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**Art, Illustration and Visual Culture
in Infant and Primary Education**

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**Arte, Ilustración y Cultura Visual
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Visual Poetry. Illustration in digital publishing

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Resumen

Este estudio es un proyecto de investigación de la ilustración como técnica, comunicación y expresión visual, capaz de soportar una estructura narrativa dirigida a los nuevos medios digitales. Los libros digitales son una nueva manera de comunicar y un reto a los profesionales de edición. Nos dedicamos a estudiar la función del ilustrador, particularmente en los libros infantiles haciendo una análisis de la intersección entre ilustración y animación. Este proyecto se ocupa de los cambios que los nuevos medios digitales han traído a la ilustración de libros.

Palabras clave

álbum ilustrado, animación, edición digital, ilustración.

Abstract

This study represents a research project considering illustration as a technique, a form of communication and visual expression, capable to support a narrative structure aimed at digital media. Digital books emerge as a new form of communication challenging publishing professionals. We here dedicate to study the role of the illustrator, considering a particular product of the editorial industry: children's publishing. Addressing the intersection between illustration and animation this project deals with the changes this new medium brings to illustration practice in an editorial context.

Keywords

animation, digital publishing, illustration, picturebook.

Introduction

Digital publishing emerges as a new form of communication, reconfiguring forms of production, distribution and reading, a format that also challenges communication and image professionals. If, in e-books, sensitive and emotional issues, such as the touch, feel and leafing through traditional paper are addressed, in children publishing other questions arise given its focus on image. From interactive tablet possibilities, touch and image manipulation, resembling the status of games, come into the picture. Approaching the intersection with animation, this project studies the role of illustration in this editorial format.

The research process presented here starts with an historical background of children's books and animation history, ending with an approach to new media and its relationship with traditional formats. The process includes interviews with illustration, animation and publishing professionals, including references of those who are already part of this new technological paradigm, such as André Letria, Pato Lógico's illustrator and editor. Several case studies were established, a few representative of the vast universe of available apps, setting a critical approach to the platform under consideration. "What should be the skills of the illustrator in the future?" is the key question that underlies this project.

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1 Social, cultural and technological influences in children's books

We begin the theoretical support of this research addressing the concept of illustration, which in an academic context falls into distinct disciplines such as graphic design or fine arts. A permeability that has led to a blurring of its purposes, an issue already surpassed by several authors, who define illustration as an autonomous practice, with its own methodologies and tools. A visual democratic practice intended for mass reproduction, unlike art objects (Heller & Chwast, 2008:8).

Books are one of illustration most common vehicles, with which we interact from an early age through literature. Children's books as a separate category of literature cannot exist without the acknowledgment of the audience it addresses, what, in Western culture, happens between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Nikolajeva, 2005:12). But considering format and not classification, the origin of the picturebook goes back to earlier periods. Different means of expression used image as a primary form of communication, from the Egyptian visual art that combined written language with pictorial images, the doctrine intentions of the Christian Church (Ramos, 2010:11), to the histories, epic poems and romance illustrations from the thirteenth century. It was with the growing interest in education that the first children's books appeared, "Kunst und Lehrbüchlein" in 1580 and "Orbis Pictus", in 1658 (Salisbury, 2008:8). Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, printing methods were based on printmaking techniques, culminating in the coloured picture of the "Golden Age" in the mid-nineteenth century. Edward Lear, John Tenniel, Kate Greenaway and Beatrix Potter are references of this century, but it is with Randolph Caldecott that illustration stops duplicating the text, evolving to a symbolic interpretation (Male, 2007:144).

El Lissittzky's "Of Two Squares" (1922) pioneered in breaking traditional format and content of children's books, proposing a shift from naturalism to the symbolism of abstract forms. However, it had no effect in editorial conventions (Heller & Chwast, 2008:230). From the 1950 and 1960 decades, illustration is influenced by graphic design, with the use of flat colours and minimalist approach, with several designers exploring the visual narrative possibilities of books (Martínez, 2012:53-54). Maurice Sendak innovates both form and content, defining the picturebook as "visual poetry". Postmodernism further explores the materiality, content and shape of the book format, including wordless books, and expanding the narrative to endpapers and covers (Nikolajeva, 2008:59). Typographical conventions are also subject to change. If the nineteenth century is defined by accuracy, in the late 1930s sans-serif fonts are introduced in asymmetrical compositions. During the 1940s and 1950s The American Institute of Graphic Arts provides typographic rules for readability, which are followed even by the most progressive authors, "Typography should be seen and not heard", defended Leo Lionni, placing image as the most important element in picturebooks, not type (Heller & Chwast, 2008:232). In the late 1980s with the role of author and illustrator merging, typographic eclecticism appears and text is integrated in the visual storytelling. The picture book is considered by many authors as the ideal means of artistic expression: Warja Lavater translated fairy tales in graphic symbols; Květa Pacovská explores the three-dimensionality, placing the book in the borderline between toy and sculpture. As a cultural artefact, the picturebook should continue to experiment with formats and established conventions, challenging the reader and reflecting technological advances.

2 Animation, the art of the interval

Returning to illustration definition, we see that it extends to multimedia, and does not confine to the printed page – "moving image, animation, film, digital imaging" (Male, 2007:22). The introduction of tablets in the publishing world reinforces the use of the screen as a vehicle of expression, paving the way to animation. It is therefore important to know the principles of the animated image.

"Animation" derives from animare ("give life to") (Júnior, 2005:29), and despite its origin in the sequential images of the Paleolithic and Egyptian art, its true expression emerges from the fascination with technology and optical illusion that marks the nineteenth century, the magic lantern being one of its first inventions (Parkinson, 2002:7). In 1824 the article "The Persistence of Vision with Regard to Moving Objects" defined the ability of the retina to retain

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an image for a split second after it being removed from the field of vision, what fostered the invention of several optical devices such as the thaumatrope, zoetrope or praxinoscope. These were important, although technological developments. It is in the first decade of the twentieth century that animation acquires its own aesthetic, with Emile Cohl developing visual concepts such as metamorphosis, and Windsor McCay who, with "Gertie the Dinosaur" in 1914, establishes all the bases for character animation. With these two artists, it is clear the role of technology in animation, as something that enables its manifestation, but that is in service of art and not the contrary (Júnior, 2005:57).

The industrialisation of animation occurs with the automation of techniques. The United States are dominated by the golden age of Disney animation between the 1920s and 1940s, while Europe explores the forefront of independent animation, focused on individual expression. Walther Ruttman, Len Lye and Oskar Fischinger stand out in abstract language, as Lotte Reiniger directs the first animated feature film "The Adventures of Prince Achmed" in 1926, using the silhouette paper-cut technique (Júnior, 2005:88). Norman McLaren in the National Film Board of Canada assumes movement as distinguished expression: "Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but the art of movements that are drawn" (Carels, 2006:14). The stagnation of the Disney aesthetics and animator's desire to be freed from the execution of thousands of drawings, leads to the development of computer animation. "Hunger" by Peter Foldes (1974) was the first animated film presenting a figurative narrative structure performed with digital technology (Júnior, 2005:316). Although with growing scientific research, digital technique is only manifested as a whole when the artistic principles of animation are applied by John Lasseter in "Luxo Jr." (1986) and "Toy Story" (1995), the first feature film made entirely in computerized animation. Currently, animation has been expanding its language with the introduction of new vocabularies and techniques, earning its place as a form of art and author expression.

3 Between new and old media

With the impact of digital tablets in the contemporary publishing world, it is relevant to address the relationship of "new media" regarding traditional media. "New media" refers to a compilation of objects, with economic, social and technological background developments, an inclusive concept that, although abstract, has a broad cultural resonance, representing a fundamental change of paradigms, from "spectator" to "user" and from "consumer" to "producer" (Lister et al, 2009:9). Interactive media emerged with the convergence of computing technologies, video and audio in the same digital environment in the late twentieth century. "Interactivity" may be a recent term, although its root is not, as interactive structures are found in periods prior to the twentieth century, such as index and chapters structures from the first dictionaries and encyclopaedias, that represent the beginning of user input, a non-linear structure similar to the logic of hypertext (Friedmann, 2012:251). There are many features that distinguish narrative objects mediated by traditional media and the ones supported by new media, but interactivity lies in the core of its definition. Lev Manovich refers to this as the myth of interactivity: "to call computer media" interactive "is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers" (Manovich, 2001:55). Interactivity is defined as a cyclical process between two or more agents. In the case of man-machine interface, is based on the stimulating action of the individual user on the artefact so that it becomes significant. User action defines interactive art (Zagalo, 2009:192).

The relationship of new media with the existing culture is defined by Bolter and Grusin as "Remediation", the process in which "new media are doing exactly what their predecessors have done: presenting themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000:15). New media challenge traditional media as they reaffirm their identity, resorting to age as a symbolic meaning. In the publishing world, book supporters call upon its historical legacy to proclaim a special status. According to Bolter and Grusin's logic, no media operates in cultural isolation, relating, in contrast with the existing media (Bolter & Grusin, 2000:66). This concept allows us to understand the connection and co-existence between traditional media and new media, assigning them a cyclical relation rather than a linear one, in a perpetual cycle that does not necessarily progress to a finite conclusion. It is indeed a relationship of dependency that strengthens the cultural identity of each medium.

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4 Loop. iPad app

Digital media in editorial context implies a fundamental change that is the introduction of a new medium. Many of the existing "book" apps simulate a virtual leaf that is not consistent with the digital format, what makes us refer to an assertion made by Gillian Crampton Smith: "When cinema started, people thought of it as pointing a camera at a theatre stage, and divided silent films with chapter headings as if they were books" (Smith, 2007: XVII). We are dealing with a new structure that does not depend on leafing nor on the three-dimensional space of the physical book. The narrative is contained in a virtual environment, the screen. Despite the "game" appeal, narrative structure is assumed as a fundamental starting point considering children's digital publishing, as André Letria e Margarida Noronha (Kalandraka Portugal) stated in interviews. To Isabel Minhós Martins (Planeta Tangerina) with this format comes "a new space for a new object situated between the game and book". Some of the case studies approached in this research reflect this principle. "Incómodo" from Pato Lógico, or "In My Dream", winner of the first BolognaRagazzi Digital Award, present an interactive structure that has an intrinsic relationship with the narrative. The user becomes part of this structure, that not only occurs on an intellectual level, but also on a physical level, involving intervention on the artefact.

Starting from this context, our project explores the concept of "story-image", a vehicle of multiple meanings with which one interacts in order to enable a narrative construction. The concept finds Maurice Sendak's expression defining picture book – "visual poem" – as a metaphor, to which another concept is associated, the Tangram game, a set of geometric pieces that allows the construction of multiple images. We here propose a symbolic exercise that explores interpretation, and where text integration subverts the traditional word-image relationship. "Loop", the title, reflects the strategy concerning moving image, simultaneously referring to the computer loop and to the origins of animation, when optical toys relied on this structure as a narrative language. "Loop" puts the narrative in motion, a temporal aesthetic possibility for digital media. Contrary to linear narrative, an open structure is proposed, appealing to a discrepancy between meanings and random language, in an aesthetic that relates to non-sense, making a more direct appeal to imagination.

Conclusion

The impact of digital media in the publishing circuit is still at an early stage of assertion, what frames the presented project in an area of innovation, assuming as a main goal, to add new knowledge to this area. The evolution to a final finished object to be commercially released is also intended, transferring this project from the academic to the professional sphere.

During the investigation, we've seen how the picturebook evolves according to cultural and technological contexts. Animation history demonstrates how the relationship between technology and aesthetics are inseparable but that technology development "does not imply the automatic emergence of art" (Júnior, 2005:441). New media do not cause the demise of traditional media, but frequently contributes to its restatement. Thus, the appearance of tablets and e-readers will not necessarily lead to "the death of the book", but to its reconfiguration, by strengthening its identity.

For the illustrator/author, digital publishing involves the recasting of a paradigm, shifting from a linear narrative to a non-linear one, of a pace that no longer depends on the temporal and three-dimensional relation of the turn of a page. The skills of the illustrator in the future, regardless of the techniques to be used, are, as always, dependent on the formulation of an artistic vision. As stated by Alberto Lucena Júnior "the technological resources that enable visual representation and manipulation should be considered as the tools that they are, properly conditioned to the reflections of artistic nature. (…) The approach of these tools by the user, equipped with the knowledge of traditional art practices, should, more than the digital techniques itself, imply the visual redesign of the information society, although it is in the integration of the entire digital universe that relies its revolutionary force." (Júnior, 2005:441-442)

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