing Arts. The transversal characteristic of the knowledge required to create images leads to the hybridization between different visual cultures. However, their efficiency is still linked to strategies that require scientific control over the language chosen, to achieve a specific goal for each domain. These areas of interest originate from the Drawing Art declined as Graphic Art, thanks to which is possible to organize the sign to diffuse a message quickly and highly engaging but also different and complementary with words.

A very thin line separates graphic language, which is extremely effective, and verbal language, which is responsible for delivering information and abstract concepts with great precision and accuracy.

In fact, besides ideograms, also the phonetic writing of Indo-European alphabets originates from the drawing of the mark referred to specific sounds, some of which are still recognizable[1]. The act of writing remains a graphic manifestation and synthetization of the verbal language, but illustration endures as visual communication with informative purpose, thanks to its recognizability, a fundamental characteristic that allowed the circulation of information during eras when analphabetism dominated the population. Im-

ages were extremely useful, with a function of information and recall, for example, in store signs. Few cases like the representation of the goods inside the small shops found in ancient roman archeological sites, or store signs made of wood or iron in many European cities demonstrate the inseparability of words from images in the commercial domain.

For this reason, the advertising domain is considered the natural consequence of the conscious application of raphics to communication. Beginning with the economic development that interested the industry sector, this circumstance increased the interest and the research on psychological mechanisms linked to the use of images in visual communication.

From the application into graphics of *Gestalt* studies, the domain of advertisement flourished through brilliant intuition but also technical expedients regarding the project of images and their union with words. Words and images have different but complementary characteristics that stimulate precise mechanisms in order to engage and persuade the consumer. Like verbal communication can be precise and specific but assumes adequate language knowledge, figurative representation is effective in diffusing a message that is immediately recognizable, but also captivating due to the interpretability of images.

Advertising frequently uses both illustration and words in a single verbo-visual message to balance the characteristics of the two different types of communication and increase the effectiveness of the message.

The ongoing changes due to the digital transition require a review of the codes and techniques of visual communication to take advantage of the potential of images as a reference element for the experience in the 'digital dimension' parallel to the physical one.

Today new spaces are opening to digital representation thanks to a revolution of the culture of the image open to the stimuli offered by other areas. The rules of the verbo-visual rhetoric developed in the advertising field can become an important reference for communication in digital domains,

which are currently 'oriented' by images, destined to become the main interface between us and the digital expansion of reality. Digital technologies expand the possibilities of the construction of visual images with instruments and multimedia technics that can produce synesthetic stimuli that the *avant-garde* movements were looking for during the first decade of the past century. In many hybrid applications, visual languages have lost part of their specificity, but the role of images remains central and there are many cases in which they assume an autonomous role from other elements. The evolution of advertising communication itself, testify the importance of the visual channel also inside mediums that support sensorial stimuli linked to the concept of time (sound, movement) and in the development of a more complex form of communication, like the ones tied to the digital media evolution.

The creative industries that accompany the development of technology require more transversal interdisciplinary collaborations, aimed at optimizing the effectiveness of the communication mediums involved. Starting from the visual one that moves from the long tradition of Drawing, based on static and two-dimensional images capable of representing space and time, to describe the material reality and evoke the sensorial one. The same communication between individuals and institutions through digital platforms could benefit from greater design control of images. Since these tools increasingly replace the physical interlocutor in the search for information and this can only start from the research developed in the advertising field through the transposition of the principles of rhetoric, which underline the link between image and word in the common ability to visualize figures, inverting the interlocutor's margin of freedom with respect to the margin of interpretation. In fact, the mental image created by the verbal description is personal and conditioned by individual experience, just as the interpretation of images in visual communication remains open. Figures are the point of contact where verbal and visual communication meet[2].

The experiences developed in advertising offer useful information for the application of new techniques in other areas where graphic representation is central, such as the visualization of the architectural project, which in the past has developed its own expressive characteristics. They can have great interest in teaching through the application of engagement strategies such as those developed by gaming.

The control of the rhetorical effects of the images is in fact functional to the application in visual languages of semantic structures based on the graphic transposition of what has already been codified by the *Ars Rhetorica*, about the figures that enrich the speech as real ornaments.

The research aims to define characters of the structures and figures of visual rhetoric and on an empirical verification of the expressive autonomy of the images with respect to the word, that is the possibility of constructing and recognizing similar figures to those identifiable in verbal discourse, despite the different connotation, at the service of different areas characterized by an image planning, such as cultural industries, engagement, or communication of architecture.

A necessary first step is the definition of a taxonomy for images based on the evidence of the figures used in advertising. In fact, advertising was the first applied art to codify a rhetorical use (persuasive) of images, theorizing the basis of a verbo-visual rhetoric to make unequivocal the message conveyed by the images, overcoming the margin of interpretation with respect to the word with the presence of a slogan (Barthes, 1964, p. 40). The comparison between the figures of speech with their verbo-visual reinterpretation (Rampazzo, 1998) highlights how it is possible to distinguish the salient features of the various rhetorical figures even without the verbal integration, despite a greater difficulty in recognizing similar figures for the minor definition of the drawing with respect to the word. There are many rhetorical figures in the speech and not all of them possess a graphic transposition because the word foresees subtle differences, which are difficult to render with images.

FROM WORD TO IMAGE, RHETORIC'S STRUCTURES
AND TECHNICS

Rhetoric, defined as the 'art of speech', has codified the technical references for the construction of verbal communication. The canons enunciated in the classical era demonstrate a surprising modernity, which confirms their absolute validity in the field of communication. The vocabulary describes it as the 'art of speaking and writing effectively' (Treccani, n.d.). It concerns *elocutio* (adequacy of words and linguistic structures to the subject matter) and *compositio* (methods of their juxtaposition).

The birth dates back to the classical world, when in the fifth century BC. Gorgia da Lentini identifies the formal expedients of refined prose, before Aristotle studied rhetorical figures in a systematic way.

He argues that men "feel the same sensation in front of style as they do in front of foreigners […]: one must consequently make language exotic, since men admire what is distant, and what causes wonder is pleasant" (Ret, 1404b).

Two thousand years ago Quintilian defined it as the art of "saying something known in a new way" (Bonsiepe, 1966, p. 218), focusing its effectiveness on the creativity of the speaker and since then its structures have conditioned the forms of verbal communication, from oratory to theater. Rhetoric therefore defines the techniques of verbal persuasion, teaching the artifices necessary for the convincing construction of the discourse in different situations, or in reference to what we now define the 'target' with the rigor of a codified science. Its purpose is the involvement and emotional agreement of the interlocutor, the same that after characterized the advertising communication (Polidoro, 2008) with the transfer of the rules of the word to languages derived from the visual arts, like drawing and painting. The latter has often made a rhetorical use of images, as in the use of symbolic images and allegories, or images painted in popular catechesis.

The rhetorical conviction is based on the connection of different propositions in order to lead to a common conclusion, through applying in a controlled manner recurring patterns regarding the structure of the discourse and using rhetorical figures, devices capable of stimulating the imagination with elegance (Marchese, 1978). The four fundamental qualities of classical composition are 'adequacy', 'correctness', 'clarity', and 'ornament', which is the overall elegance of the speech, and are valid in any type of communication. We find the four parts of the discourse (debut, exposure, argumentation, and peroration) in the structure of the play and in cinema, but also in the advertisement (headline, visual, copy, payoff) (Cattani, 2009) and in the succession of ways of representation of the project (sketch, relief, technical drawing, render) and in the forms of its telling (concept, references, description, image). Rhetorical figures are the verbal ornaments that make *elocutio* more effective, involving the emotional sphere together with the intellect. They stimulate the imagination, that is, the construction of mental images, intangible representations with complementary characteristics to the visual ones, but similar effects on the receiver of the communication.

Rhetoric shows that the classical world developed the first scientific approach to communication in the context of words, expanding it to the use of graphic images only at the beginning of the twentieth century, at first in an intuitive way, until studying systematically the linguistic structure of visual images (Bonsiepe, 1966). Thus, the principles of visual communication were intimately linked to graphics and advertising, and then expanded to experimental research on poetry. (Pignotti & Stefanelli, 1980, Salerno, 2014). After the war, under the influence of structuralist thought and the group of Liège, which tried to frame the problem in a logical structure (Mu Group, 1970), the school of Ulm binds Rhetoric and visual communication, configuring an autonomous discipline on a scientific basis. Here Gui Bonsiepe introduces a course in verbo-visual rhetoric and involves students in experimental applications (Bistagnino, 2018).

RHETORIC OF ADVERTISING

The persuasive purpose is the most evident common element between rhetoric and advertising graphics, which aims to convince through the mechanism of satisfaction that derives from the decoding of the visual message, often charged with provocative or amusing ideas that remain impressed in memory for their originality. According to Bonsiepe, high diversification in the field of consumption implies the need to persuade customers and therefore recourse to rhetoric. Commerce and services become the privileged field to applying the tools of classical rhetoric. Advertising communication adopts the principles of the ancient oratory art and its persuasive power but renews it by merging words and images into a single element. The pre-existing figures, already domain of prose and poetry, assume graphic form in a new language that is more incisive than the verbal one, capable of undermining the natural distrust of commercial content. Rhetorical artifices create unexpected connections that give new credibility to the product or the message because they go beyond the canonical vision, surprising the interlocutor. The visual transposition combines the immediacy of the image with the rational essence of the word, inducing the formation of playful stimuli. The cognitive effort that allows the decoding of visual ambiguity generates a sense of satisfaction that sets the message in memory (Kjeldsen, 2012). The images convey and fix the message, while the words bind or confirm its interpretation, but they can be omitted.

The first to systematically exploit the propaganda effectiveness of images were the Futurists. Their 'launchers' invented a new way of bringing products to the market, which was probably originally based more on the creative intuition of the graphic designer than on the application of a technique built on a scientific basis such as the one developed a few decades later by the school of Ulm. There, *Gestaltung* studies join structuralism, starting from the study

of linguistic structures and rhetorical figures to better understand their mechanisms.

Attempts to classify verb-visual transposition have not produced definitive results, but studies conducted between 1950 and 1970 in parallel with the linguistic research that accompanied the development of cybernetics have reawakened attention to the ancient art of rhetoric, underlining its interest in communication and providing a scientific basis for visual communication. Often the public confuses the skillful construction of the image with a pure creative genius, which exists but is supported by technique, as evidenced by the recognizability of the main rhetorical figures behind many famous commercials and advertising campaigns.

WITHOUT WORDS, RHETORIC THROUGH IMAGES

The verification of the possible visual transposition of rhetorical figures of speech started from planning of a list as complete as possible in order to recognize those that can be visually transposed in a theoretical way, then search for concrete applications, verifying the real need to recourse to verbal integration. An extensive list gathers 74 figures, some of which are presented as synonyms from recent literature[3]. An initial examination was carried out on published studies, which however were not always organic and sometimes not very exhaustive.

The comparison with contemporary classifications underlines the difficulty of reconciling the published thesis, always referring to a limited number of easily recognizable figures. The lack of an extended general classification, if not exhaustive, suggested selecting the figures who could theoretically support a visual transposition, without taking into account the previous classifications, surveyed only in a preliminary way, and grouping them into provisional groups, based on the type of relationship between the figure of speech and its image, that is, the mechanism of juxtaposition between the graphic representation and the mental reference.

A first selection limited the field of investigation to 55 figures theoretically recognizable even without verbal integration, reduced to 44 with the unification of figures that are too similar or synonyms. The others were excluded for the evident lack of a direct graphic sense or for the difficulty of imagining a significant difference in graphic transposition, compared to other semantically close figures[4]. Among these, sound figures represent an interesting segment that requires further study and verification. In fact, they refer to the rhythm of the word and to the metric. For this reason, it is possible to hypothesize an analogy with the rhythmic repetitiveness that can inspire the design, but the graphic results could merge and be confused with other figures.

Six groups were therefore identified comprising from 5 to 11 figures, in addition to synonyms:

1. 'repetition' (alliteration / asyndetic, consonance / assonance / isophone, replication / anadiplosis, homeoteleuton, polyptoton, enumeration, conversion, iteration, anaphora, climax, chiasmus;

2. 'association' (adnomination, quarrel / denomination, paronomasia, analogy, metaphor, parallelism, similitude, synecdoche);

3. 'identification' (*topos* / *cliché*, antonomasia, metonymy, personification, prosopopoeia, hypotyposis);

4. 'contrast' (reversal / anti-phrasing, antithesis, conciliation, oxymoron, irony, paradox);

5. 'lack' (reticence, syncope, allusion, ellipsis, euphemism);

6. 'transformation' (ipallage, anacoluthon, apostrophe, atomization / tmesis / separation, hyperbaton, hyperbola, litotes, inversion / reversion / anastrophe).

Subsequently, an experimental test on an empirical basis was carried out, proposed as an exam exercise within the curricular workshop of the 'Publishing and advertising graphics' course of the Degree in Communication and new media for the cultural industries of Dusic[5], asking the participants to work in groups on reasoned selections of rhetorical figures already grouped according to analogies linked to semantic

characteristics and to the mechanisms of visual transposition. The concept recalls the graphical interpretations that followed the 99 Queneau's writing exercises (Queneau, 1949). The groups of figures were assigned, according to the numerical consistency, to 27 groups of students enrolled in the workshop, asking them to deepen the rhetorical figures proposed, and then look for their application in real static advertisements, analyzing the specific graphic characters of the visual transposition. Subsequently each group had to invent an advertising campaign for a real or imaginary product, entirely based on the group of figures assigned.

In this way it was possible to assign each group of figures at least 4 times for an expected total of about 200 analyses and as many design interpretations, with at least one answer for all the figures investigated. Even if the sampling collected is not exhaustive with respect to the topic, the work of the students made it possible to expand and verify the previous comparison of 74 advertisements collected and classified in the initial phase of the research, which were not presented to the students to avoid conditioning their work of passive (analysis) and active (graphic design) interpretation.

The purpose of the verification is to evaluate the effectiveness of the graphic representation in the possible distinction between figures with transpositions based on similar mechanisms, due to the less expressive precision compared to the contents conveyed by the word, and therefore the opportunity to maintain a second level of rhetorical articulation, uniting only the indistinguishable figures.

The group of *Repetition figures* (Figures 1a-1c) examines all the rhetorical figures of speech that operate on the repetition of elements, both verbal and visual.

These mechanisms are born from the roots of poetry and are currently used in the sphere of verbal communication, of which contemporary advertising exploits the effectiveness especially within the headline and payoff.

From the point of view of visual transposition, advertising communication applies repetition figures to the visual, yet
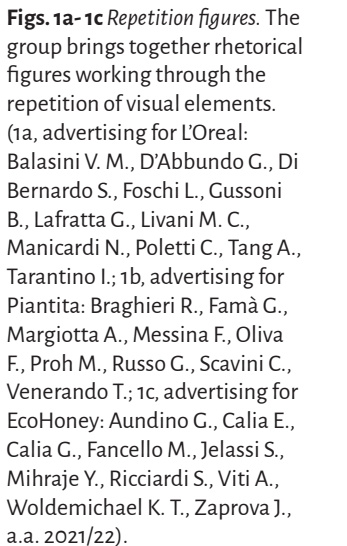
Figs. 1a- 1c *Repetition figures.* The group brings together rhetorical figures working through the repetition of visual elements. (1a, advertising for L'Oreal: Balasini V. M., D'Abbundo G., Di Bernardo S., Foschi L., Gussoni B., Lafratta G., Livani M. C., Manicardi N., Poletti C., Tang A., Tarantino I.; 1b, advertising for Piantita: Braghieri R., Famà G., Margiotta A., Messina F., Oliva F., Proh M., Russo G., Scavini C., Venerando T.; 1c, advertising for EcoHoney: Aundino G., Calia E., Calia G., Fancello M., Jelassi S., Mihraje Y., Ricciardi S., Viti A., Woldemichael K. T., Zaprova J., a.a. 2021/22).

from the study it emerged that the specificity that characterizes and distinguishes the figures of repetition in the sphere of the word, is attenuated until it almost becomes uniform in the visual communication, precisely for the contrasting principles of precision of the word and immediacy of the image. Analyzing the sample of the campaigns carried by the students, some observations emerge: first of all, the difficulty of rendering the subtle differences that characterize the figures within the word is evident in a visual key. Although the campaigns already presented a semantically autonomous visual including repetition figures, in several cases the need arose for students to integrate the image with a headline containing repetition figures.

In fact, out of a total of 5 campaigns based on *Repetition figures*, 3 of these have an independent visual from text elements[6].

This group of figures applied to images has a visually reinforcing function of the message. This result is in line with the expectations that were formulated with the previous study, focused on a sample of real advertising campaigns, in which the repetition figures are confirmed as reinforcing tools of a concept.

The group of *Figures of Association* includes the rhetorical figures that relate two entities belonging to distinct fields, often semantically distant, but which have a common char-
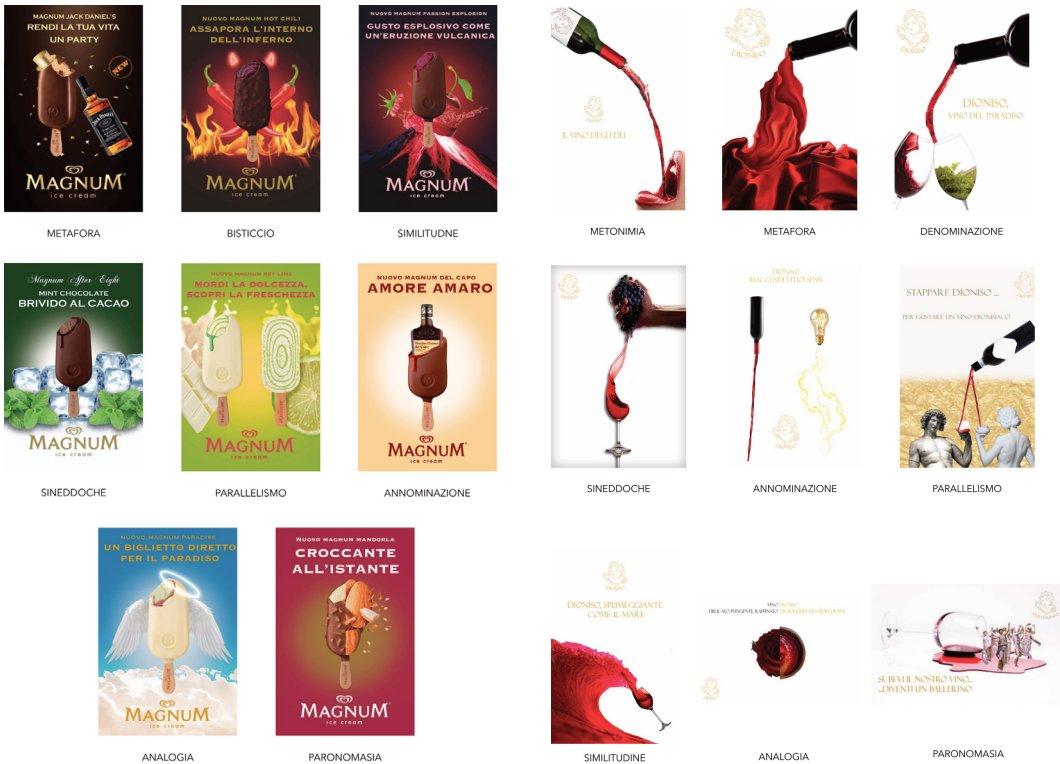
acteristic that is intended to be emphasized. This category brings together rhetorical figures widely used both in the verbal and literary sphere, as well as in the visual and figurative sphere and therefore easily recognizable.

The familiarity that the costumer reserves for figures such as metaphor or synecdoche is the consequence of a wide use of these in everyday written and spoken language, but also of a habit of enjoying them in an iconic form through advertising, art, illustrations. It is possible to consider it a phenomenon of more 'education' towards this class of rhetorical figures since they are more widespread and therefore recognizable.

Unlike other classes of figures, advertisements created with rhetorical association mechanisms demonstrate less, if any, dependence on the word, as the image is complete and autonomous in the role of message. The associations created with these figures mainly concern the morphology, shape, color, or intrinsic and abstract characteristics of the objects taken as a comparison.

The students' work shows an analogous approach to the task and consequently a homogeneous and uniform output, despite the campaigns were designed on very different product categories. The implementation criterion has led all the advertisings belonging to this category to match both the image of the product and the entity (total or partially) identifying a product feature in the visual. Thanks to the expressive power of the images and the sharing of meaning, 3 out of 4 works in this category are independent from additional text content, classifying as one of the categories in which the presence of verbal elements is reduced to essential elements such as brand and payoff.

The *Identification figures* (Figure 3) include some of the rhetorical figures used to identify, make a subject recognizable through direct comparison to behavioral and formal characteristics of well-known characters, or to recurring and familiar situations to the communication target. *Identification figures* refers to notions, characters and phenomena that belong to the culture

METAFORA

BISTICCIO

SIMILITUDNE

METONIMIA

METAFORA

DENOMINAZIONE

SINEDDOCHE

PARALLELISMO

ANNOMINAZIONE

SINEDDOCHE

ANNOMINAZIONE

PARALLELISMO

ANALOGIA

PARONOMASIA

SIMILITUDINE

ANALOGIA

PARONOMASIA

Figs. 2a, 2b *Association figures*. The group brings together rhetorical figures that relate entities from distinct and semantically distant fields, which have common characteristics. (2a, advertising for Magnum: Buftea I., Cermaglia A., Cioni S., Curia A., El Khazri O., Iezzi F. P., Restelli D., Vacondio S.; 2b, advertising for Vino Dioniso: Benedusi S., Bna A., Ferrari S., Lorenzano G., Risari K., Simonazzi L., Tirelli V., Volpe V., Zannoni J., a.a. 2021/22).

of individuals and are inserted within a message as cultural references. The process is similar to that applied by the *Association figures* (Figures 2a, 2b); the subtle difference is the sphere from which the references to which the product is linked are taken.

Although the references may vary according to the reference culture and to which the message is addressed, in the advertising field is important that the references are shared by as many individuals as possible, to make the promotional content effective and pervasive. Identification strategies have a very effective visual transposition, widely used within advertising communication to enhance the qualities of a product, and make it part of a social status.

The campaigns created by the students centered on Identification figures shows a common working and design method, based on the extrapolation of recognizable and stereotyped traits of each product, subsequently transposed

Fig. 3 *Identification Figures.*
The group includes rhetorical figures who identify such strong analogies as to recognize a specificity through different situations, with similar characteristics. (Fig.3, awareness advertising for safe driving: Bernini F., Fontanini S., Galli R., Giuliano R., Minari G., Passalacqua L.,- a.a. 2021/22).


TOPOS   METONIMIA   ANTONOMASIA

PROSOPOPEA   PERSONIFICAZIONE   IPOTIPOSI
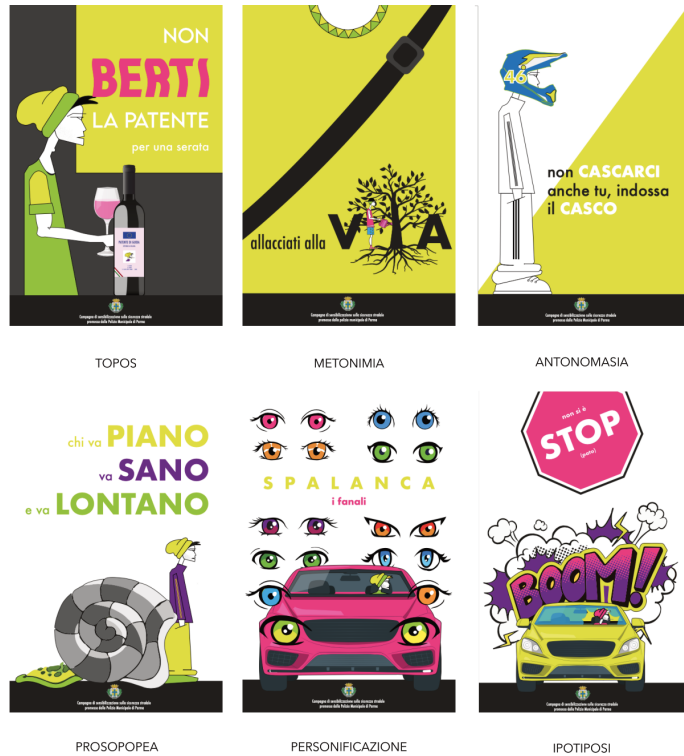
into the advertisements. The work was based on extremely recognizable associations of goods with physical characteristics, celebrities, familiar situations, or sayings of the spoken language: all elements that are part within the cultural background of the average user. Through these strategies, the product fits into a broader sphere that goes beyond the invitation to purchase, but involves a series of sensations, memories and associations rooted in the personal life of the user. In this case, half of the campaigns (2 out of 4) were judged to be visually autonomous from text elements. Furthermore, the only awareness campaign of the whole sample falls into this category. The group has chosen to create an awareness campaign about the highway code and the behaviors to follow while driving, without promoting any product. In these circumstances, the sample of awareness campaigns is too small to permit to formulate shared hypotheses, however it

Fig. 4 *Contraposition figures*. The group brings together figures who convey the message through mechanisms of contrast and conflict between semantically opposite entities. (advertising for Barate: Attolini G., Bertolini E., Casali V., Fantini A., Lessman E., Tonti C., Zaccaro M., a.a. 2021/22).
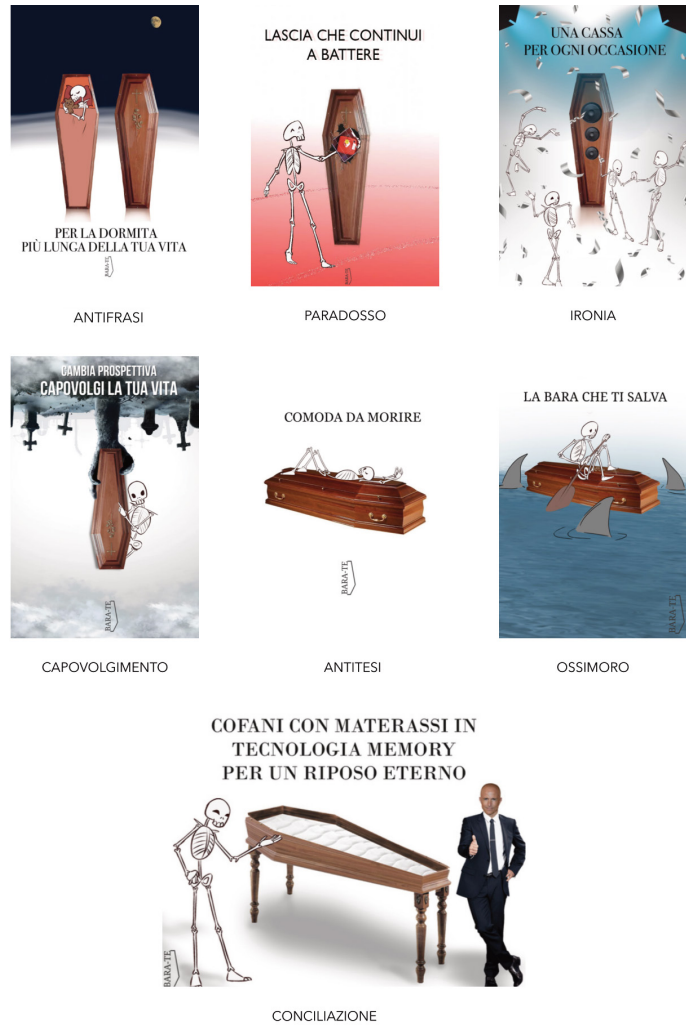
would be interesting to analyze the distribution and the role played by text and images within these non-commercial advertisements. The observation that arose from a first reflection precisely concerns the autonomy of the image from text elements, an objective that is assumed to be more difficult to achieve in cases of lack of goods to promote.

Contraposition figures (Figure 4) are rhetorical figures that use mechanisms of contrast and conflict between semantically opposed entities to convey a message.

A speech or a representation that has absurd or unusual features is much more engaging than a linear and notional communication. In fact, the visual representation that uses figures such as irony, paradox, oxymoron, appears to the user as a discrepancy to be resolved in order to understand the interplay of relationships that is hidden behind a contradictory image. This is a rather extreme case of communication, especially in the visual field, since there is a high risk of misunderstanding if the relationship is too hermetic.

With the group of opposition figures, the difficulty of the students in applying the opposition to the figurative sphere of the announcement was manifested. In general, were emerged campaigns with original headlines and texts, in line with the contrasting figures, while the visuals are lacking in contrasting elements typical of this group. Therefore, there is a common problem in conceiving and applying opposition mechanisms to images for advertising purposes. The trend recorded is that of greater creativity and irony in the text components, while the images play a representative role of the product. The contrast emerged on a conceptual rather than a representational level: the projects of the Contraposition campaigns contained excellent theoretical ideas that were not completely transposed into the visual realization, in fact only 1 group out of 4 approached the expected result of visual autonomy of the visual. The predictions were made on a previous survey, which confirmed the possibility of creating a visual with contrasting figures that was autonomous from text elements from the point of view of conveying the message.

The *Lack figures* (Figures 5a, 5b) are united by the omission of some elements with respect to the message they convey. The principle of the Lack figures is that of insinuation, in which certain aspects are mentioned and others are missing, with the aim of stimulating the user's intuition and curiosity. The category of figures is a fundamental resource for the field of advertising, which uses omission mechanisms to make advertising communication more irreverent and intriguing, involving the user in a game of hypothesis.

Ehi, ci facciamo una bella Spice Up, stasera?

Seriia nolosa? Let's Spice Up

ELLISSI

Seriia nolosa? Let's Spice Up

RETICENZA

Seriia nolosa? Let's Spice Up

SINCOPE

DRINK art

SHARE art

SINCOPE

See through Starbucks!

ELLISSI

Seriia nolosa? Let's Spice Up

EUFEMISMO

Manspreading? NO! Spice Up

ALLUSIONE

IF YOU WANT ENERGY THROUGH THE DAY, STARBUCKS IS YOUR WAY

LOADING ENERGY

ALLUSIONE

Figs. 5a, 5b Figures of Lack. The figures of the group are united by the omission of some elements with respect to the message they convey. (5a, advertising for SpiceUp: Baldani L., Erpetti M., Fanizza V. M. R., Kollo M. Hen Basile C., Vettoretto A.; 5b: advertising for Starbucks: Bejan O, Curcio N, Elattar Y, Galloni L, Lorane H., a.a. 2021/22).

Particularly effective is the visual transposition of the missing figures, rendered through the strategic removal of elements of the image, whose persuasive power is amplified with respect to the word. In general, the students dealing with this category of figures have shown that they have understood the role played by the Lack figures, also playing with taboo themes, with which the figures create a very powerful and effective union. However, the theme of Lack has been interpreted differently depending on the product on which the campaign was built: some have opted for a lack played purely on a visual level, others have preferred to design a campaign in which the mechanisms of insinuation are found also in the headline and in the concept of advertising and product. 2 out of 3 groups created visually autonomous and captivating campaigns using the Lack figures: one uses the allusive power of the figures to explore taboo themes, while the other declines the concept of lack for more creative and artistic purposes. These two paths lead to the hypothesis

IPERBOLE   IPALLAGE   IPERBATO   IPALLAGE   ANACOLUTO   APOSTROFE

ANACOLUTO   LITOTE   APOSTROFE   LITOTE   IPERBOLE   IPERBATO

ATOMIZZAZIONE   ANASTROFE   INVERSIONE   ATOMIZZAZIONE

Figs. 6a, 6b Transformation Figures. The group applies mechanisms of breaking of syntactic regularities in speech, or of the laws of physics in visual representation. (6a: advertising for Malaerba: Bellavigna G., Colazzo S., Evangelista M., Guidotti C., Leva M., Pellegrini M., Pirrone M. L., Ragni A.; 6b, advertising for Pong Beer: Colangelo F., Frosi V., Giavazzi G,, Lai V., Magnolfi A., Martinelli B., Mori S., Piccioli A., a.a. 2021/22).

that Lack figures offer different ideas to work with depending on whether the subject one aspires to make is merely physical, linked to the product, or there is a more cognitive intent, in which the user is led to reflect on wider phenomena than the product in question.

The *Transformation figures* (Figures 6a, 6b) foresee mechanisms of breaking of syntactic regularities, when used in speech, or of the laws of physics if used in visual representation. In general, it is a profound detachment from the normal representation of a content, which causes a sense of incongruity in the user. The Transformation figures unleash their potential for effectiveness especially when applied to the visual sphere, since they intervene in the creation of images with elements of unusual proportions and surreal behaviors, however, their recognizability is based on the verbal text.

Fig.7 *Advertising without rhetorical figures.* (advertising for Gin alcohol: Grosso F., Piccirilli C. , a.a. 2021/22)

This class of figures is specific in considering a new point of view on objects and phenomena, altering them through exaggeration or shrinking, dividing them into parts and then reorganizing them with new logic. In contact with these mechanisms, words and images become material to convey innovative and original messages.

In the case of this group, there is a strong preference to invest in text components that can make explicit the meaning of the visuals rendered anomalous by Transformation figures. In fact, if some Transformation figures such as hyperbole and litotes are the most common used in advertising, others, such as anacoluthon, anastrophe, hyperbaton are more complex to manage in visual transposition and decoding in absence of an explanatory text. It is noted that although most of the visuals containing Transformation figures were easily decodable and autonomous from the point of view of conveying the message, in general persists the belief that it

is necessary to add an explanatory content to guarantee its understanding. 2 out of 4 groups designed campaigns that were visually coherent with the Transformation figures, with independent visuals from explanatory text components.

CONCLUSION

The first results of the experimentation provide interesting clues. From the works, a different approach emerges in the students' response, some of whom are enrolled in the degree course of Architecture, a variable that underlined the different graphic ability in the manipulation of images for rhetorical purposes, due to their greater familiarity with drawing as an organizational matrix of space, which provides technical support for planning and allows better control of the execution.

Another relevant data for the final balance concerns the balanced distribution between students who have created a campaign inspired by an existing brand and those who preferred to create a fantasy product: the percentages report 60% of campaigns for real products and 40% for invented products; 13 and 11 campaigns out of 24 total projects respectively. Given the total freedom of choice of the campaign product, it was plausible to hypothesize a preference for products already on the market, from which extrapolate the advertising communication style and apply it to a new campaign. However, many students have expressed the desire to get involved by designing a new product that is credible both in terms of functions, in communication and positioning on the market.

As for the visual transposition of rhetorical figures, the research previously made on existing advertisements had confirmed the possibility of visual transposition for all the rhetorical figures of the 6 identified groups. The current study is a continuation and confirmation of the previous one, and thanks to the sample collected the intention is to analyze the mechanisms and methods of visual transposition that affect the design and creation of advertising

content from scratch. Investigating the possibility of visual transposition and the autonomy of the iconic component from text elements are the two main goals of the research and the mechanisms that had been hypothesized now have a concrete and scientific basis.

The observations that emerged from the analysis of the projects and from the comparison between them, confirm the previously formulated theses: in fact, all groups of figures have been successfully translated into images, most of them semantically autonomous from explanatory text contents.

However, almost all the students still chose to integrate the ad with short text elements such as slogans or headlines. This decision was interpreted as an attempt to add credibility and realism to the advertising, taking inspiration from most of the advertising content that contains short text inputs. Consequently, since all the campaigns collected contain verbal elements, within the study all those in which the text does not add value or meaning to what is expressed through images are considered 'autonomous' advertising.

Note how in 5 groups of figures out of the total of 6, the text elements inserted are redundant to the image, without adding meaning or additional explanations. However, the group in which there was a greater difficulty in making the visual semantically independent of the text was the Contraposition group, whose campaigns are rather weak in conveying the concept of contrast only through images. Advertisings based on Contraposition figures present images that do not achieve the expected contrast effect, which is why the communication of the paradoxical message is relegated to text elements, such as headlines. This result is slightly out of the previsions, since the previous research and the supporting material had shown the concrete possibility of visual transposition of Contraposition figures, as well as a remarkable effectiveness on the part of the images in conveying messages.

On the contrary, the categories that have been most successful in creating autonomous visuals in transmitting

a message have been those of Association, Identification and Lack. The first two, from the analogous mechanism, applied to different spheres of knowledge (Association is linked to a knowledge drawn from sensory experience, while Identification concerns the connection to facts or subjects that fall within the individual or collective culture), on average 3 out of 4 ads were evaluated semantically autonomous, equal to 75% of the works.

The Lack figures follow, who have produced excellent works, well made and in line with requests, visually autonomous in 2 out of 3 cases.

Although this line of research is growing with more specific theses, materials, and experiments, at each step new questions arise and new hypotheses need to be tested, suggesting that the study is far from coming to an end, but constantly offers new stimuli for in-depth analysis and parallel connections. For example, in this study we came across a prototype of an awareness campaign, of which the difference that separates it from a commercial campaign is in its purpose, but also in the communication mechanisms. From stimuli like this comes the push to further investigate other aspects that branch out from the same central theme.

NOTES

1 For example, the 's' that in many Indo-Europeans idioms stands in the shape and in the sound of the snake, or the 'm' that reminds ocean waves or the maternal breast.
2 The research presented in these pages begins with Greta Milino's graduation thesis, 'Verbo-visual rhetoric: study of the mechanisms for combining text and images within commercial advertisements with a focus on print and television, web - University of Parma, a.a. 2020/21, tutor prof. Michela Rossi.

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AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF IMAGES
INVESTIGATION INTO
THE IMAGINATIVE WORLD OF ROBERT VENTURI

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ARCHITECTURAL THEORY
IMAGE THEORY
ROBERT VENTURI
VISUAL PERCEPTION

The research presented aims to investigate the theoretical work of the American architect, Robert Venturi, starting with the question: what was his dreamlike, imaginative, and creative world composed of? What role did the images that populated it play out and how were they transformed? From European explorations, through the book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, to the realization of *Mother's House*, the study seeks to shed light on the evolution of theoretical thought through the observation from the images that Robert Venturi selected for himself, and which thus constitute themselves an archive of the visual and spatial research he conducted. It is thus from the images collected or taken that an attempt has been made to reconstruct the connection between visual perception, image, and theory.

INTRODUCTION

The In reality, however, he has merely discovered that up till then he has never thought about his images at all. (Jung, 1934-54/2021, p. 21)

The text presented here wishes to place itself in the groove of those studies related with the observation of images. These are foundational grounds for the understanding of the historical-artistic processes made of evolutions, recurrences, and contradictions. We could call it an *Archaeology of Images* quoting Brusatin (1995), whose goal is not so much to reveal exact data about events or people, but, on the contrary, to show how high is the level of contamination, mixing and geographical/temporal dislocation of meanings that through images continue to have an opportunity to enter the world of things. A certain kind of study refers to the criterion of archaeological inquiry expressed by Foucault, and from which I borrow the desire to focus attention on what he calls traces, ruptures, layers, and transformations, within a discourse that does not aims to identify continuity and directionality (Foucault, 1999, p. 29).

The idea of using this 'tool' of investigation in the field of architectural representation stems from the characteristics from which this discipline is made, as well as the role it plays during the creative process. For architecture, as for many other practices, the condition that simultaneously nurtures and generates representations is always a true process. This is real before it even exists and after its eventual realization or destruction. Such a cycle, we might say vital, is composed of an imagination to which an action corresponds. Moving the threads of the path from ideas to reality is bonded with the desire for images. That is, that inexplicable but characterizing need of human beings since the dawn of time to expose outside themselves what they have intimately seen in the darkness of their minds. What we would call giving birth is the culmination of a long journey of inner gestation of images and perceptions. In this

time frame –short when commensurate with one man's history, and very extensive when related to the history of man– what happens is the establishment of a constant dialogue between us and the images, and vice versa.

This intimate relationship, made up of words that tell images and images that try to synthesize words, is an integral part of all those activities whose purpose is transformation. For this reason, the research I conduct chooses to investigate the theoretical work of the American architect, Robert Venturi, starting with the question: what was his dreamlike, imaginative, and creative world composed of? Following the visible traces of its *oggetti di affezione* to discover the role that images play in the process of constituting an architectural theory, and in what ways and by what means they act in the process itself (Purini, 2002).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The blind man felt around over the paper. He moved the tips of his fingers over the paper, all over what I had drawn, and he nodded. –Doing fine– the blind man said. (Carver, 1983/2014, p. 258)

To enter another person's imaginative world, one must inevitably attempt to look through his or her eyes. In other words, to retrace the road already taken to glimpse images, thoughts and feelings, and if possible, neatly connect and make evident in retrospect the work of slow construction that the author, living it, could not already make narrative.

The starting point, of Robert Venturi's long journey of formation, is his own family. Although both Italian-Americans and settled in Philadelphia, both Robert Sr. and Giovanna (Vanna) choose to instill in their son Bob more than a taste for pasta, a love of Italian art. In fact, his first entry into the world of pictures illustrating books happens when he was still a child and was initiated into Italian art and architecture through the volumes he could consult in

his father's home. In this way, what will be passed on to Robert will be "a powerful and topical idea of Italy as the cradle of Western arts and culture, but above all as a place of a history still eloquent and yet to be discovered" (Sessa, 2020, p. 35).

Venturi will never abandon this initial imprinting, which he owes above all to the long and firm relationship established with his mother Vanna. Images will accompany him all his life, cyclically marking real, personal, and professional evolutionary transitions. It may seem very trite to say, but in the pre-digital era images had a different value and perhaps even a different meaning and weight in the formative path of a young boy than they do today. If only because in the world still made up of paper books and film photographs, you were obliged to seek images, if you wanted to satisfy your curiosity to know. This physical relationship, made up of encounters with books, places, and imaginations is what I would like to highlight.

Consultation of the material constituting the Venturi Fund, housed at the *Stuart Weitzman School of Design* in Philadelphia, was a crucial if not mandatory step in the beginning of my research. In 2006 Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown donated the entire body of material constituting the archives of *Venturi Scott Brown Associates*, their professional practice, to the University of Pennsylvania. The VSBA collection consists of both documents, drawings, models, reports, manuscripts, and correspondence; and documents that Venturi and Scott Brown produced for their lectures at UPenn and other institutions. All in all, this is a substantial amount of material that allows one to move throughout the author's life. Indeed, the extraordinary uniqueness of the Venturi, Scott Brown archive consists precisely in its unity and integrity; an extremely useful condition when related to the intent of trying to reconstruct the events, choices, and influences that shaped Robert Venturi's view of the world. What to look for, then, to 'look through another person's eyes? From the outside,

perhaps the only possible way is to see what those eyes have seen. The research, in fact, would like to substantiate the inseparable relationship that exists in Venturi's work between images and text, not only as a moment of reflection but above all as a real activity of processing visual material, which as Arnheim points out is only possible "if the relevant properties of the objects to be thought about are made evident to the eyes through images" (1969/2013, p. 17). A concept that in common parlance can be traced in the effective summary: 'if you do not understand I can draw you a picture'; an extrema ratio that reveals an insufficiency of words in the process of communication.

RESULTS

I was in the grip of a kind of hallucination; I was suffocating; I needed air. Mechanically, I fanned myself with the piece of paper, the back and front of which came successively before my eyes. What was my surprise when, in one of those rapid turns, at the moment when the back was turned to me, I thought I caught sight of the Latin words "craterem" and "terrestre", among others! (Verne, 2009, p. 66).

What, then, are images? And how do they construct their own autonomy of interaction within and with the viewer? It is undeniable that not all images are the same, and as far as research is concerned, the images that constitute the most important are those in which a relationship of significance established between the subject and the signs it contains can be discerned. Indeed, it is in this relationship that the image is not configured as a mere artifact, but a true epiphany (Wunenburger, 2008).

Starting from this and taking into account the approach to images that Robert Venturi constructed during his early years of training in the family sphere, I have chosen to proceed by beginning with the consultation of visual material,

giving myself as a criterion of temporal progression, that
is, starting from what he saw to arrive at what he created.
First there are the books he encountered during his jour-
ney, some of which we may know if we consider the stated
sources of images and bibliographical references, he him-
self included in his 1966 book *Complexity and Contradiction in
Architectures*, but which for reasons of economy of the text
and in order to privilege unpublished content I choose not
to delve into on this occasion.

Then there are the images he himself collected, includ-
ing those extracted from books, or acquired in the form of
postcards or photographs. The process of taking them out
of context and precise selection, which underlies the very
idea of collecting, makes this material a valuable 'mirror'
of an otherwise inaccessible thought. The *Images and Il-
lustrations* section, contained in the *Finding Aid* document
specially created to allow consultation of the preparatory
material for the book's publication in 1966, is a good key to
the images that populated Robert Venturi's imagination.
What is in fact found in the first 5 folders (225.XI.106 to 110)
are postcards, photographs, negatives, and electrostatic
prints belonging to a time span from 1960 to 1965. During
this time frame, following his trips to Europe (the first in
1948 and the second from 1954 to 1956 as a resident at the
American Academy in Rome), he continued to look at, use,
and communicate with images that in retrospect we can
recognize as springs of his theoretical thoughts.

In both Figures 1 and 2, I report some of the materials
found in the archive. Already from this very small part of
the voluminous corpus of images that in those years ac-
companied the process of construction of both *Complexity
and Contradiction in Architecture* and *Mother's House* (1964),
it is possible to see how the recurrence of certain themes
indicate a definite interest. That is, Robert Venturi selects
and assembles images in which he recognizes a constancy
in difference, a kind of mutation of form but not of sub-
stance (Giedion, 1969). For example, the theme of the plas-

Fig. 1 Robert Venturi, *Scott Brown Collection* (225.XI.108), 2022. Author's assemblage of postcards and photocopies depicting various subjects, belonging to Robert Venturi.

ticity of space recognizable in the images of the Campidoglio Square, Piazzetta Sant'Ignazio, Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne and the Pantheon recurs.

From this particular contingency, in which Venturi combines the study of images for the making of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* with the making of images (drawings) for the construction of *Mother's House*; one is prompted to further reflect on the level of interdependence between words, images and the body. Indeed, it is here that it makes sense to introduce the concept of the subject's physical involvement with the image. This relationship is not a passive one, but presupposes an involvement of the body in thought, possible through a certain degree of 'surrender' or 'spontaneity' on the part of the observer (Wunenburger, 2008).

Fig. 2 Robert Venturi, *Scott Brown Collection* (225.XI.108), 2022. Author's assemblage of postcards and photocopies depicting various subjects, belonging to Robert Venturi.

The topic of the form of space may seem almost obvious in the field of architecture, yet if we talk about images, it is not at all. In fact, lastly, I introduce the slides that Robert Venturi employed during his lectures. This archival material is still in the process of being arranged, thus mostly unpublished, and for this reason it cannot be considered to belong exclusively to a precise temporal phase of his formation. The images that converge here come from a variety of moments and sources, and it is precisely this heterogeneity that guarantees their provenance: the visual world of Robert Venturi. And exactly as Arnheim argues, by the term visual education we do not mean the ability to figure something in the mind and that is all, but something that is in the possibility of being imagined because there is a corresponding experience, even a physical one (2013).

Fig. 3 Robert Venturi, *Scott Brown Collection.* Color slides made by Robert Venturi.

The following images have therefore been chosen and organized in order to encapsulate in small groups precise experiences on which different cores of a single thought were structured over time.

In Figure 3 I report what can be understood as one of the roots of Venturian theoretical and architectural thought: the American tradition of Shingle Style architecture and its city Philadelphia.

Similarly in the images in Figure 4, although not in a physical sense, I bring in a significant theoretical root that in this case refers to two important books of the twentieth century: *Vers une Architecture* by Le Corbusier (1923/1986) and *Architecture without Architects* by Bernard Rudofsky (1964). In their respective associations, in fact, we see how Robert Venturi selected precise pages in order to use the images in them during his lectures.

From Le Corbusier's book he borrows a photograph of wheat silos, a type of industrial element employed by the author to exemplify his discourse on volume as the true goal to be pursued in the imagination of architecture (1986, p. 25). From Rudofsky's book, however, he collects one of the pages in which the author focuses on the construction of the villages of the Dogon, a population of Mali. Here what is brought to attention is the high level of sophistication of the urban fabric, as well as of the buildings, in spite of the "primitive idea" of these places (1964, p. 41).

Fig. 4 Robert Venturi, *Towards a new Architecture* (p. 25) and black and white slide (above); Robert Venturi, *Architecture without Architects* (p. 41) and black and white slide (below).

THREE REMINDERS TO ARCHITECTS

GRAIN ELEVATOR
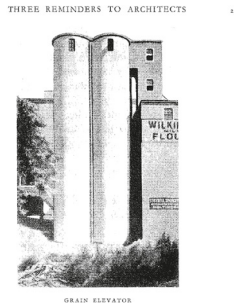
ARCHITECTURE has nothing to do with the various "styles."

The styles of Louis XIV, XV, XVI or Gothic, are to architecture what a feather is on a woman's head; it is sometimes pretty, though not always, and never anything more.

Architecture has graver ends; capable of the sublime, it
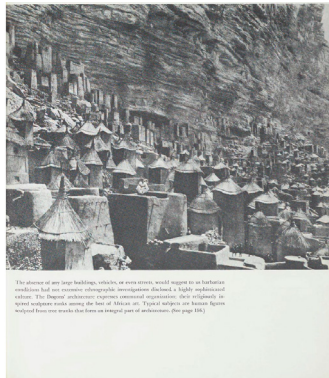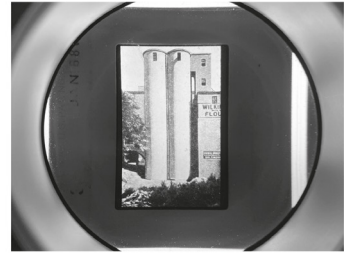
The two themes just enunciated, namely, volume and vernacular architecture, are perhaps among those that most marked Robert Venturi's formative journey at an early stage. In fact, the next group of images, certainly made by him and thus dating from a period between 1948 and 1956, are a direct extension of these reflections now conducted in the field. The photographs in Figure 5 most likely depict villages in central and southern Italy, but although the location is not indicated in the margin of the slide as it is in other cases, what is interesting to note is Venturi's precise intention to research through physical experience and thus photography the theme of *Italian Hill Towns*, about which he would write in 1955 the unpublished essay *Hillbrows and Hilltowns*, in which ideas about the experience of space and

in particular the value of medieval urban space become evident (Costanzo, 2021).

During the years of his stay in Italy, and particularly in Rome, the theme of the perception of urban space will be combined with that of volume. This hybridization will lead to the development of a line of research in which the void between things will be the focus of Robert Venturi's sensory and visual attention.

In his photographs collected in Figure 6, one can sense how the attempt is to portray what is not visible but can be inferred from the arrangement of volumes around the void. This invisible is the physical perception of space, which through an effort of translation into an image he tries to restore. An intention that is made even more evident, and perhaps didactic, in the photographs in Figure 7. Here the great season of Roman Baroque space plays a decisive role, whose affinity with medieval architectural space should not be forgotten (Ambrosi, 1979, p. 5), and which perhaps not by chance are ideally juxtaposed by Venturi, following a criteria of visuality and direct experience.

In Figure 8, finally, are collected some of his photographs that perhaps have most to do with the theme of surface, here still mixed with the concept of ambiguity and space, especially if we consider his photograph of Luigi Moretti's *Sunflower House*. The surface, understood also only as an enclosure, would be one of the topics that Robert Venturi would work on in a second phase of his life and that would lead to the production of the book *Learning from Las Vegas*, written in collaboration with Denis Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (1972/2010).

DISCUSSION

Photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are. (Sontag, 1977/2021, p. 9)

The work presented so far, and still evolving, is intended to open a window into a way of looking at Robert Venturi's work in which the experience of architecture is placed at

Fig. 5 Robert Venturi, *Hilltowns.* Color slides from photographs taken by Robert Venturi.

the center of the theoretical discourse. Indeed, his abundant production of images, whether drawings or photographs, cannot be considered accidental, but more properly can be interpreted as an ability to process sensory data (Arnheim, 1969/2013, p. 11). This very aptitude will lead Robert Venturi to structure a theory of architectural space that probably cannot be separated from the idea that any space we pass through, unbeknownst to us, is transformed into an image. Besides our eyes, is therefore the body and its perception of space to become the instrument and the full sense.

The coincidence of his most important editorial work, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,* with his equally important architectural work, *Mother's House,* presents itself as a great opportunity to analyze Robert Venturi's theoretical thinking and imagination. Wanting, in fact, to build a parallelism between what has been said so far about images (and how they were real moments of theoretical reflection to be placed at the basis of the architect's practical action) I thought it would be interesting to conclude the juxtaposing of photographs and drawings next to pages extracted from the famous book. In Figure 9 the extracted page comes from chapter 10, *The obligation toward the difficult whole,* the last of those belonging to the narrative of his idea of architecture and in which, in wanting to draw the sums of a long and articulate discourse, he finally speaks explicitly about the role of perception

Fig. 6 Robert Venturi, *Visions of urban spaces*. Color slides from photographs taken by Robert Venturi.

in architectural design. In particular, he makes a direct reference to the theories of Heinrich Wölfflin (*Renaissance and Baroque*, 1888/2010), undoubtedly demonstrating his knowledge and sharing of theories on the conception of tangible form and the psychic interpretation of spatial form (*raumform* as spatial form and *lebensgefühl* as vital feeling) (Venturi, 1966).

The photograph number 233 (*farmhouses and small provincial buildings in souther Italy*) in chapter 10, there I place side by side the page extracted from chapter 11, Works, in which Venturi presents in an almost philological manner to his theory the projects he executed (Figure 10). In this way it becomes interesting to note the affinity that exists between the two images. The spatial concept of proximity and accidentality is contained as much in the staircase of the 'typical southern Italian' dwelling (No. 249) as it is in the staircase that Venturi thinks of and makes for *Mother's House* (No. 315). Indeed, he designs a staircase with a winding, apparently unplanned form, in whose conformation he seems to try to imprint a certain spatial tension that is the result of his direct bodily experience of Italian villages.

Fig. 7 Color slides from
photographs taken
by Robert Venturi.
Views from bottom to top.

The effort to understand the point of intersection be-
tween subject-body-and object-architecture-is what Ven-
turi tries to do as much in his photographs, drawings, and
architecture.

CONCLUSIONS

The material collected, and only a small part of the one
here presented, takes the form of a possible path of inves-
tigation of an author's educational journey. Indeed, the

Fig. 8 Robert Venturi, *Surface*.
Color slides from photographs
taken by Robert Venturi.

analysis of visual mental processes is believed to be a good way to arrive at the understanding of a theory not only through words but also through images.

Robert Venturi's photographs portray mental and sensory places, as well as geographical ones. To look at them is to take a journey through time, history, and the physical perceptions he himself has experienced. His work, both in theory and practice, deals with the value of images in a very profound way. The construction of his thought is intended to bring out the true object of architecture, namely that will of matter that Wölfflin called "formal force" (2010, p. 26).

In this constant relationship between reality and image, and image and reality, a circular path is constructed in which we move from the absorbed image to the executed image, a circularity that precisely at its end returns to the beginning through an act of transformation. In other words, from the theory collected and made with photographs, the architectural project is generated. At this point a space that wants to reproduce in its image the same sensory values from which it was generated comes to existence.

Fig. 9 Page 101 excerpted from Chapter 10 related to figure No. 249 and its drawing made by Robert Venturi.

This is why Venturi's *Mother's House* can be considered the manifesto of his architecture, as it condenses the imaginative power from which it was generated.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that what has been said so far about images pertains to their evocative power, which is not to be traced to an executive technical value, and which needs the human body as a medium of transmission in order to exist.

Fig. 10 Pages 118-119 extracted from Chapter 11 related to photographs of the *Mother's House* staircase taken by Robert Venturi.

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BOOKS THAT ARE LIKE WALKING IN QUIET SPACES
ARTIST'S BOOKS, UNREADABLE BOOKS, PREBOOKS AND THEIR HEIRS

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This paper's aim is to be a comparative investigation of artist's books of the second half of the twentieth century and a selection of books in the current realm of children's publishing, in order to establish significant points of contact and intersection between the two worlds, even though they are considered distant and separate.

In both arenas, it is possible to identify books characterised by the absence of verbal and iconic code and by multi-sensory communication relying almost exclusively on paratextual elements. The forerunner of these experiments seems to be Bruno Munari's *Libri Illeggibili* [Unreadable Books] series, a selection of artwork that forgoes text in favour of an aesthetic function alone, which gave rise to new research, including *I Prelibri* [Prebooks] by Munari himself, which is a series of twelve books that differ in colour, material, and shape and that lack a narrative. The latter is a model that will become a source of inspiration, in more recent years, for the likes of Katsumi Komagata or Hervé Tullet, who are today authors of innovative 'open works' whose communicative effectiveness derives from the hybridisation of artistic languages.

INTRODUCTION

After World War II, an era when aesthetic and semiotic analysis and reflections on verbal and visual communication flourished, the book –the utmost repository of content that needs to be conveyed and a privileged medium for the transmission of knowledge– unexpectedly started having negated communication, composed of unreadable, hidden, torn, and indecipherable words.

In the multifaceted and complex landscape of artist's books, a substantial number of works are easily noticed. These works can subject the user to a variety of experiences on the theme of the absence or negation of words as well as images. In them, writes Sara Guindani in *The Book as a Work of Art*,

> words are isolated, dismembered and detached from their material support. Their semantic transparency, their implied and transitive power are denied so that we are forced to accept their irreducible conditions of matter, sound and colour (Maffei, Picciau, 2008, p. 28).

Emblematic of this interesting *leitmotif* found in the verbovisual research of the last century (Ferrari, 2007) are Vincenzo Agnetti's *Libro dimenticato a memoria* (1969), which only has white margins of the pages but no central area that normally has printed words, or the *Enciclopedia Treccani cancellata* (1970) by Emilio Isgrò, who used a marker to cross out words in these books that were intended to represent the *summa* of knowledge. The list could go on, with Lucio Fontana's *Concetto spaziale* (1966), a gold accordion-like book with perforated pages, or with Piero Manzoni's *Life and Work* (1969), made from a hundred transparent pages without printed words, or, again, with Irma Blank's *Romanzo Blu* (1997), whose wafer-thin blank pages are a monochromatic ultramarine blue, and, finally, with an example of a book-object such as Mirella Bentivoglio's *Il disgelo del libro* (1986), an onyx sculpture in the shape of an open book.

These are a few examples among many, of books broken down to their skeleton and physical connotations, in which

the authors' desire to focus on the graphic and tactile aspects of the visible surface of the pages emerges to the point of altering their two-dimensional space and making it so that, as in Lucio Fontana's famous slashed canvases, it is the physical and concrete space that runs through them —and not the one represented— that becomes the sole protagonist, along with colour, marks and matter.

Unreadable, and seemingly provocative, these books display a tension toward aphasia —sought after and declared by the authors— aimed at raising questions about the evocative power of words by virtue of their absence and the intention to invite the user to contemplate, rather than read, by seeking new symbolic apparatuses. The written word, in the age of mass communication, increasingly manifests itself as restrictive and insufficient, while the idea shows itself to be too extensive for it to be expressed, and for the concept to be translated. "Fundamentally, the true artist of the future will be a wordless poet who writes nothing", wrote Yves Klein (1991, p. 206) paradoxically.

It could be assumed that these sophisticated reflections may have exclusively invested the field of contemporary art research on the book, without affecting, due to their complexity, children's publishing, which is often considered the 'lesser handmaiden' of book production because of the supposed 'simplicity' of its contents.

In this paper we will show how some rivulets of this twentieth-century artistic trend actually reached the younger set through the experiments of some authors.

LIBRI ILLEGGIBILI [UNREADABLE BOOKS]

The early and germinal antecedents of the aforementioned artist's books can be identified in Bruno Munari's *Unreadable Books* series. The first example was presented in 1949 at the Salto bookstore in Milan and its history would be as long as the very author's life. We are in the era of the begin-

ning of the Movimento Arte Concreta [Concrete Art Movement], founded by Munari together with a group of artists after World War II to promote a particular kind of abstractionism that, opposing 'lyrical' abstraction, advocates for a predominantly geometric orientation that is free from any imitation or reference to the outside world: for the concretists, the image to be painted had to be universal, exact and transparent, obeying objective laws of mathematical derivation, free from the hindrances of a narrative and signifier.

Within this context, the Milanese artist creates non-figurative paintings open to different perceptual interpretations, such as the *Negativi-positivi* series and several artist's books that represent an innovative and stimulating convergence between Concrete Art theories of visual art and graphic design, another discipline in which "the Leonardo of twentieth century Italian art" was a master (Restany, 1999, p. 254).

We are talking about *Unreadable Books*, which were created after observing the communication capacity of a simple mock-up and questioning how the book could be an object in itself with its own visual language, forgoing text communication in favour of aesthetic function alone.

Thanks to them, the artist succeeds in giving "one final splay to the role of the book as information by eliminating its essential characteristic –legibility– and thus opens the way to its final deflagration" (Maffei, Picciau, 2008, p. 12).

Even though, as we shall see, *Unreadable Books* offer numerous insights regarding new alternative forms of reading, they were named this way by the artist "because there is nothing to read", where 'reading' is intended in the traditional sense of the term, i.e. as a simple deciphering of signs, "but there is much to be learned through the senses. It is like a walk in a silent space that stimulates our different sensory receptors", as Munari liked to say (Pittarello, 1993, p. 6).

Unreadable Books are works of art in book form. They express themselves through their very existence phenomenologically; the material nature of paper, from a simple support for print and images, now becomes the communicator of a message, taking advantage of factors such as thickness, transparency, page size, colour, gloss, matte, die-cuts, and folds.

Alberto Mondadori was the first editor of Munari's editorial work, and he was able to understand its high potential from the very beginning. Mondadori wrote, "Unreadable books 'are the first of a new language that has close kinship with cinema and music and, I believe, may one day become a 'genre', just as today alongside sculpture we have the 'Useless Machines'"(Mondadori, 1950, s.p.). In fact, if we look closely at the pages without text or images and borrow Pierpaolo Antonello's words, we can say that we are faced with a "quasi-musical experience, in which the turning of the pages is rhythmic rather than led by a narrative" (Antonello, 2019, p. 343).

It is useful to cite a few examples so that the reader can better understand their characteristics: *The Unreadable Red and White Book* (1953) features horizontally cut red and white

pages in various formats. The pages intersect to create variable two-tone layers depending on how the reader chooses to arrange them. In *The Unreadable Book N.Y.1* (1967) designed for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a red thread runs through perforated, transparent pages on which black circles are printed in various positions. And finally, *Il libro illeggibile MN1* (1984), designed for the Corraini publishing house which has reprinted it numerous times, has simple pages of different colours cut diagonally to form various combinations by flipping through the pages.

But the production of *Unreadable Books* does not end there. It has a long history. It continued even when the creative momentum within the Concrete Art Movement tapered off in the 1990s.

From this lengthy experience it seems important to us to point out some features that coincide with some of the foundational elements of Munarian research tout court:

- the great importance of colour and material, an aspect the author focuses on meticulously in all his art and design objects (Munari, 1971, pp. 356, 357);
- the multi-sensoriality, a derivation of both experiences in the Futurist sphere and frequentations of Eastern culture: "If we take into account our other senses, people will slowly get used to doing so and they will discover that there are many sensory receptors that let us learn about the world we live in", Munari wrote (1981, p. 380);
- the presence of dynamism (the author's mobiles and experiments in kinetic art are examples), rendered here through the lines drawn by diagonal page cuts and colour contrasts that create a rhythmic effect;
- simplicity, in the sense of the strenuous achievement of bringing out fundamental elements of the image such as rhythm, balance, contrast, composition, proportion, and symmetry/asymmetry. In this regard, Munari stated: "To complicate is simple, simplifying is complicated. [...] Everybody is able to complicate. Only a few can simplify. In order to simplify, you have to take away. And to take away,

you have to know what to take away, as a sculptor does when he chisels away all that extra material from a stone, to make his sculpture. Taking away rather than adding is to recognise the essence of things and to communicate them in their essential nature" (Munari, 1992, pp. 53, 54);

- the technique of displacement, meaning the intent to provoke disorientation of the viewer in order to capture his or her attention and break away of the ordinary and the usual (Fiz, 1999);

- interactivity: in keeping with the democratic, anti-elitist, participatory idea of art that drives the artist, these paper sculptures allow people to compose their work by flipping through it.

With Munari, passivity in the face of the artwork and the book vanishes in a definite way. It is the user who composes the canvases, intervenes on the pages, and imagines the stories.

Unreadable Books make each one become a unique copy and each reader become an author.

I PRELIBRI [THE PREBOOKS]

Due to their peculiar characteristics, scholar Pierpaolo Antonello (p. 344) notes that *Unreadable Books* constitute an example of *crossover picturebooks* (Beckett, 2012). They can successfully be experienced by adults as well as children who cannot read. It is therefore not surprising that their production also became part of the famous workshops conducted by Munari starting in the 1970s, and still frequently implemented by educators who adhered to his method, such as Beba Restelli and Roberto Pittarello. As the Milanese artist stated, hands-on activities inspired by *Unreadable Books* are interesting because

every child can make his or her own book, and it will be a book that communicates the child's state of mind and personality, even if he or she cannot explain in words the reason why he or she did it. Can anyone explain a piece of music with words? (Pittarello, 1993, p. 6).

Figure 2 Bruno Munari, *The Prebooks*, 2002

The same experiments belonging to a world considered elevated and sophisticated like the artist's book, moreover, would also become the subject of children's literature –an invisible and marginalised form of literature (Beseghi, Grilli, 2011)– thanks to the fact that Bruno Munari saw from the very beginning the educational potential of multi-sensory communication and thus decided to adopt and extend the ideas that started during the workshops to the publishing sector dedicated to young children.

Beginning in 1929, Munari started dedicating himself to children's books. It was a period in which he participated in research of the second Futurism and its typographic revolutions, and the Milanese artist soon began to subvert every hierarchical structure of the illustrated book, going on to put the peritextual elements in the foreground. Throughout his long career he devoted himself to the illustrated book with constancy and great care, believing that it could be a valid tool

to operate in society, as it is an art object capable of a capillary dissemination of its poetic power, "the only antidote to the vulgarity of the world and its commodification" (Garrera, Triulzi, 2019, p. 12). With Munari, books are devices that respond to the utopian need to poetically re-found society, saving it from homologation, consumerism and inauthenticity.

Interestingly, even when addressing children, the author displays the same distrust of words that characterised his visual research in general, favouring the image first and foremost and its independent communication abilities (Maffei, 2008, p. 27), giving ample space for reflection regarding the material nature of the book (Beckett, 2018; Campagnaro, 2019).

The apex of this revolution initiated in children's publishing is reached by *I Prelibri* [The Prebooks], first published by Danese in 1980, now part of the Corraini catalog. They are dedicated to preschoolers and seem to be a "tautological demonstration of the futility of storytelling" (Maffei, Picciau, 2002, p. 29). The pages of the twelve square booklets with different materials and bindings, with no story to tell, have a few stylised shapes and many abstract images, engravings, die-cuts, buttonholes, buttons, and strips. They are objects that aim to arouse wonder, because Munari said,

> culture is made up of surprises, which are things we did not know before, and we must be ready to receive them all and not reject them for fear that the castle we have built for ourselves will crumble (Munari, 1981, p. 232).

Direct heirs of the *Unreadable Books* (Munari, 1981, pp. 225-239), the Prebooks are a response to Munari's view of the importance of democratic and pedagogical dissemination of an experimental and modernist artistic language. Once again, the work is open-ended, and the child user, the only real protagonist of the Prebooks, has the opportunity to invent his or her own story and to freely make use of his or her own capacity for imagination. In the twelve small books, "another" dimension of reading is manifested, a "gymnastics for the mind", as Annie Mirabel (2008, p. 32) writes, meaning "the creative ability to connect different

elements, to interpret them, to relaunch them beyond with our imagination" (Varrà, 2012, p. 82).

Nicoletta Gramantieri observes that as the reader flips through these books and wonders what, in the absence of story, they want us to do,

> there is an enactment of most of the narrative mechanisms underlying picture books, novels and fiction in general. We find accumulation, subtraction, and dilation, and we are led to make predictions that are sometimes confirmed and other times not confirmed. We find repetitions, variants, and revelations, and with pleasure readers will spot and recognise them (Gramantieri, 2012, p. 216).

The Prebooks, true sculptures in book form, are able to express themselves through a plastic and material dimension; in the absence of themes and content, the emphasis falls on elements that are typically found in poetry or music, such as rhythm, assonance, expressiveness, and dynamism, recalling emotions that cannot be expressed in words.

THE 'HEIRS' OF UNREADABLE BOOKS AND PREBOOKS

Boero and De Luca (1995, p. 324) state that "Munari gives us solutions that are also typographically ingenious […] a plurality of ideas, stimuli, and provocations capable of opening up many avenues for the illustrator-writers of future generations". Many of the author's books have taken on the status of cult objects. They have become landmarks of children's publishing and important objects that are studied from different standpoints, including history (Terrusi, 2012), graphic and visual elements (Salisbury, 2015), categories related to time (Varrà, 2012), play (Campagnaro, 2016), and space (Campagnaro, 2017), as they are original examples of artist's books and object-books that can be subjected to careful aesthetic analysis (Mirabel, 2008; Beckett, 2012).

In particular, the success and revolutionary scope of the Munari books mentioned here is also evidenced by the nu-

merous books for young children that were inspired by them and have been published over the past four decades. It is precisely because of the Prebooks that the now established Japanese graphic designer Katsumi Komagata created the *Little eyes* series in 1991 (Komagata 1991a-1991e). Consisting of twelve small square books with purely visual content and no text, the series uses the expressive properties of die-cut paper and simple shapes. The first five books in the box set, designed for infants as young as a few months old, are characterised by 'pure abstraction' and asemic communication. Their purpose is to invite visual and tactile discoveries together with adults by offering a vocabulary of art and visual communication through a repertoire of printed or carved geometric shapes. These are book-objects that are presented in the format of triptychs, and they determine reading at the rhythmic pace of triple time. They force one to take time and leave the eyes free to move and observe changes as the pages go by. In book n. 3, *Play With Colours*, for example, simple red *polka* dots on a white background become green *polka* dots on a red background on the next page and then turn into red dots on a green background. It is a contrast that causes "une sensation aussi vive qu'une piqûre d'insecte", Mirabel (2008, p. 32) writes.

When it comes to references to the Munari legacy, we could cite numerous other works, such as the following examples. *Jet de boules* by Miloš Cvach (1998, limited edition of 50 copies), an artist's book commissioned by the Centre des Livres d'Artistes at Saint Yriex la Perche in 1998, for the *Books of Childhood* exhibition: the pages have several round spots that grow, collide and explode, negatively or positively, on folded, accordion-like pages that can turn into an architectural element that can be displayed in a play space. Also, by the same author, we can cite *Dans Tous les Sens* (2007, limited edition of 50 copies), another book-sculpture in rough cardboard bound with rings and with minimal geometric shapes: avowedly an heir to Bruno Munari's *Unreadable Books*, the user can open it in all directions and compare and contrast painted and die-cut geometric shapes, with solids and voids

that can be discovered by one's fingers. *Le Petit Livre des couleurs* (1997, limited edition of 50 copies), by Ianna Andréadis, has fabric pages with different formats that value the tactile experience of reading and allow the user to play with colours while flipping through it, observing colour contrasts and assonances. *Basic Space* (2015) by Fanny Millard is a hardback playbook/book-object with simple illustrations and abstract geometric shapes in red and white that allows the theme of architecture to be explored by creating voluminous shapes with fold-out pages: the book turns into a three-dimensional object the user can enjoy with the body and in space. By using one's imagination, it can become a house, a school, and a space for dreaming. Organic space, by the same author (2017) is an invitation to experiment with organic forms from nature, imagining oneself immersed in a landscape with the triangular hardback pages that can be folded and arranged at will. It is a tool designed to expose children to the notions of territory and it is an initiation into the relationship with the concepts of surface, distance, and margins, in a playful way.

And finally, we also have the famous *Jeu de sculpture* (2012; 2020) and *Jeu des Formes* (2015) by Hervé Tullet. These books have hardback, die-cut pages allow youngsters to 'enter the space of the book' and engage with the language of sculpture. These are, once again, book-objects and playbooks, without any figuration or programmed pedagogical intentions other than those aimed at stimulating creativity and testing design skills and manipulative abilities. The book-object can be used as a structure from which to build a personal installation, which is always different depending on the position of the coloured inserts that can be placed and embedded in the available slots, according to the user's free choice.

The books just listed, a special category of children's books that could include many others that have been recently released, seem to be united by aniconism, or the absence of narrative and symbolic codes. At first glance, their characteristics and aesthetic qualities do not seem all that different from the artist's books we addressed in the first

part of this paper. In all of the cases, because of these poly-form objects that do not allow themselves to be caged in by schematics and definitions and that do aim for active, multi-sensory enjoyment, art has moved out of the galleries and into familiar, everyday life.

These examples point out what is usually considered secondary and sometimes overlooked in book design. By eliminating the verbal code and the iconic code, at least what is intended as a traditional figurative one, the communication abilities of the graphics code of the page and the code of the packaging, the materials, the external shape, and the cover emerge in the foreground. As far as children's books are concerned, as mentioned by Chiara Carrer (Dallari, 2007), we can also add the code of the mediator and the way the book is utilised, which is particularly important when preschoolers are guided by an adult who initiates forms of questioning and cognitive processing.

BOOKS THAT ARE LIKE 'OPEN WORKS'

Unreadable Books, Prebooks and their "heirs" found in both the artist's book section and the section for young children do not tell stories, reveal truths, or offer answers. Like all modern abstract works they reject the possibilities of traditional understanding. Rather, they confront us with the still, silent space of pages that become spaces of research and start to resemble non-figurative or monochromatic pictorial works. They represent an entirely different opportunity for encounter in the onslaught of visual stimuli that pervades us every day and they constitute precious silent spaces as opposed to the density of chaotic information we receive daily. Their aesthetic quality and essence as crossover works, open works and total works of art (Cantatore, 2019), bring about awe and curiosity. They capture your attention, and open themselves up to questions.

As Umberto Eco (1972, pp.153-184) wrote, the purpose of the open work is to convey an ambiguous message, to provide room for the possibility of interpretation, to offer *stimuli* endowed with indeterminacy, without claiming to be the vehicle of an objective message, so that the reader is induced to a series of ever-changing 'readings'.

It will therefore be necessary to reflect on some of the dangers of misunderstanding when enjoying works such as the ones that are analysed and especially when adults mediate how the books are used by children.

In the preface of Beba Restelli's book *Giocare con tatto* (2002, pp. 12-15), Alberto Munari speaks about his father's work and warns about prejudices regarding concepts such as 'art' (as well as 'play'), very often linked to stereotypes implanted in common opinions, which see the work as an object that must always convey meaning. When it comes to abstract works of art, it is often believed that the result can only be achieved by expert connoisseurs and the field is abandoned, judging the terrain to be too difficult for the uninitiated and the young.

The books that were presented emancipate themselves from the preconception that it is necessary to be prepared with meanings to be conveyed or elements to be taught. They propose adventures for the eye, explorations for the senses, putting even the youngest children on the path of formal research of expressive possibilities, as they skilfully offer a confrontation with visual communication tools and techniques. It is an important opportunity for awareness of how images work, as they are cognitive objects that are only seemingly easy to read.

Therefore, we consider the books analysed here as works to be enjoyed without having to translate them into words, which is the same as that artistic genre that emancipates itself from the concept of imitation of nature: music. Music is an art that is understood "as a construction of pure shapes, of nonrepresentational character, which nevertheless through this abstract playing can create emotion in its user, and that is precisely what its beauty consists of", Barbieri (2011, p. 32) writes. The association with non-figuration with music was, moreover, in the program of the artist who is traditionally referred to as the founder of abstractionism, Kandinsky, who with the abolition of mimetic depiction causes painting to move away from the universe of prose to "the advantage of that of the sonic, more intuitive, more mystical, more sublime" (Barbieri, 2011, p. 34).

Let us then return to communication that is intended as a challenge that goes beyond words. Based on what we have examined so far, books can be seen not only as containers of written discourse but can represent an opportunity to access the terrain of freedom of expression proper to contemporary art and to confront the possibilities given by detachment from the usual, and of going beyond the ordinary. There is no need for translation into words. One touches, in silence, the most intimate, unspeakable strings of existence, without having to explain.

Silence, which has a real starring role here, is moreover an increasingly necessary practice for contemplating the

world and processing *stimuli* (Torralba Rossellò, 2012). It is no accident that in the books that were analysed, as well as in a great many other illustrated books, silence is a frequently present narrative object (Campagnaro, 2020). Silence can put the brakes on the acoustic and visual *pollution* of repertoires associated with prevailing banal and stereotyped stories and often oppressive pedagogy; it can also be a resistant tool to encourage visual contemplation and the approach to an aesthetic experience.

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LIBRI COME PASSEGGIATE IN SPAZI SILENZIOSI: *LIBRI D'ARTISTA, LIBRI ILLEGGIBILI, PRELIBRI* E LORO EREDI

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Introduzione

A partire dal secondo dopoguerra, epoca in cui fioriscono studi di analisi estetica e semiotica e riflessioni sulla comunicazione verbale e visiva, l'oggetto libro, depositario per eccellenza di un contenuto da veicolare, luogo privilegiato attraverso cui avviene la trasmissione della conoscenza, vede inaspettatamente comparire al suo interno una comunicazione negata ovvero composta di parole illeggibili, nascoste, strappate, indecifrabili.

Nel multiforme e complesso panorama dei libri d'artista è facile, infatti, notare un consistente numero di opere capaci di sottoporre al fruitore una varietà di esperienze sul tema dell'assenza o negazione della parola, oltre che dell'immagine. In essi, scrive Sara Guindani in *Il libro come opera d'arte*, "la parola è isolata, smembrata, trattenuta nel suo supporto materiale. La sua trasparenza semantica, il suo potere allusivo e transitivo sono negati per inchiodarci all'irriducibilità delle condizioni materiche, sonore e cromatiche" (Maffei, 2008, p. 28). Emblematici di questo interessante *leitmotiv* riscontrabile nell'ambito delle ricerche verbovisuali del secolo scorso (Ferrari, 2007, pp. 605-609) sono il *Libro dimenticato a memoria* (1969) di Vincenzo Agnetti, delle cui pagine rimane solo il margine bianco di contorno alla parte centrale normalmente dedicata alla stampa, o l'*Enciclopedia Treccani cancellata* (1970) di Emilio Isgrò, che opera cancellature a pennarello su volumi che intendono rappresentare la summa del sapere. L'elenco potrebbe continuare con *Concetto spaziale* (1966) di Lucio Fontana, un libro d'oro, a fisarmonica, con pagine forate, oppure con il volume di Piero Manzoni, *Life and Work* (1969), realizzato da un centinaio di pagine trasparenti senza testo o, ancora, con *Romanzo Blu* (1997) di Irma Blank, le cui sottilissime pagine vuote presentano un monocromatico blu oltremare e, infine, con un esem-

pio di libro-oggetto come *Il disgelo del libro* (1986) di Mirella Bentivoglio, una scultura in onice a forma di libro aperto.

Esempi, tra i tanti, di libri ridotti alla loro ossatura e alle loro connotazioni fisiche, in cui emerge la volontà degli autori di privilegiare gli aspetti grafici e tattili della superficie visibile delle pagine fino ad alterarne lo spazio bidimensionale e a fare in modo che, come nelle famose tele tagliate di Lucio Fontana, sia lo spazio fisico e concreto che le attraversa – e non quello rappresentato – a diventare il solo protagonista, insieme al colore, al segno e alla materia.

Illeggibili, apparentemente provocatori, questi libri mostrano una tensione all'afasia – cercata e dichiarata da parte degli autori – che ha lo scopo di sollevare domande sul potere evocativo delle parole in virtù della loro assenza e l'intenzione di invitare il fruitore a contemplare, piuttosto che leggere, cercando nuovi apparati simbolici. La parola scritta, nell'epoca della comunicazione di massa, si palesa sempre più come restrittiva, insufficiente, mentre l'idea si manifesta troppo estesa perché la si possa esprimere, perché il concetto possa essere tradotto. "Fondamentalmente, il vero artista del futuro sarà un poeta senza parole che non scrive nulla", scriveva paradossalmente Yves Klein (1961). Si potrebbe ritenere che queste sofisticate riflessioni possano aver investito esclusivamente il settore delle ricerche dell'arte contemporanea sul libro non interessando, per via della loro complessità, quello dell'editoria per l'infanzia, colei che è spesso considerata l'"ancella minore" della produzione libraria a causa della presupposta 'semplicità' dei suoi contenuti.

Nel presente contributo mostreremo come alcuni rivoli di questa tendenza artistica novecentesca siano in realtà giunti ai più piccoli grazie alle sperimentazioni di alcuni autori.

I libri illeggibili

Gli antecedenti precoci e germinali dei suddetti libri d'artista si possono individuare nella serie dei *Libri illeggibili* di Bruno Munari, il cui primo esemplare è presentato nel 1949 alla libreria Salto di Milano e la cui storia sarà lunga quanto la vita dell'autore. Siamo nell'epoca dell'avvio del Movimento Arte Concreta, fondato da Munari insieme a un gruppo di artisti nel secondo dopoguerra per promuovere un tipo particolare di astrattismo che, opponendosi all'astrazione "lirica", sostiene

un orientamento prevalentemente geometrico e libero da ogni imitazione o riferimento al mondo esterno: l'immagine da dipingere doveva, per i concretisti, essere universale, esatta e trasparente, obbedire a leggi oggettive di derivazione matematica, libera dagli intralci della narrazione e del significante.

In questo contesto l'artista milanese realizza dipinti non figurativi aperti a differenti letture percettive come la serie *Negativi-positivi* e diversi libri d'artista che rappresentano una convergenza innovativa e stimolante tra le teorie concretiste dell'arte visiva e il graphic design, altra disciplina di cui "il Leonardo dell'arte italiana del Novecento" era maestro (Restany, 1999, p. 254).

Stiamo parlando dei *Libri illeggibili,* nati dall'osservazione della capacità comunicativa di un semplice menabò e dall'interrogarsi su come il libro possa essere un oggetto di per sé dotato di un suo linguaggio visivo, rinunciando alla comunicazione testuale a favore della sola funzione estetica.

Grazie a essi l'artista riesce a dare "l'ultima spallata al ruolo informativo del libro eliminandone la sua peculiare caratteristica, la leggibilità, aprendo così la via ad una sua definitiva deflagrazione" (Maffei, 2008, p. 12).

Sebbene, come vedremo, i *Libri illeggibili* offrano numerosi spunti di riflessione riguardo a nuove alternative forme di lettura, sono così denominati dall'artista "perché non c'è niente da leggere", intendendo la lettura nel senso tradizionale del termine ovvero come semplice decifrazione di segni, "ma molto da conoscere attraverso i sensi. È come una passeggiata in uno spazio silenzioso con tanti richiami ai vari recettori sensoriali", come amava affermare Munari (Pittarello, 1993, p. 6).

Sono, i *Libri illeggibili,* opere d'arte in forma di libro che si esprimono attraverso il loro stesso esistere fenomenologicamente; la matericità della carta, da semplice supporto del testo e delle immagini, diviene ora il comunicatore di un messaggio, sfruttando fattori quali lo spessore, la trasparenza, il formato delle pagine, il colore, il lucido, l'opaco, le fustellature, le piegature.

Come scrisse Alberto Mondadori, primo curatore dell'opera editoriale di Munari, capace di comprenderne fin da subito l'alto potenziale, I Libri illeggibili "sono i primi di un nuovo linguaggio che ha strette parentele con il cinema e la musica e, credo, potranno diventare un giorno un «genere», così come oggi a fianco della scultura, le «macchi-

ne inutili»"(Mondadori, 1950, s.p.); in effetti, a ben osservare le pagine senza testo e senza immagini e prendendo a prestito le parole di Pierpaolo Antonello, si può affermare che ci troviamo di fronte a una "quasi-musical experience, in which the turning of the pages is rhythmic rather than led by narrative" (2019, p. 343).

Ci sembra utile citare alcuni esempi per farne comprendere meglio le caratteristiche al lettore: *Il libro illeggibile bianco e rosso* (1953) presenta pagine bianche e rosse tagliate orizzontalmente in vari formati, le pagine si intersecano creando tavole bicolore variabili a seconda di come il lettore sceglie di predisporle; in *Il libro illeggibile N.Y.1* (1967) progettato per il Museo di Arte Moderna di New York, un filo rosso attraversa fogli forati e trasparenti su cui sono stampati cerchi neri in varie posizioni; infine, *Il libro illeggibile MN1* (1984), progettato per la casa editrice Corraini che ne ha curato numerose riedizioni presenta semplici carte di diverso colore tagliate diagonalmente a formare diversi abbinamenti scorrendo le pagine.

Ma la produzione dei Libri illeggibili non si esaurisce qui, ha una storia lunga: essa continua anche quando si è ormai consumata la spinta creativa nell'ambito del Movimento Arte Concreta, arrivando fino agli anni Novanta.

Da questa lunga esperienza ci sembra rilevante evidenziare alcune caratteristiche che poi coincidono con alcuni degli elementi fondanti della ricerca munariana *tout court*:

- la grande importanza affidata al colore e al materiale, aspetto cui l'autore dedica una meticolosa attenzione in tutti i suoi oggetti artistici e di design (Munari, 1971, pp. 356-357);
- l'attenzione alla plurisensorialità, una derivazione sia delle esperienze in ambito futurista che dalle frequentazioni della cultura orientale: "Se teniamo conto degli altri sensi, la gente pian piano si abituerà e scoprirà che ci sono tanti recettori sensoriali per conoscere il mondo in cui viviamo", scriveva Munari (1981, p. 380);
- la presenza del dinamismo (si pensi ai *mobiles* e alle sperimentazioni nell'arte cinetica dell'autore), qui reso attraverso le linee tracciate dai tagli diagonali delle pagine e dai contrasti di colore che creano un effetto ritmico;
- la semplicità, intesa come faticosa conquista che consente di mettere in evidenza elementi fondamentali dell'immagine quali il ritmo,

l'equilibrio, il contrasto, la composizione, le proporzioni, le simmetria/asimmetria. Munari, a tal proposito, affermava: "Complicare è facile, semplificare è difficile. [...] Tutti sono capaci di complicare. Pochi sono capaci di semplificare. Per semplificare bisogna togliere, e per togliere bisogna sapere cosa togliere, come fa lo scultore quando a colpi di scalpello toglie dal masso di pietra tutto quel materiale che c'è in più della scultura che vuole fare. Togliere invece che aggiungere vuol dire riconoscere l'essenza delle cose e comunicarle nella loro essenzialità." (Munari, 1992, pp. 53-54);

- la tecnica dello spiazzamento, ovvero l'intento di provocare un disorientamento dello spettatore per catturarne l'attenzione e uscire dall'ordinario, dal consueto (Fiz, 1999);
- l'interattività: in linea con l'idea democratica, antielitaria e partecipativa dell'arte che guida l'artista, queste sculture di carta permettono di comporre la propria opera sfogliandola.

Con Munari svanisce infatti definitivamente la passività di fronte all'opera d'arte e al libro: è il fruitore a comporre le tavole, a intervenire sulle pagine, a immaginare storie. I *Libri illeggibili* prevedono che ogni esemplare diventi una copia unica e che ogni lettore diventi autore.

I Prelibri

Grazie alle loro peculiari caratteristiche, come osserva lo studioso Pierpaolo Antonello (p.344), i *Libri illeggibili* costituiscono un esempio di *crossover picturebooks*, (Beckett, 2012): possono farne proficuamente esperienza gli adulti così come i bambini che non sanno leggere. Non sorprende dunque che la loro produzione sia divenuta parte anche dei famosi laboratori condotti da Munari dagli anni Settanta e ancora frequentemente attuati da educatori che aderirono al suo metodo, come Beba Restelli e Roberto Pittarello. Come affermava l'artista milanese, le attività pratiche ispirate ai libri illeggibili sono interessanti perché "Ogni bambino può fare il suo libro e sarà un libro che comunica lo stato d'animo e la personalità del bambino, anche se non sa spiegare a parole perché lo ha fatto. C'è qualcuno che sa spiegare a parole, un brano musicale?" (Pittarello, 1993, p.6). Le medesime sperimentazioni appartenenti a un mondo considerato elevato e sofisticato quale quello del libro d'artista, inoltre, diventeranno soggetto anche della letteratura per l'infanzia –

la letteratura invisibile e a lungo marginalizzata (Beseghi, Grilli, 2011) – grazie al fatto che Bruno Munari comprese fin da subito le potenzialità educative di una comunicazione plurisensoriale e decise così di adottare ed estendere le idee nate durante i laboratori anche nel settore editoriale dedicato ai più piccoli.

Dedicatosi al libro destinato all'infanzia a partire dal 1929, periodo in cui frequentava le ricerche del secondo Futurismo e le sue rivoluzioni tipografiche, l'artista milanese iniziò ben presto a sovvertire ogni struttura gerarchica del libro illustrato, andando a mettere in primo piano gli elementi peritestuali. Nel corso della sua lunga carriera si dedicò al libro illustrato con costanza e grande cura, ritenendo che esso potesse essere un valido strumento per operare nella società, un oggetto d'arte capace di diffondere capillarmente la sua potenza poetica, "l'unico antidoto alla volgarità del mondo e alla sua mercificazione" (Garrera, Triulzi, 2012, p. 12). Con Munari, infatti, il libro è un dispositivo che risponde all'esigenza utopica di rifondare poeticamente la società, salvandola dall'omologazione, dal consumismo e dall'inautenticità.

È interessante notare come l'autore manifesti, anche quando si rivolge all'infanzia, la medesima sfiducia nella parola che caratterizzava la sua ricerca visiva in generale, favorendo il primato dell'immagine e delle sue autonome capacità comunicative (Maffei, 2008, p. 27), dando piuttosto largo spazio alla riflessione sulla materialità del libro (Beckett, 2018; Campagnaro, 2019).

L'apice di questa rivoluzione avviata nell'editoria per l'infanzia è toccato da *I Prelibri* (pubblicati per la prima volta da Danese nel 1980, ora nel catalogo Corraini): dedicati ai bambini in età prescolare, paiono mostrarsi come "tautologica dimostrazione dell'inutilità della narrazione" (Maffei, 2002, p. 29). Le pagine dei dodici libretti quadrati caratterizzati da materiali e rilegature differenti, senza nessuna storia da narrare, presentano al loro interno alcune figure stilizzate, molte immagini astratte, incisioni, fustellature, asole, bottoni, fettucce: oggetti che mirano a suscitare stupore, anche perché, diceva Munari, "la cultura è fatta di sorprese, cioè di quello che prima non si sapeva, e bisogna essere pronti a riceverle e non a rifiutarle per paura che crolli il nostro castello che ci siamo costruiti" (Munari, 1981, p. 232).

Diretti eredi dei *Libri illeggibili* (Munari, 1981, pp. 225-239), i *Prelibri* rispondono all'ottica munaria-

na dell'importanza della diffusione democratica e pedagogica del linguaggio artistico sperimentale e modernista. Ancora una volta l'opera si presenta aperta e il fruitore bambino, unico vero protagonista dei *Prelibri*, ha la possibilità di inventare il proprio racconto e di servirsi liberamente della sua stessa capacità di immaginazione. Nei dodici piccoli libri si manifesta una dimensione "altra" della lettura, una "ginnastica per la mente", come scrive Annie Mirabel (2008, p. 32), intesa come "capacità creativa di collegare elementi diversi, di interpretarli, di rilanciarli oltre con la nostra immaginazione" (Varrà, 2012, p. 82).

Osserva Nicoletta Gramantieri che mentre le dita sfogliano questi libri e il lettore si domanda cosa, in assenza di storia, essi vogliano che si faccia, "vediamo messi in scena gran parte dei meccanismi narrativi che sottostanno ad albi illustrati, romanzi e narrazioni in genere: troviamo l'accumulo, la sottrazione, la dilatazione, siamo portati a fare previsioni che a volte vengono confermate e altre volte disconfermate, troviamo ripetizioni, varianti, svelamenti e con piacere i lettori li individuano e li riconoscono" (Gramantieri, 2012, p. 216).

I *Prelibri*, vere e proprie sculture in forma di libro, sono capaci di esprimersi attraverso una dimensione plastica e materica; in assenza di temi e contenuti, l'enfasi cade su elementi tipicamente propri della poesia o della musica come il ritmo, l'assonanza, l'espressività, il dinamismo, attingendo a stati emotivi che non possono essere espressi a parole.

Gli 'eredi' dei *Libri illeggibili* e dei *Prelibri*

"Munari ci propone soluzioni anche tipograficamente geniali [...] una pluralità di idee, di stimoli, di provocazioni in grado di aprire molti percorsi agli illustratori-scrittori delle generazioni successive", affermano Boero e De Luca (1995, p. 324). Molti libri dell'autore hanno assunto lo *status* di oggetti di culto, sono diventati punti di riferimento dell'editoria per bambini e importanti oggetti di studio dal punto di vista storico (Terrusi, 2012), degli elementi grafici e visivi (Salisbury, 2015), delle categorie legate al tempo (Varrà, 2012), al gioco (Campagnaro, 2016), allo spazio (Campagnaro, 2017), originali esempi di libri d'artista e libri-oggetto da sottoporre ad attenta analisi estetica (Mirabel, 2008; Beckett, 2012).

In particolare il successo e la portata rivoluzionaria dei libri munariani qui ricordati è testimoniato anche dai numerosi libri per i più piccoli ad essi ispirati e comparsi nel panorama editoriale negli ultimi quarant'anni. È proprio sull'esempio dei *Prelibri* che l'ormai affermato grafico e designer giapponese Katsumi Komagata creerà nel 1990 la collana *Little eyes*: composta da dodici piccoli libri quadrati dal contenuto puramente visivo e senza testo, sfrutta le proprietà espressive della carta fustellata e delle semplici forme utilizzate. I primi cinque libri del cofanetto, ideati per bambini di pochi mesi, sono caratterizzati da un'"astrazione pura" e da una comunicazione asemica. Il loro scopo è invitare a fare scoperte visive e tattili insieme agli adulti, attraverso l'offerta di un vocabolario dell'arte e della comunicazione visiva reso grazie a un repertorio di forme geometriche stampate o intagliate. Si tratta di libri-oggetto che si presentano nel formato di trittici, determinano una lettura al ritmo scandito dei tre tempi, obbligano a prendere tempo e a lasciare lo sguardo libero di muoversi e osservare mutamenti nell'alternarsi delle pagine. Nel libro n.3, *Play With Colors*, ad esempio, dei semplici *pois* rossi su fondo bianco diventano, nella pagina successiva, dei *pois* verdi su fondo rosso per poi diventare rossi su fondo verde: un contrasto che provoca "une sensation aussi vive qu'une piqûre d'insecte", scrive Mirabel (2008, p. 32).

Sempre in relazione all'eredità munariana potremmo citare ancora numerosi altri esempi come: *Jet de boules* di Miloš Cvach (1998, tiratura limitata a 50 esemplari), un libro d'artista commissionato all'artista dal Centre des Livres d'Artistes del Saint Yriex la Perche nel 1998, in occasione della mostra "Books of Childhood": nelle pagine si susseguono diverse macchie tonde che crescono, si scontrano ed esplodono, in negativo o in positivo, su pagine piegate e fisarmonica che possono anche trasformarsi in un elemento architettonico che può andare a definire uno spazio ludico; dello stesso autore è anche *Dans Tous les Sens* (2007, tiratura limitata a 50 esemplari), altro libro-scultura in cartone grezzo rilegato ad anelli con forme geometriche minimali: dichiaratamente erede dei *Libri illeggibili* di Bruno Munari, si può aprire in tutti i sensi e confrontare le forme geometriche dipinte e forme geometriche fustellate, in un contrasto tra pieni e vuoti in cui le dita possono avventurarsi; *Le Petit Livre des couleurs* (1997, tiratura limitata a 50 esemplari), di Ianna Andréadis, compone pagine di tessuto di differenti formati che danno valore

all'esperienza tattile della lettura e permettono di giocare con i colori mentre si sfoglia, osservando contrasti e assonanze cromatiche, Basic Space (2015) di Fanny Millard è un libro-gioco/oggetto cartonato con semplici illustrazioni composte da forme geometriche astratte di colore bianco e rosso che permette di esplorare il tema dell'architettura formando dei volumi con le pagine a soffietto: il libro si trasforma in un oggetto tridimensionale da fruire con il corpo e nello spazio; grazie all'immaginazione, può diventare una casa, una scuola, un ambiente per sognare; *Organic space*, della stessa autrice (2017) invita a sperimentare forme organiche, della natura, a immaginarsi immersi in un paesaggio servendosi delle pagine cartonate triangolari che possono essere piegate e disposte a piacere: uno strumento ideato per sensibilizzare i bambini alle nozioni di territorio e iniziarli alla relazione con i concetti di superficie, distanza, margine, in maniera ludica.

Celebri, infine, sono anche *Jeu de sculpture* (2012; 2020), e *Jeu des Formes* (2015) di Hervé Tullet, libri le cui pagine cartonate e fustellate permettono alle giovani dita di 'entrare nello spazio del libro' e di confrontarsi con il linguaggio della scultura. Si tratta, ancora una volta, di libri-oggetto e libri-gioco, senza figurazione e senza programmati intenti pedagogici se non quelli volti a stimolare la creatività e a mettere alla prova capacità progettuali e le abilità manipolative, utilizzando l'oggetto libro come struttura da cui partire per poter costruire una personale installazione, sempre diversa in base alla posizione degli inserti colorati da collocare e incastrare nelle fessure a disposizione, in base alla libera scelta del fruitore.

I libri elencati, una speciale categoria di libri per bambini cui se ne potrebbero aggiungere molti altri di recente uscita, sembrano dunque essere accomunati dall'aniconismo, dall'assenza di narrazione e di codici simbolici. Ad una prima analisi delle caratteristiche e della qualità estetica che li contraddistingue non sembrano poi così differenti dai libri d'artista che abbiamo affrontato nella prima parte di questo contributo. In tutti i casi, grazie a questi oggetti poliformi che non si lasciano ingabbiare da schematismi e definizioni e che mirano a una fruizione attiva e plurisensoriale, l'arte è uscita dalle gallerie ed è entrata nella vita familiare e quotidiana.

Grazie a questi esempi viene messo in rilievo ciò che è solitamente considerato di secondo piano e a volte trascurato nella progettazione dei libri: eliminando il codice verbale e il codice iconico, almeno quello figurativo tradizionalmente inteso, emergono in primo piano, infatti, le capacità comunicative del codice grafico della pagina e del codice della confezione, dei materiali, della forma esterna, della copertina; a questi, per quanto riguarda i libri per l'infanzia, come ricordato da Chiara Carrer (Dallari, 2007) va aggiunto il codice del mediatore e della modalità con cui avviene la fruizione, particolarmente importante quando i bambini in età prescolare vengono guidati da un adulto che avvia forme di interrogazione ed elaborazione cognitiva.

Libro come opera aperta
I *Libri illeggibili*, i *Prelibri* e i loro "eredi" presenti sia nel settore dei libri d'artista che in quello destinato ai più piccoli non narrano storie, non rivelano verità, non offrono risposte; come tutte le opere astratte moderne respingono le possibilità di comprensione tradizionale. Piuttosto ci pongono di fronte allo spazio immobile e silenzioso di pagine che diventano luogo di ricerca e che arrivano ad assomigliare alle opere pittoriche non figurative o monocromatiche. Rappresentano un'occasione di incontro del tutto differente nella pioggia di stimoli visivi che ci pervade ogni giorno e costituiscono preziosi spazi silenziosi al cospetto della densità di informazioni caotiche che quotidianamente riceviamo. La loro qualità estetica e la loro essenza di opere crossover, opere aperte e opere d'arte totali (Cantatore, 2019), suscitano stupore, curiosità, catturano l'attenzione, aprono a interrogativi.

Come scriveva Umberto Eco (1972, pp.153-184), scopo dell'opera aperta è veicolare un messaggio ambiguo, dare spazio a possibilità interpretative, offrire stimoli dotati di indeterminatezza, senza la pretesa di essere il veicolo di messaggio oggettivo, affinché il lettore sia indotto a una serie di "letture" sempre variabili.

Occorrerà dunque riflettere su alcuni pericoli di fraintendimento nel momento in cui si fruiscono opere come quelle analizzate e soprattutto quando gli adulti mediano la fruizione con i bambini. Nella prefazione del volume *Giocare con tatto* di Beba Restelli (2002, pp.12-15), Alberto Munari, a proposito dell'operato del padre, mette in guardia sui pregiudizi riguardanti concetti come quello di "arte" (oltre quello di "gioco"), molto spesso legato a stereotipi impiantati nell'opinione co-

mune, che vedono l'opera come un oggetto che debba sempre veicolare un significato. Nel caso delle opere d'arte astratta spesso si ritiene che il risultato possa essere raggiunto solo da esperti intenditori e si abbandona il campo, giudicandolo un terreno troppo difficile per i non addetti ai lavori e per i più piccoli.

I libri presentati si emancipano dal preconcetto che occorra premunirsi di significati da veicolare o elementi da insegnare; propongono avventure per lo sguardo, esplorazioni per i sensi, mettendo anche i più piccoli sulla strada della ricerca formale delle possibilità espressive e offrendo sapientemente un confronto con strumenti e tecniche della comunicazione visiva. Un'opportunità importante per la consapevolezza del funzionamento delle immagini, oggetti conoscitivi solo apparentemente facili da leggere.

Consideriamo dunque i libri qui analizzati come opere da fruire senza dover tradurre a parole, così come accade nel caso del genere artistico che meglio si emancipa dal concetto di imitazione della natura: la musica, un'arte da intendere "come costruzione di forme pure, di carattere non rappresentazionale, la quale tuttavia attraverso questo gioco astratto può creare nel suo fruitore l'emozione, e proprio in questo consiste la sua bellezza", come scrive Barbieri (2011, p.32). L'associazione della non-figurazione alla musica era d'altronde nel programma di colui che è tradizionalmente indicato come il fondatore dell'astrattismo, Kandinsky, che con l'abolizione della raffigurazione mimetica fa sì che la pittura si allontani dall'universo della prosa a "vantaggio di quello del sonoro, più intuitivo, più mistico, più sublime" (Barbieri, 2011, p.34).

Torniamo allora alla comunicazione intesa come sfida che va oltre le parole: in base a quanto esaminato finora, i libri possono essere intesi non soltanto come contenitori di discorsi scritti ma possono rappresentare un'opportunità per accedere al terreno della libertà di espressione propria dell'arte contemporanea e di confrontarsi con le possibilità date dal distacco dal consueto, dell'andare oltre l'ordinario. Non c'è nessuna necessità di traduzione in parole. Si toccano, in silenzio, le corde più intime, indicibili dell'esistenza, senza dover dare spiegazioni.

Il silenzio, che ha qui un ruolo da vero protagonista, è d'altronde una pratica sempre più necessaria per contemplare il mondo ed elaborare gli stimoli (Torralba Rossellò, 2012). Non è un caso che nei libri analizzati, così come in moltissimi altri albi illustrati, esso sia un oggetto narrativo frequentemente presente (Campagnaro, 2020). Il silenzio può diventare un freno all'inquinamento acustico e visivo dei repertori associati a storie banali e stereotipizzate predominanti, nonché al pedagogismo spesso opprimente; può rappresentare inoltre un resistente strumento per favorire la contemplazione visiva e l'avvicinamento all'esperienza estetica.