

NEW DIRECTIONS IN PICTUREBOOK RESEARCH



EDITED BY TERESA COLOMER,
BETTINA KÜMMERLING-MEIBAUER,
AND CECILIA SILVA-DÍAZ

NEW DIRECTIONS
IN PICTUREBOOK
RESEARCH

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New Directions in Picturebook Research
edited by Teresa Colomer, Bettina
Kümmerling-Meibauer, and Cecilia
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Series Editor's Foreword

Dedicated to furthering original research in children's literature and culture, the Children's Literature and Culture series includes monographs on individual authors and illustrators, historical examinations of different periods, literary analyses of genres, and comparative studies on literature and the mass media. The series is international in scope and is intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology.

Children's literature and culture are understood in the broadest sense of the term children to encompass the period of childhood up through adolescence. Owing to the fact that the notion of childhood has changed so much since the origination of children's literature, this Routledge series is particularly concerned with transformations in children's culture and how they have affected the representation and socialization of children. While the emphasis of the series is on children's literature, all types of studies that deal with children's radio, film, television, and art are included in an endeavor to grasp the aesthetics and values of children's culture. Not only have there been momentous changes in children's culture in the last fifty years, but there have also been radical shifts in the scholarship that deals with these changes. In this regard, the goal of the Children's Literature and Culture series is to enhance research in this field and, at the same time, point to new directions that bring together the best scholarly work throughout the world.

Jack Zipes

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Introduction

Current Trends in Picturebook Research

*Teresa Colomer, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer,
Cecilia Silva-Díaz*

Picturebook research underwent considerable changes by the end of the twentieth century. Initially, historical perspective dominated the field: most surveys focused on the emergence and development of picturebooks. In the 1980s they began to be regarded by scholars as either an art form or as educational tools for language acquisition, introduction to literature and visual literacy. However, picturebooks have never received such enthusiastic critical attention as they have in recent years. The number of studies has increased as the artistic effects of picturebooks have developed considerably due to intensive experimentation with the interplay of text and image. Research confirms that, at its best, picturebook illustration is a subtle and complex art form that can communicate on many levels and leave a deep imprint on a child's consciousness.

The unique character of picturebooks as an art form has been amply described by scholars like Perry Nodelman in *Words About Pictures* (1988) and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott in *How Picturebooks Work* (2001). They have provided students and scholars who have an interest in narrative, design, and communication with a growing awareness of the opportunities that picturebooks offer. The innovation of modern picturebooks underlines their potential for the development of linguistic, written and visual literacy. These features were already recognized by critics in the 1980s, and new ones have been examined, such as the understanding that reading picturebooks involves complex aesthetic and cognitive processes. For example, some poetic and visual effects tend to interfere with, or, at the very least, delay the process of interpretation, hence affecting the regular course of cognitive processes.

Therefore, our book is mainly aimed at discussing the general aesthetic and cognitive constraints on which the understanding of picturebooks depends.

This collection seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on the importance of picturebook research, focusing on aesthetic and cognitive aspects of picturebooks. The thirteen articles are revised versions of papers given at the international conference on “New Impulses in Picturebook Research,” held at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Spain, in September 2007, and organized by Teresa Colomer and Cecilia Silva-Díaz in cooperation with Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer. Four additional chapters complement these contributions in order to demonstrate the wide spectrum of the field. Written by scholars from twelve countries (Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, and Venezuela), the articles clearly suggest that the study of the intersection of cognitive and aesthetic aspects in picturebook research is a major, widespread trend. Moreover, they all focus on interdisciplinary approaches that integrate different disciplines such as literary studies, art history, linguistics, narratology, cognitive psychology, sociology, memory studies, and picture theory.

Picturebooks, Literacy, and Cultural Context

The first five chapters focus on the relationship between children’s response, literacy, metaliterary awareness, the values of contemporary societies, the artistic constructiveness of visual and written text and its implication in cognitive development, thus presenting picturebooks from a multidimensional perspective. Based on his recently published study, *The Hidden Adult: Characteristics of Children’s Literature* (2008), Perry Nodelman argues that the picturebook may help scholars to have a better understanding of children’s literature. In order to build his case, a typical picturebook, Nan Gregory’s *Amber Waiting* (2002), is thoroughly analysed, thus revealing a paradoxical dynamic between the somewhat simple texts and the relatively more complex visual information of the pictures. This article reveals that texts in picturebooks usually purport to be childlike, to represent how adults like to believe children see and understand the world, while the pictures tend to undercut that childlike simplicity with a more sophisticated adult view of things. By considering the implications of the ways in which picturebooks characteristically create childhood and at the same time undermine it, Nodelman demonstrates that they give children the adult knowledge they purportedly suppress while constructing profound paradoxical childhood subjectivity.

The juxtaposition of the concept of the implied reader and the child’s developing sense of visual literacy and literary competence is the starting point in Maria Nikolajeva’s thought-provoking article. Based on Roland Barthes’ seminal work on reader-oriented semiotics, *S/Z*, she argues that readers need to have access to a number of codes (i.e., proairetic, hermeneutic, semic, symbolic,

and referential code) and how these codes become specific in multimodal texts. By emphasizing the impact of these codes for the decoding of the plot, meaning making, the understanding of fictionality, symbolic representation and intervisual/intertextual references, Nikolajeva thoroughly demonstrates that visual and literary decoding must be gradually acquired by children in order to enable the interpretation and appreciation of complex picturebooks. In a last step Nikolajeva draws upon Barthes' distinction between readerly and writerly texts, applying these categories to picturebooks. She claims that picturebooks belonging to the category of writerly texts stimulate a creative dialogue between text/image and reader/viewer, thus encouraging visual and literary competence.

Teresa Colomer's article shows that the establishment of new values promoted by children's books during the 1960s and 1970s became significantly modified by the beginning of the twenty-first century, reflecting a shift towards the social representation of childhood. The comparison between the two periods reveals that, as a consequence of changes in the social context, picturebooks show a particular emphasis on topics that deal with sentimental education, especially in reference to the building-up of personality, as well as complex values of multicultural and social coexistence. In addition, the chapter shows that, ever since modern picturebooks started to develop, they have introduced innovative aspects such as metafiction, irony or the blurring of fictional borders, which raise questions about the understanding children may have of these artistic post-modern forms. These new picturebooks are regarded as the ideal means to explore sentimental questions through the emotive use of illustrations, the text's proximity to connotative and metaphoric poetic functions, or the possibility of combining codes in order to articulate different levels of comprehension. This new production poses a number of new questions for critics to tackle.

Nina Christensen deals with the differences and similarities between eighteenth-century picturebooks and today's modern picturebooks with regard to two aspects: One is how the books introduce the child to the process of semiosis—how children are implicitly expected to be able to deduce meaning from language and image. The second aspect is related to the content of the books and is a discussion of how human behavior is discussed in relation to descriptions of vices and virtues. Christensen compares Dorte Karrebaek's mock-scientific image of creatures representing the seven deadly sins, *The Black Book. On the seven Deadly Sins* (Den sorte bog. Om de syv døds synde, 2007), with two books from the eighteenth century: *CCLII Udvalde og med 800 Billeder udlagde Bibelske Hoved-Sprog*, (252 selected Biblical Proverbs with 800 images. Published anonymously in 1775), Karl Philipp Moritz's *Neues ABC Buch welches zugleich eine Anleitung zum Denken für Kinder* (New ABC including an encouragement for children to think, 1790) stresses the changes in the process of meaning-making and in the child's education.

Based on the findings of a research project, Evelyn Arizpe stresses the importance of picturebooks for primary school children from ethnic minority backgrounds. She investigates how these children responded to two picturebooks set within their new culture: *Traction Man Is Here* (2005) by Mini Grey and *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* (2006) by Oliver Jeffers. Her analysis concentrates on the response-inviting structures of the picturebooks selected, which involve some of the “post-modern” aspects of this genre, such as meta-fiction, fragmentation, intertextuality and non-traditional textual, and spatial arrangements. The implications reveal how the interplay between different literacies and cultures affects and creates metaliterary awareness of verbal and visual texts such as in metafictional picturebooks, thus offering a new perspective for future research in this field.

Sandra L. Beckett stresses that visual allusions to art works are an important trend in contemporary picturebooks. She differentiates between three categories of artistic allusions: a) allusions to the stylistic conventions of an entire genre; b) allusions to the style of a period or movement; and c) reference to the characteristic manner of a particular artist. Since children are more apt to decode allusions to specific works of art than general allusions to an artistic movement, the former are more common in picturebooks. In addition, this article shows that allusions to individual works of art tend quite often to be parodic, thus revealing sophisticated, multi-level parodies. By means of a thorough description of picturebooks by renowned artists from five countries, the influence of artistic allusions on the multi-layered meanings of the respective works is clearly demonstrated. In the final section Beckett discusses under what conditions children might recognize the complex visual allusions and whether the illustrators help them by providing them with some clues to decipher the hidden references to art works.

Picturebooks and Storytelling

The next section comprises six articles that focus on the relationship between picturebook research and narratology by investigating such topics as the role of frame-making and frame-breaking, twist endings in picturebooks, narrative constraints of wordless picturebooks, the influence of modernism on the development of new narrative strategies, the mutual relationship between narrative perspectives used in different art forms, and ellipsis and off-screen as narrative devices.

Carole Scott's article explores the purposes and effects of framing in picturebooks. Besides the aesthetic aspects of graphic design, it considers graphic-narrative metafictional devices as literary constructs; the expressions of social and psychological boundaries and distinctions; psychological states of mind; and the communication of social commentary. Scott alludes to theory about architecture whose structures order our three-dimensional

world as picturebooks reflect it in two dimensions, particularly James Steele's *Architecture Today* (1997). In this regard, frames in picturebooks are not only aesthetic devices that influence the viewer's sense of involvement in the action of the work, but also must be considered as the ordered application of a certain belief system. Of particular interest is the consideration of how children's developing perception might be influenced by their understanding of boundaries and how they may be broken, together with their increasing realization of fictionality—the relationship between creative invention and real-life experience.

The chapter written by Brenda Bellorín and Cecilia Silva-Díaz deals with surprise endings in picturebooks. By means of a thorough study of the forms, effects, and implications of these unexpected endings, the authors show how they create patterns of concealment and revelation, both in their narrative and physical dimensions, and through the interplay of text and image. Considering that twist endings usually surprise readers by concealing an important part of the narrative, Bellorín and Silva-Díaz have analysed and organized some picturebooks according to the type of concealment. Their twist ending classification includes stories with disturbing epilogues, concealed intentions, hidden characters, sneaky narrators, non-explicit turning points, and stories within stories. As a preliminary approach to future research on the subject, the authors have also shared the reading of the books with individual readers and have presented a short report on their reactions.

Isabelle Nières-Chevrel's chapter focuses on the complexity of the French wordless picturebook *L'Orage* (The Thunderstorm, 1998) by Anne Brouillard. Through a meticulous analysis of the sequence of illustrations, she demonstrates the narrative power of pictures as well as the commitment required by the reader to understand the book. By linking together description and narration in pictures, the artist realizes a visual translation of the different experiences involved by the depicted event. Whereas time is fairly readable because the narrative follows the chronological order of the storm, space is utterly bewildering—half a maze and half a jigsaw. The book requires an active reader: he/she must look for clues, put forward hypotheses about the laying out and the linking of the pictures and elude the traps set by reflections in mirrors. In the final discussion, a genuine investigation of the powers and limits of pictures when used as the only narrative medium is undertaken in order to consider the readability of the mismatch of time, space, and actions in this wordless picturebook.

Elina Druker discusses the conceptual and spatial innovations of the Nordic picturebook during the 1950s, which is deeply influenced by avant-garde and modernist movements. Concentrating on picturebooks by Egon Møller-Nielsen as well as his monumental play ground sculptures, it shows that the artists refer to both these artistic movements and attempt to activate the reader's role by using new spatial concepts, such as holes in the pages, pop-up elements, and a continuous red thread as page turner. This observation refers to

the meta-artistic structure that is either stressed by the Chinese box-principle or by the analogy between book form and architectural design. Through these artistic devices the picturebooks discussed introduce modernist aesthetics into children's literature, thus anticipating post-modern features.

Tomoko Masaki's article is a detailed analysis of Susumi Shingu's first picturebook, *Strawberries* (1975), which stands out for its extraordinary illustrations and plot. This is due to the impact of Shingu's previous sculptural work on the unusual proportions and dimensions of the illustrations. Moreover, Shingu wishes to involve the viewer/reader in the perception and re-creation of the picturebook's meaning by referring to different aspects of movement (a main trait in Shingu's sculptures). Masaki also reports about her reading sessions with Japanese and British children (fourth and sixth grade), which reveal astonishing differences in the way this picturebook is received. These differences are rooted in the diverse cultural assumptions about the role of illustrations and stories, and the children's varied access to picturebooks.

Dealing with the off-screen, i.e., a spatial ellipsis that omits a scenic portion that is significant for the story, Fernando Zapparain claims that off-screen is a fundamental instrument which an author-illustrator can use in order to introduce gaps into his work. Several types of off-screen are discussed: objective off-screen as representations of those areas that have not entered into the frame but are nevertheless recognized by the viewer; internal off-screen that is represented by different frames, such as windows, doors, books or mirrors; subjective off-screen, produced by the viewpoint of the observer; and *mise en abyme* that occurs when the viewer is placed behind the observer. This special type of off-screen is typical for picturebooks that present the artist in his study creating the work in question, or when the endpapers and back covers give details about the making of the book.

Making Sense Out of Picturebooks

The last five articles deal with the impact of linguistics and psychology on the making and research of modern picturebooks by showing that the inclusion of child psychology, cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, and memory research shed new light on both pictorial and linguistic aspects of picturebooks.

Ingeborg Mjør's chapter is based on empirical studies showing how reading aloud of picturebooks can make a contribution to children's ability to be involved in meaning making processes, and on the development of literacy, especially *visual* literacy. Based on semiotics and cognitive psychology this article analyses the challenges parents face when reading a specific picturebook to their toddlers. During reading aloud, parents might analyse the relationship between the real and implied reader to be out of balance. Therefore,

they try to compensate this imbalance through different strategies: adding redundancy, creating a different verbal text, stressing the role of body and gestures, and replacing telling by showing.

Eva Gressnich and Jörg Meibauer attempt to link relevant categories of narrative analysis to deictic categories by pointing out the abilities a child must have in order to understand the deictic references within the text as well as the text-picture relationship, drawing largely on recent research on the acquisition of deixis and discourse strategies. Thus, they show that the interaction between language acquisition and the acquisition of literary competence is a demanding and complex process. In this analysis, the authors concentrate on the use of deictic expressions in picturebooks with a first-person narrator. In this way they show the difficulties children may have when confronted with this specific point of view and how deictic expressions influence the text-picture relationship. Moreover, they establish a typology of different combinations of verbal and visual point of views suggesting varying degrees of complexity as well as a possible order of acquisition.

The article by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer focuses on picturebooks with first-person narrators that consist of autobiographical stories written and illustrated by the authors. Since the storyteller is also the key figure in the story, the artists have to tackle the representation of their point of view in the pictures. In this regard, a shift between telling and focalization is obvious. The story is told in the first person whereas the pictures are presented in the third person. Confronted by these different points of view, the reader is encouraged to empathize with the narrator on the one hand, and to have a more objective position of distance on the other, thus calling his attention to the different time levels presented in these picturebooks: reminiscences of the past, most often childhood memories, and the present situation of the narrator.

Agnes-Margrethe Bjorvand demonstrates that the presentation of dysfunctional families and complex relationships between adults and children is new for Scandinavian picturebooks. Her article deals with the Norwegian picturebook *Sinna Mann* (Angry Man, 2003) by Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus, which depicts a disturbing story about a violent father who threatens both his wife and his son. The analysis of the picturebook is based on recent research in child psychology and the concept of multimodal literacy. The juxtaposition of both fields serves as an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the multi-layered structure of *Sinna Mann*. Bjorvand shows that the color scheme, the surrealist surroundings, and the distorted proportions largely contribute to the menacing, even nightmarish atmosphere, whereas the lyrical text builds a contrast to the illustrations. The gaps in text and pictures and the open ending of the narrative leave the final decision about the meaning of the whole story to the reader.

Finally, Anna-Maija Koskimies-Hellman reflects on the motif of mindscapes (as a newly-established term for psychological landscapes) by analysing two picturebooks from Finland and Sweden: *Urhea pikku Memmuli* (Brave

little Memmuli, 2005) by Mervi Lindman and *Hanna huset hunden* (Hanna, the house, the dog, 2004) by Anna-Clara Tidholm. Both books are ambivalent on several levels. Visually they are on the border between imagination or dream and reality. Yet the verbal narrator in both books presents the mindscapes as real, without a didactic comment indicating that the events are dream or fantasy. Therefore the mindscapes also support the characterization of the main protagonists, because the reader is given access to the characters' inner lives. In addition, the books are ambivalent with regard to the implied reader; both picturebooks address adults and children at the same time on different levels.

In conclusion, the variety of aspects that are analysed and the multiplicity of critical approaches illustrate the complex issues raised when modern picturebooks are approached through different perspectives that come together and tend to interact with each other. These issues link picturebook studies with some of the main trends in social sciences, cognitive studies and literacy such as the reflection on contemporary society, literacy in contemporary cultures, childhood, learning, multimodal communication or artistic interpretation. This anthology by specialists from different countries is also a testimony to the general academic interest in picturebooks as a new artistic form and is therefore representative of the different trends and opportunities for research in this emerging field.

Part I

Picturebooks, Literacy, and Cultural Context