The Analysis of Visual Storytelling On Children’s Books

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in a visual, image-based culture. Visuals now associate many forms of information and entertainment. We all grew with the picturebooks of fairy tales and stories. They had important influences on our perception and imagination. In my thesis I will illuminate you about the evolution of visual storytelling on children’s books.

As a genre picturebooks doesn’t have a long history. It is a form which perpetually developing and evolving by the artists and the authors. This serious improvement seems so fast for grown ups who used to verbal literature more than the visual one. New generations may not feel this evolution on the same way because they are already living and growing in that visual-based culture.

As a structure, traditional picturebooks had images to decorate and augment the text. Otherwise; today’s picturebooks have visuals with small number of text unlike the illustrated books. Beside the changing structure, with the increasing interest in picturebooks some questioning emerged. For example; “Is it art?” or “Is it suitable for children?”; because it started to seem like a laziness reading visuals instead of the text. About that argument I agree with what Sheila Egolf said; “…the picturebook, which appears to be coziest and most gentle of genres, actually produces the greatest social and aesthetic tensions in the whole field of children’s literature.”

The perception of appropriate content for children is an significant issue about the picturebooks. That perceptions are rapidly changing by the time. As well, they are different from across the cultures. That’s why there isn’t any absolute right content for them.

Moreover; the words and the images and how they used in that books are another topic. Generally in books, illustration or other kind of visuals accommodate the text as an aid to imagination, but in picturebooks words and images work together and establish the meaning. The visuals start to work like the text and the text placed like an image.

On that thesis I analysed all of that important points about visual storytelling on children’s books.
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THE DEFINITION OF PICTUREBOOK

During their childhood mostly toys and picturebooks are being with children. Even if they cannot read, children love looking the pictures of that books and convince their parents to read them. So; what is the picturebook?

A picturebook is a designed book which includes pictures and illustrations to tell a story. Some of these books tell the story just with the pictures without any text but some others use text and the visual together. Children prefer visuals to the written text. They always attracted by the world of colours and visuals that formed as illustrations or cartoons. In picturebooks; each turn of the page reveals a new picture or set of pictures. This continuity takes children attention more and more.

Children start to look picturebooks at the age of two or three and they may continue to enjoy with them several years. Picturebooks become big part of their perception. The genre of picturebook actually designed to introduce little children to the idea of book and reading. If a child can make habit of reading that books; he/she will wants to read the other books when they grew.

BRIEF HISTORY OF PICTUREBOOKS

The history of modern picturebook is short when we compare it other genres but to see it’s evolution it may help us to take a look at the wider history of illustrated books for children. Pictorial storytelling be depicted as far as the earliest painting on cave walls. That time they would have been looked and enjoyed by people at all ages. There are some examples in France and Spain which may be 30,000 - 60,000 years old. Trajan’s column in Rome is also one of the oldest examples of visual narrative. It tells the stories of the various battles. Moreover; the tombs of ancient Egypt and the walls of Pompeii are also another evidences of the need visuals in communication.

The oldest surviving illustrated book is said to be an Egyptian Papyrus roll of around 1980 BC. When we proceed in time; the invention of printing is a big step about books. It make the books available to more than just few rich families. Even if the printing invented in China just like paper; the invention of moveable type by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1430s evoke the viable mass publishing. We come 1461; when the first example of a book with type and image “Der Eelstein” was printed by Ulrich Boner. Then; in 1658 Comenius Orbis Sensualium Pictus (The Visible World) published in Nuremberg. It is generally seem as the first children’s picturebook. In that example picturebook means a book of pictures designed for children to read. It is not like just we know today.

Until William Blake, the word and image relationship was often tenuous and decorative. William Blake; painter and poet, can mention as the first experiment of symbiotic relationship between text and image. “Song of Innocence” produced in 1789 by Blake; he printed and published the book himself. Thomas Bewick also must be mentioned in the evolution of the book illustration. He emerged in the late eighteenth century with the great skills of wood engraving combined with an deep interest in the
natural world of produced results. Until the 1830s colour was added by hand to the printing machine but it changed with the invention of the process for printing colour from woodblocks. George Baxter and Charles Knight independently invented that technique. After that; in 1835, in Austria, Abyssios Senefelder had invented the principle of lithography. After all these relevant improvements the production of "Der Struwwelpeter" by Heinrich Hoffmann was most direct effect on modern picturebook. (fig 1.) This book was including continuing tales, cruelty and violence. Hoffman’s famous book was spread England to Germany in around 1848. The other example “A Book of Nonsense” by Edward Liar, had been published just a couple of years before. Just at that time; the most important man appeared in picturebook’s evolution. Randolph Caldecott’s ‘picture books’ change all the perception about the role of image in relation to text. (fig 2.)

Late nineteenth and the early twentieth century known as the golden age of children’s books; with the help of development in printing and changing attitudes to childhood. The precursor of that age was Sir John Tenniel’s drawings for Lewis Caroll’s “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”. They changed the use of page and the images started to act key role in the books. The new technology; photolithography gave Arthur Reckham chance to make more layered watercolour works. Following these improvements; “The Clever Bill” (Heinemann, 1926) and “The Pirate Twins” (Faber, 1929) are also important examples to use of image and text together. In 1931; Babar the elephant emerged with “The Story of Babar”, published in France by Condé Nast. (fig3.) The books were totally different the further ones; they were large with the full page pictures and their text had simple childlike clarity. In Britain, that books published in a great quality printing houses.

1. Heinrich Hoffmann (born June 13, 1809, Frankfurt [Germany] — died Sept. 20, 1894, Frankfurt), German physician and writer who is best known for his creation of Struwwelpeter (“Slovenly Peter”), a boy whose wild appearance is matched by his naughty behaviour. This book of cautionary tales was written as a Christmas gift for the doctor’s four-year-old son. Hoffmann also wrote poetry, humour, and satire, as well as other children’s books and books on medicine and psychiatry.
The author, Jean de Brunhoff, created five following stories of Babar. After his unexpected death in 1937, his son continued to Babar books over many decades. The son, Laurent’s Babar, awfully true to his father’s work. Next artist is Edward Ardizzone. His illustrations spread much of the twentieth century. Unlike the others, he draws for all age groups and all kinds of books. He changed the perception of people about human conditions, such as bad or good. His book “Little Tim” is an important step to evolution of picturebook genre. Mervyn Peake was another imaginative and unique artist in 1930s. Peake’s picturebook was “Captain Slaughterbord Drops Anchor.” It was published in 1939 by Country Life. In that time period his books found unsuitable for children by some authorities. After a while, the whole stock of books was destroyed when the warehouse was bombed by Luftwaffe. Some of the first edition copies are today’s most collectable and expensive children’s books.

“Curious George” became one of the most popular characters in American picturebooks which was published in 1941 (Houghten Miffin). George was so popular because of his eccentricities, and with it’s eight books published until mid-1960s. In the 1950s, graphic designers started to increase, and these designers were learning drawing and typography. Suddenly, the structure of picturebooks changed and the text started to use less. The understanding of the page rise up to the visual stage. Antonio Frosconi, Roper Duvoisin, Leo Lionni and Miroslav Sasek were some of these artists. The successful American graphic designer Paul Rond also created “I Know A Lot of Things” in 1956.

Certainly, the ground-breaking were of 50s was the “See and Say” of Antonio Frosconi. Minimal concept and few words in four languages with his artistic skills became very successful when we came 1960s we should mention Brian Wildsmith, Charles Keeping, Jonathan Cape, Ezra Keats as the influential designers on children’s books. When we slowly come to the twenty-first century, we face with the growing global picturebook market. Beside; this changing perception and that big Disney impact; people realizing the importance of their traditions and cultures. There are little regional artists and publishers who support that but on the other hand, almost none of them can translate other languages. As well as that gloomy picture; there are good happenings
in that century. Australian Shawn Tan is one of the contributors. His books “The Red Tree” (2000) and “The Arrival” (2007) created new level about the picture and text. He used multiple meanings in visual sequence. The other names are Jutta Bawer and Kitty Crowther. Especially, Kitty Crowther can be mention as a master of the picturebook. She has very important awards.

THE PICTUREBOOK AND THE CHILD

I will start this chapter with a definition of Barbara Bader. She writes like that in “America Picturebooks” from Noah’s Ark to Beast within (Macmillian, 1976). “A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document: and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the independence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page”. She defines the picturebooks as an art object which introduce the children the primary literature. They integrate children into a culture. The child is learning the concepts of reading and the book, with the picturebooks. Children generally love the picturebooks and they try to read them visually. Mostly they effort to convince their parents to read the text, but the question is that what they learn or understand when they are looking at? Visual literacy is important topic about picturebooks. It means considering the images, visuals like words and reading their meanings, thinking their functions. Children are amazingly interpreting the visual material with their colour, form, meaning and design. The natural ability can be improved by education. Beside, reading picturebooks, children draw with their imagination at very early ages, but mostly we cannot read that drawings properly. In a way picturebooks provide this basic education about looking at and evaluating visual text. Generally assumed that children follow a standard development about their understanding of visual codes. Jean Piaget wrote that; between the age of two and seven children are too egocentric in their consideration of any other viewpoint and when they are between seven and eleven they improve the ability to undertake many formal operations but only after twelve they start to think and understand the abstractions.

THE PROPER CONTENT FOR CHILDREN

The proper content for children changing by the time. It also have many differences across the cultures. Today, there are wide range of content for children. What is the criteria for that? Generally we think that a child should be protected from all kind of dangerous and unpleasant things in life and literature. There are many cultures which are discussing about that unpleasant aspects of life like death in picturebooks. On the other hand we know that no book is ever neutral in terms of social and political aspects.
Every book more or less have the trace of traditions or ideologies. Beside that differences and aspects; the style of visual text is important issue. Publishers and the artists share their ideas about this topic but there is not any defined research on what kind of visuals are suitable for young children. This is like a mystery for us; how they perceive and read images so naturally. If we turn back to the proper content topic, we can consider violence, sex and love, death and sadness. Each of them highly questionable for being a children’s book content. “Sinna Mann” (Angry Man, Cappelen, 2003) is one of the best example for violence. (fig 4.) That book is about a boy and his hard life with angry father and his violence. Sinna Mann, was made for a family therapist who request a book about children witnessing domestic violence. In that book; anger of the father shown with exaggerated scales of him compared to the child and wife and also burning colours express the anger of him. Despite this example, generally picturebooks which include violence are targeted to the adults. They can be picturebooks as well, but this do not mean they are for children.

**TEXT AND IMAGE**

The children’s book was analysed by many theorists in terms of their visual literacy from a range perspectives. That analyses show that there is a dynamic relationship between word and image, and also there is important role of visual design and multiple meaning offered by genre. William Moebius in 1986 wrote one of the earliest articles on picturebook codes. He tried to take attention to the elements of design and expression. After Moebius; Gur- ther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen analysed the semiotic on picturebooks in “Reading Images: The Grammer of Visual Design (Routledge, 1996) They showed that there is a “grammer” of visual design. Later that analysis; Sylvia
Pantaleo (University of Victoria) and Lawrence Sipe (University of Pennsylvania) worked on another important topic; the potential of sophisticated picturebooks. The book; “Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody and Self Referentiality” (Routledge, 2008) offers us the examples of their idea. Moreover; there are some ideas about the sophisticated and high-tech visuality of picturebooks and their movies, games. Margaret Macket believes that when the other dynamic text are so seductively available, knowing that books can also play lively and entertaining postmodern games in a lesson that cannot be learned too young.

After these examples of analysis about theories which surround word and image interplay, now we can take a look at some great picturebook examples which are simple, satisfying and well designed. The image and text relationship in picturebooks called “complementary” by Nikolojeva and Scott in “How Picturebooks Work” (Routledge, 2000). That “complementary” means that the images reflect and explain what the text are saying or just the opposite of this. One of them filling the blanks of the other.

**INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSIONALS**

I devote this part to the professionals that I know around the world. I made a little interview with Ana Biscaia, Stella Lin and Vera Khlebnikova. Beside these professionals I share a professional study case on Vlamidir Radunsly and Chris Raschka who can give more ideas about visual storytelling and the children books.

**ANA BISCAIA**

*What kind of illustrations you are drawing?*

Right now I have several projects in my hands:

A small illustrated book consisting on 32 drawings based on a film I chose to illustrate: Brulli, Sporchi e Cattivi by Ettore Scola. This book is a commission given by “Ao Norte” (Portuguese Association located in Viana do Castelo). Another project is a children book called Lembro-me (I remember…) it is about the things that existed in the dictator period in my country. The author is José António Gomes. Another book for children needs to be ready in 2013. A surrealistic poem that needs to be illustrated written by José Fanha.

*What do you think about the effects of illustrations on children?*

Illustration is the first contact children have with art. Illustration, like children’s literature, gives the child enormous spectrum of information about culture, it enables the child to develop imagination and creativity by experiencing manifold of culture.
Did you participate in a children book? (as an author, illustrator, writer...) 

Yes, I did made some illustrated books. Always as an illustrator.

What are the important points about visual storytelling?

Visual storytelling makes the viewer richer, by enabling understanding without boundaries. There are no borders when it comes to tell a story using images. No need for translation. Images are for everybody. Images tell stories. The illustrator must be 100% aware if his/her responsibility towards others. Some stories deserve to be told and the illustrator has the power to tell it in a very good way. This can lead to many discussions but illustration must highlight some parts of the story and because of this illustration is always about the illustrator’s understanding of some story.

VERA KHLEBNIKOVA

I make illustrations for children book. Last book I made this Autumn was for 7 year old children, but I prefer the youngest age. I made several books for Japanese publisher for children in age 0-1-2. Some of them were written by me. In a books for a such little babies the idea (kind of screenplay) is more important than text by itself. The text here - only few words under the picture. I make the whole design of the book.

STELLA LIN

What do you think about the effects of illustrations on children?

It stimulates their association with objects, creates a platform for children to imagine. For the children around 1 - 3 years old, I think the storybook tells them what the world looks like, and the interesting illustrations encourages them a new way of interpreting the world.

Did you participate in a children book? (as an author, illustrator, writer...) 

I am participating as a storyteller and illustrator, but in my book, there is no text but only visuals. The current book that I am making is about, ‘A book that you can see the sound’. (‘wind’ ‘flower’ ‘snow’ ‘moon’)

What is the important points about visual storytelling?

I think the visual storytelling doesn’t need to have an order, doesn’t need to have an ending. Confounding people's expectation is what I would like to do, you can put some little secret in every page, very subtle and it becomes another plots of story only when the people noticed.
PROFESSIONAL STUDY CASE:  
Author and Illustrator Collaboration

Vladimir Radunsky and Chris Raschka / Hip Hop Dog
An interesting aspect of the ongoing collaborations between Vladimir Radunsky and Chris Raschka is that they are both artists and they are both writers. The traditional concept of writers coming up with ideas and illustrators visualizing them does not apply here. This is a genuine meeting of minds where projects emerge and evolve with fluctuating creative dynamics.

In the 1970s, Radunsky studied at the Moscow Architectural Institute, one of the descendants of the legendary Vkhutemas studios set up by Lenin in the 1920s to prepare master artists of the highest qualifications for industry, and builders and managers for professional-technical education. He says his drawing, painting and architecture. This, he feels, was an important foundation for him creatively.

I have never felt restricted or ‘locked in’ by this rigorous training. I never felt “This is what I am going to do for the rest of my life’. I still think architecture is the best training in the creative arts. But at that time in Russia, I couldn’t see any future for myself as an architect. It was the time of the ‘paper architects’, such as Alexander Brodsky, when the best architectural work existed only on paper. All of the graduates pursued anything but architecture - music, design, etc.

Radunsky left Russia in 1982 and worked in New York where he designed art books, working for clients such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Abbeville and Marlborough Gallery.

I always liked children’s books. In Russia it was an area of escape and relative creative freedom, free from oppression. There is a wonderful tradition of Russian illustrated books. The collaborations of writers and artists such as Samuil Marshak and Vladimir Lebedev, for instance. Even in Stalin’s time there were avant-garde poets and artists working in children’s books. I always respected this tradition but didn’t get involved in making books until I arrived US. It happened by accident really. An illustrator (Robert Rayevsky) invited me to design one of his picturebooks. I became so involved in the design that I think I started taking over his book without realizing it. So then I started making my own books. I suppose my particular way into picturebooks was one of not understanding any separation between word and image between design and illustration. When I am the author, I do everything except my wife translates my English into English.

The initial idea for Hip Hop Dog (Harper Collins NY, 2010) was Radunsky’s. Chris Raschka is a highly successful writer, artist and musician. The two had collaborated on a number of books with great success but, rather than singing and binding deal with the publishers, they chose to make theirs an informal arrangement, and agreed to come together when an idea inspired them. Radunsky says:

We didn’t want to be tied down. In a way, we work life partisans. We do jam sessions together and the outcome is a book. I had the idea to do a hip hop book for children. But I couldn’t do it. I don’t have the language! It needed some space between real hip hop and this hip hop - a different vocabulary. So I asked Chris if he would write it. I just gave him the character of the dog really. I didn’t want to restrict him.

In Hip Hop Dog Radunsky takes Raschka’s words and creates integrated page designs where the visual shape, weight and direction of the words is

3. Chris Raschka is a published adapter, author, and an illustrator of children’s books. Some of the published credits of Chris Raschka include Knowing God Intimately: Being as Close to Him as You Want to Be, Peter and the Wolf, The Grasshopper’s Song: An Aesop’s Fable Revisited, and Grump Groan Growl.
as important to the page as the characters that share the space. (fig 5.) The text sits on roughly cut panels, with extra weight given to the words that need to be emphasized to express the rhythms of the rap. Sometimes the panels fall away gradually; sometimes they spiral into the centre of the page, requiring the reader to spin the book rapidly in order to maintain the meter of the poetry. Radunsky’s love of words is clear. (Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles “Profesisonal Study Case”, in Children’s Picturebooks - The art of Visual Storytell- ing / Laurance King, 2012 / 104)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion; although it’s little history children’s books has significant role in children’s life and learning process. Children develop their reading habit with that books and it continues during their life. They also learn social conventions from that books. Children’s books or picturebooks don’t have an exact structure. It changes according to story, artist or author but the importance of the relation between text and image doesn’t change in anyone. Their relation always critical for the successful communication between book and the child. Another point which I mentioned in my thesis is; the content. Proper content for children is also uncertain like the structure because it is changing according to how and where it used. As you saw in my examples violence, although it seems improper for children; can be used in that books but for a reasonable purpose.

All of these analysis shows that children’s books has it’s own key points which are linked to another. There are many issues about each of these points. When we talk about children, and their perception nothing is like a piece of cake. They are actually more difficult than to make that for adults.
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