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Publisher: Routledge  
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UK



## New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcil20>

### On the Strangeness of Pop Art Picturebooks: Pictures, Texts, Paratexts

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Available online: 01 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer & Jörg Meibauer (2011): On the Strangeness of Pop Art Picturebooks: Pictures, Texts, Paratexts, *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 17:2, 103-121

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13614541.2011.624909>

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## ON THE STRANGENESS OF POP ART PICTUREBOOKS: PICTURES, TEXTS, PARATEXTS

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*As a species of picturebook emerging around 1970, some Pop Art picturebooks were quite successful in their time, but appear strange from today's point of view. This strangeness has to do with multiple transgressions of traditional conventions restricting the notion of a "good" picturebook: transgressions regarding artistic style (influenced by the Pop Art movement), transgressions regarding the stories' content (with their emphasis on weird characters, surprising twists in narration and plot, and a fanciful combination of sceneries), and transgressions regarding the idea that politics and economic and social problems should be banned from picturebooks (displaying an anti-capitalist or anti-authoritarian attitude). While portraying five Pop Art picturebooks in more detail, the article aims at establishing the notion of strangeness as a descriptive term in picturebook analysis. It is pointed out that strange picturebooks not only erect boundaries for their understanding, but also invite to transgress these boundaries.*

**Keywords:** Etienne Delessert, paratext, pop art picturebooks, strangeness

### Introduction

Pop Art picturebooks are a specific type of picturebooks that emerged around 1970 and was heavily influenced by the art movement called Pop Art. Pop Art is characterized by a permanent transgression of boundaries, for example (1) the shift between fine art and popular art/culture, (2) the contrast between original artwork and reproduction; (3) the revitalization of the European

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avant-garde, such as Surrealism and Dada, on the one hand, and (4) the indebtedness to the codes and technical processes of mass media on the other hand.

Pop Art mostly deals with material that already exists as a sign, for instance photograph, comic, advertisement, newspaper, and other “pre-coded material” (see Alloway 170). The artists were interested in extending aesthetic attention to the mass media and absorbing mass-media material within the context of art. Further characteristics of Pop Art are the attempt at artistically conveying innovative matters of perception such as, for example, the psychedelic sensual experiences evoked by the consumption of drugs, and the criticism of modern society, politics, and culture.

It appears, then, that Pop Art picturebooks, being overloaded with conflicting messages, run the risk of not being easily understandable for a wider audience, of being strange or weird somehow, of not fitting into the category of “good” picturebooks. What a “good” picturebook is may of course be a matter of taste. However, the assumption that there exist “good” picturebooks—the ones that are recommended by certain social institutions and, for example, distributed by public libraries—is pervasive, not only among parents and teachers, but among scholars, too.

Kiefer (120), for instance, claims that a good picturebook is determined by a stimulating aesthetic experience which derives from the artist’s design and technical choices in order to express meaning, and Nodelman points out that: “Many picture books—indeed, possibly all of the best ones—do not just reveal that pictures show us more than words can say; they achieve what Barthes called ‘unity on a higher level’ by making the difference between words and pictures a significant source of pleasure” (209).

It may be asked, then, whether Pop Art picturebooks are “good” picturebooks in the intended sense.

Note that, when looking at picturebooks, two interests usually interact, the child’s interest, maybe the search for pleasure, that has to do with comprehensibility, and the adult’s interest that often has to do with (educational) functionality. If a book is too demanding, if it is too radical, it is dysfunctional insofar as that the child is not able to comprehend the multiple levels of meaning necessary for a rough understanding of the respective work.

Comprehensibility, as an important feature for the child’s interest in picturebooks, should not be understood as the naïve

requirement that everything shown and told in these books has to be cogent from the start; however, the picture-text-relation should be sensitive to the cognitive-developmental stage of the child reader. Although adults and scholars should not underestimate the abilities and curiosity of children, there certainly exist children's books that children cannot easily cope with, simply because of the strangeness of the text and/or pictures. We would like to argue that many Pop Art picturebooks are "strange" indeed and, moreover, that this strangeness appears to be intended.

Although some of the creators of Pop Art picturebooks are famous artists, such as Andy Warhol, Peter Max, Heinz Edelmann (the renowned art director of the Beatles film *The Yellow Submarine*, 1968), and Etienne Delessert, their picturebooks completely fell into oblivion. They are neither mentioned in Barbara Bader's seminal study on American picturebooks nor in any other monographs dedicated to the history and theory of modern picturebooks. (The only references we detected so far are a chapter on picturebooks of the 1960s/1970s in Klaus Doderer's volume on the history of picturebooks in German-speaking countries and an article by Jens Thiele on the influence of pop culture on picturebook artists.)

This obvious neglect in the academia stands in high contrast to the enthusiastic acclaim of Pop Art picturebooks by contemporary critics. Some picturebooks had high print runs, as for instance Eleonore Schmid's and Etienne Delessert's *The Endless Party* (1967), which was translated into 14 languages with more than 4 million copies sold worldwide.

The outline of this article is as follows: First, we focus on five Pop Art picturebooks that show the typical "strange" characteristics of their kind:

- *Story Number 1* (1968). Pictures: Etienne Delessert, Text: Eugène Ionesco
- *The Land of Yellow* (1970). Pictures and Text: Peter Max
- *Rüssel in Komikland* (Nozzle in Comiland 1972). Pictures: Leo Leonhard, Text: Otto Jägersberg
- *Pele sein Bruder* (Pele's Brother 1972). Pictures: Werner Maurer, Text: Jörg Steiner
- *Mister Bird* (1971). Pictures and Text: Parick Couratin

For reasons of space, we will integrate into our analysis aspects of the pictures, the text, and the picture-text-relation; it goes without saying that all of these aspects deserve separate treatment.

Second, we draw attention to some important features of Pop Art picturebooks by stressing the following aspects: title, relationship between illustration and text, and paratexts, such as foreword, afterword, and blurb. The importance of picturebook paratexts was already highlighted by Nikolajeva and Scott (241–62), and we intend to demonstrate that within the realm of Pop Art picturebooks paratexts play significant roles, since they attempt to lead the audience's reception in specific directions.

Finally, we conclude that Pop Art picturebooks transgress certain boundaries of the "good" picturebook, indeed, although clearly these boundaries are in a historical flux and have to be negotiated. Our speculation is that these books were in some ways too demanding and although they obviously reacted to cultural changes, they sometimes overreacted.

### Five Pop Art Picturebooks

While the majority of Pop Art picturebooks are so challenging that we suspect that they exceed the child's interpretative abilities, there are some exceptions to the rule. For this reason we will discuss five prototypical Pop Art picturebooks in order to demonstrate, on the one hand, the wide range of artistic styles and genres and, on the other, the different levels of comprehensibility. Moreover, this selection gives an impression of the somewhat complicated texts and complex pictures of Pop Art picturebooks as a whole.

#### *Story Number 1*

The best-known Pop Art picturebook is probably *Story Number 1* (1968), with a text by the playwright Eugène Ionesco (from his collection "stories for children under three years of age"), and illustrations by Etienne Delessert. This successful picturebook had three followers: *Story Number 2* (1971), *Story Number 3* (1971), and *Story Number 4* (1973).

*Story No 1* is a rather confusing story about a little girl, Josette, who asks her father to tell her a story. In this story, everything, whether people, animals, or toys, has the same name: Jacqueline. Afterwards, when Josette goes shopping with the housekeeper, she meets another girl whose name is Jacqueline and Josette concludes that this girl's parents, siblings, relatives, doll, and even the night potty are named Jacqueline. While the other clients in the shop look worried, the housekeeper keeps calm, since she is accustomed to the silly stories of Josette's father. The text more or less consists of enumerations, even the housekeeper lists the items on the breakfast tray:

Here is your morning newspaper, here are the postcards you have received, here is your coffee with cream and sugar, here is your fruit juice, here are your rolls, here is your toast, here is your butter, here is your orange marmalade, here is your strawberry jam, here are your fried eggs, here is your ham, and here is your little girl!

The text has no plot at all, apart from the tired father telling his daughter a nonsense story without any plot, and the housekeeper going shopping with the little girl. The protagonists are characterized by a peculiar behavior and communication that is reminiscent of Ionesco's absurd theatre. The oddity of the story is additionally stressed by the watercolor illustrations. Prominent features are the distorted proportions and perspectives, the dreamlike landscapes with strange buildings and fantastic monster-like animals, and the intervisual allusions (for example to the Trojan horse or to Maurice Sendak's picturebook *Where the Wild Things Are* [1963]). Besides the artistic allusions which will mainly be recognized only by adults, this picturebook captivates with the sophisticated use of language. The wordplays and the underlying question of what will happen when everything has the same name, stimulate the viewer's reflection upon the meaning of words and stories. This meaning-making process evokes pleasure and stimulates the child to discover more details in the illustrations that might be overlooked at first glance. While the adult or an older child who is already able to read will obviously detect the signs in the shop that refer to the author, illustrator, publisher, and main figure of the text, children will more easily find pleasure in looking for recurrent motifs, such as the striped clothes, a butterfly, a rhinoceros(!)

reminiscent of Ionesco's most famous theatre play, the little warriors in Antique Greek clothes, or the big eyes. However, the pictures that cover a doublespread without any accompanying text do not directly refer to the story, leaving their interpretation to the viewer, such as the picture presented after Josette's meeting with the girl in the shop: a landscape with mountains and hills is shown against a sunny light background. The biggest mountain has the shape of a human head with curly hair and a face with big eyes from whose holes tiny people are looking out. An endless procession of little folk, all in striped clothes, the women and girls with fair curly hair, the men and boys with a cap on, carrying flags and eye-signs on sticks, is moving across the landscape toward the human-shaped mountain. A monstrous butterfly is sitting on its peak with a throne between his forelegs. The crowned boy on the throne seems to be the goal of the procession, but the connection to the story is not quite clear. Never mind, both story and pictures, even when seen in combination remain strange and indiscernible for adults and children alike. Those who are accustomed to Pop Art and its underlying aesthetic principles, will recognize that Ionesco and Delessert not only refer to nonsense, which has a long tradition within the realm of children's literature, and absurd theatre, which is mainly based on Ionesco's plays, but also to the so-called "aesthetics of boredom" (Alloway 170), regarded by some critics and artists as a main contribution of Pop Art. This aesthetics of boredom is responsible for some eye-catching principles of Pop Art: repetition or serial order, inexpressiveness, obsession with detail of daily life, and abstraction.

### *The Land of Yellow*

Even stranger than *Story Number 1* is *The Land of Yellow* (1970) by Peter Max, famous for his Beatles' posters and disc labels. This book, which is dedicated to the sun, is about colors and tells the story of the purple king who is requested by the sunshine queen to fetch the red color from rainbow land as a tribute to the prince of shadow land. If this request will not be fulfilled, the prince threatens to eliminate all the bright colors by a shadowy grey. The text, written as a poem, describes the journey of the purple king to the different color levels of the rainbow in an enumerative way.



On each page turning, he struggles with another color in order to reach his goal. When he finally catches the red color and fulfills his commitment, he leaves the queen by presenting her a bundle of flowers. The strangeness of this fairytale-like story is additionally stressed by a sylleptic structure: in the lower part of the page a strong dark line divides the illustration into two parts. In this part, faces shown in profile look at each other with speech bubbles coming from their mouths. The short sentences printed in these balloons start with *I am* or *You are*, followed by a noun, such as *poem*, *sun*, *poetry*, or *bird*. The connection between these two parts is rather loose; one does not really miss anything from the main story by neglecting this lower part. Yet, the syllepsis contributes to the strangeness of the poem which is characterized by onomatopoeic notions influenced by comics, such as *snap*, *bam*, and *zip zap*. Even more striking are the illustrations inspired by different Pop Art styles. Peter Max combines collage-like pictures made of marbled paper, cloth, and large spaces painted with acrylic colors. These spaces are either single colored or printed in halftone with a regular dot pattern that reminds the viewer of Roy Lichtenstein's famous paintings. Because of this technique and the merging colors and shapes, it is not always easy to find the figures and faces hidden in the images, most often showing the purple king diving into another color level or running across a fantastic landscape. Peter Max obviously attempts to transfer psychedelic experiences into picturebook art; however, whether children are really attracted by this picture-text-relation remains to be seen. One suspects that the strange depiction of the characters certainly complicates the child's identification with them and their adventures. The anti-narrative structure of *The Land of Yellow* and its heterogeneous visual messages might lead to the assumption that this exceptional work gains status as a rare collectible rather than as a sophisticated book for children.

### *Rüssel in Komikland*

The German picturebook *Rüssel in Komikland* (Nozzle in Comiland 1972) written by Otto Jägersberg and illustrated by Leo Leonhard is characterized by cross-media exchanges and the convergence of multiple layers of meaning, thus adhering to main

principles of the Pop Art movement. The title already refers to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), and the first black-and-white illustrations reminds us of John Tenniel's style. However, when Nozzle and his friend Bowl start to draw a landscape because they do not wish to stay in a negative space any longer, the impact of the fantastic paintings by the Dutch artists Pieter Breughel and Hieronymus Bosch is prevalent. During their journey through this strange landscape they meet Flabby Jack, who is painted in full color and thus contrasts with the unicolored surroundings. Flabby Jack teaches Nozzle and Bowl how to speak with the help of speech bubbles, and finally shows them the way to Comiland, where everything is bright and colorful. The illustrations that depict the adventures of Nozzle, Bowl and Flabby Jack in Comiland are framed with a thin black line and structured as panels like in a comic strip. However, the friends get in trouble by fighting the mogul Al Bosso who dominates Comiland and its inhabitants with his media empire. In the end they escape Comiland in search of another country and finally land on a printing press. By accident they start running the rotation machine that—as the text explains—prints thousands of copies of the life and adventures of Nozzle and his company in a gigantic process. To stress the metaphorical meaning of this assertion, the narrator turns to the readers and tells them that they are actually reading the story that was printed on this machine. This metafictional ending, however, is not the only “strange” occurrence in this picturebook that comprises several metaliterary aspects, such as intertextuality, intervisuality, metaphors, and irony, as well as a critical perspective directed against the dominance of the mass media, the individual's powerlessness in an indifferent and egalitarian society, and the suppression of fantasy and imagination. This picturebook is obviously overburdened with meaning, artistic allusions, and a confusing story with an open ending.

### *Pele sein Bruder*

In contrast to *Rüssel in Komikland*, Jörg Steiner's and Werner Maurer's *Pele sein Bruder* (Pele's Brother 1972) is a picturebook that draws upon Pop Art for illustrating the impact of perception on worldview. This book tells the story of a little boy who

is scolded for being a “dreamer.” Other children laugh at him since he cannot play football, missing the ball every time because of his clumsy movements. The boy withdraws into his own dream world full of fantastic adventures, animals and people. Although he is not completely unhappy, he is worried about the adults’ comments on his behavior. The situation changes when he starts school, because the doctor finds out that the boy urgently needs glasses. Due to his short-sightedness he just saw blurred contours and colors, the hazy shadows of moving objects and figures in the surroundings inspired him to invent an own imaginative world. When he wears his glasses, everything becomes clear with straight contours. He can recognize faces and judge distances correctly so that he is then able to participate in the other boys’ games, feigning to be the brother of the famous football player Pele. By contrast, when he loans his glasses to other children who have no problems with their eyes, they perceive everything blurred instead, thus getting new insights into the boy’s former perception. In this regard, the colorful Pop Art illustrations contribute to successfully convey different visual perspectives on the same object or situation. In this book, the “strangeness” of the pictures is explained by the protagonist’s problem with his eye-sight. The picturebook’s appeal to tolerance toward disabled people is quite obvious, even though there is no educational instruction in a usual sense.

### *Mister Bird*

As the last example, we consider the picturebook *Mister Bird* (1971) written and illustrated by Patrick Couratin. Mister Bird bears his name because of his hat that he once purchased in exchange for some feathers. In order to satisfy the other birds’ longings, he earns his money as a hat seller, until every bird is wearing a hat and called Mister Bird as well. In view of this egalitarian situation, the original Mister Bird does not feel happy anymore. He leaves his companions, searching for a new country where he might regain his individuality.

This poetical fairytale-like text has been completely changed in the German version. The book’s title is now *Herr Hut. Nicht Herr Mithut. Nicht Herr Ohnehut. Immer Herr Hut* (Mister Hat. Not Mister

With-hat. Not Mister Without-hat. Always Mister Hat). The first paragraph of the original reads as follows:

He was called Mister because he wore a hat. And even when—on very rare occasions—he appeared without his hat, all of the other birds would dip their wings politely and say “Good morning, Mister Bird” or “Good evening, Mister Bird.” For the others knew that only he had a hat—even if he didn’t always wear it. And his hat, after all, was what made him different from the others. Or so it seems.

Now compare the German version:

Hello. My name is Mister Hat. Quite simply Mister Hat. Sometimes I’m called Musjö Schapo [= Monsieur Chapeau]. This is French and sounds noble. Alas, isn’t such a hat noble? And, when the sun shines and it is warm and I leave the hat at home (tree number 18)? Then my name is also Mister Hat. Just as with hat. Not Mister With-hat. Not Mister Without-hat. Always Mister Hat. But everyone knows this, after all. (our translation)

It follows from this short comparison that the German text is far more complicated in that it contains word plays and allusions to foreign languages. The metonymical proper name *Herr Hut* (because the bird always wears a hat) is quite demanding in counter distinction to the English *Mister Bird*. However, during the course of the story, the plot takes another surprising turn. While the original version presents a poetic circumscription of a bird in search of its identity, the German version leads to a critique of capitalist consumerism and egalitarianism which suppress the individuals’ needs. As a result, the story ends when Mister Hat intends to emigrate to another country where he might be admired because of his peculiar outlook. But the implied narrator suggests another solution: Mister Hat should throw his hat away or give it to a horse, for example, since flying without a hat is easier. As a conclusion the narrator affirms that “everybody actually knows that,” with the implication that only the silly bird Mister Hat has not realized this yet.

In contrast to the majority of Pop Art picturebooks that are distinguished by colorful and bright pictures, Couratin created black-and-white illustrations made with pencil and crayon. The color red constituting a sort of background just appears on the book covers and the endpapers. Therefore, the book conveys a

gloomy mood and emphasizes the underlying criticism of the text. The artistic allusion to Pop Art, however, is obvious in the serial order of birds and hats, the rounded shapes of eyes, trees, hills, and faces, and the distorted proportions. The juxtaposition of illustrations and story is another example of boundary transgression.

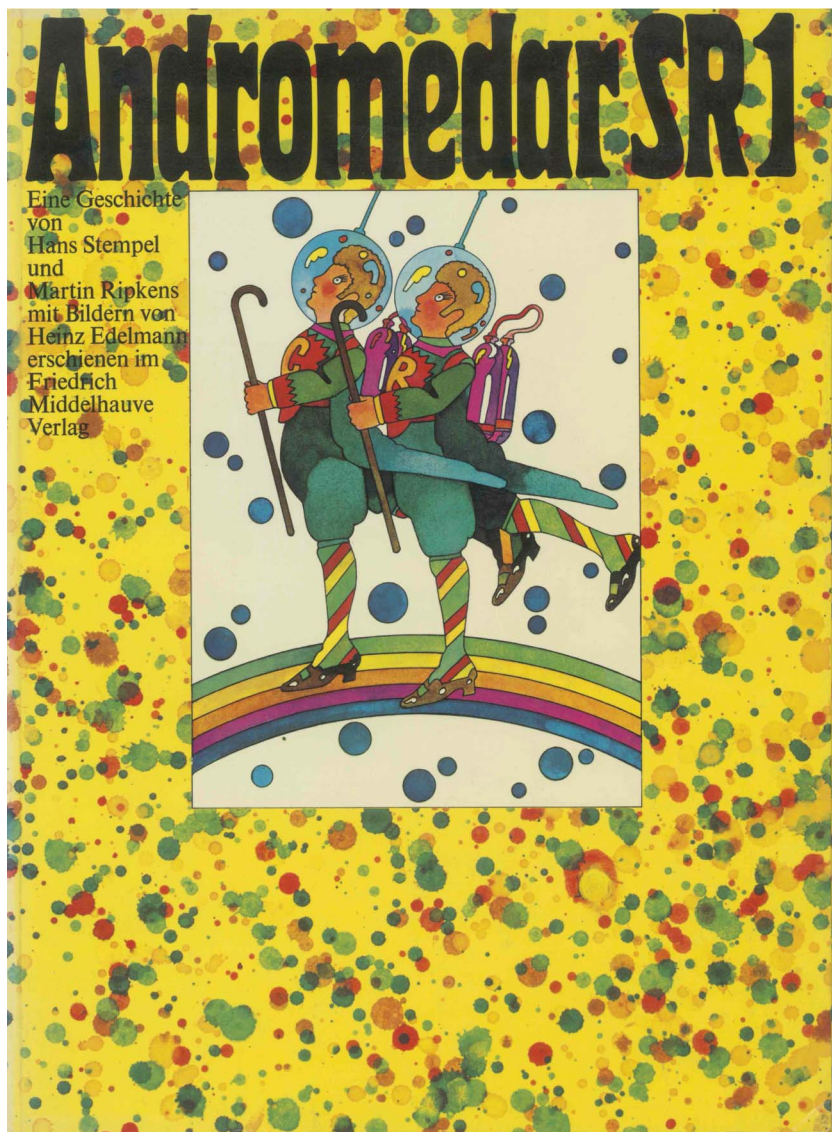
## Titles and Paratexts

### *Titles*

While we find with Pop Art picturebooks the usual types of titles, for example, proper names like Hans Christian Andersen's *Poucette* (Thumbelina 1978) with illustrations by Nicole Claveloux, or Anne van der Essen's *Yok-Yok* (1979), illustrated by Etienne Delessert, or titles rendering the essence of a story, such as *Gertrude and the Mermaid* (1971) by Richard Hughes and Nicole Claveloux, there are stranger, boundary-crossing titles, too. This is in accordance with the provocative, attention-drawing nature of Pop Art picturebooks.

First of all, take the "stories for children under 3 years of age" told by playwright Eugène Ioneco and illustrated by Etienne Delessert as an example. These stories are simply titled *Story No 1* and *Story No 2*. While this pattern reminds the reader of similar practices of enumerating works of art, there is certainly a strong allusion to the prototypicality of these stories. We do not know whether this is to be taken ironically or sincerely, as in many cases of Pop Art.

Second, consider the titles of the two famous works of Heinz Edelmann, namely *Andromedar SR1* (text by Martin Ripkens and Hans Stempel, 1970) and *Maicki Astromaus* (text by Frederic Brown, 1970). The former title refers to a rocket called "Andromeda" whereas "SR1" is an abbreviation of "super rocket 1"; the title is explained in the text. The latter title had been suggested by the Austrian poet H. C. Artmann; "Astromaus" is sort of a translation of the original title of Fredric Brown's short story *The Star Mouse* (1941) (see Figure 1). The first name *Maicki*, of course, alludes to Mickey Mouse (or in German: Micky Maus), the famous mouse character created by Walt Disney.



**FIGURE 1** Book cover of *Andromedar SR1* with a text by Martin Ripkens and Hans Stempel, and illustrations by Heinz Edelmann. Köln: Friedrich Middelhaue Verlag, 1970 (color figure available online).



Third, we find baroque titles like *How the Mouse Was Hit on the Head by a Stone and So Discovered the World* (Etienne Delessert 1971), or *The Geranium on the Window Sill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On* (Albert Cullum 1971). It goes without saying that the same titles rendering parts of the texts are atypical titles for picturebooks. They are too long, and may not easily be cited in discourse.

In summary, there are titles of Pop Art picturebooks that possess boundary-transgressing properties because of their allusional potential, complexity, or simply length.

### *Paratexts*

The fact that boundaries exist with regard to the accessibility of the Pop Art picturebooks is reflected in paratexts accompanying some of the books. For instance, on the back cover of *Théo la Terreur* (Timothy the Terror 1972) by François Ruy-Vidal and Jean-Jacques Loup you can read:

Attention! Attention! Attention!

Such books could set children thinking, they could pose questions!

While persuading parents to run the risk of raising “curious” children is a quite aggressive strategy (this obviously being an aim of the anti-authoritarian movement), other books tend to explain their ideological background to the adults.

Thus, in *The Geranium on the Window Sill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On* by Albert Cullum, dealing with the contrast between the authoritarian teacher and the sheer helplessness of the generic pupil, it is taken for granted that most of the adults have nightmarish memories of their school years, too: “The reader is stimulated to memorize and simultaneously reflect about possible experiences of the child—not in order to withhold them from herself and the child, but in order to talk to the child about these experiences and those of the child” (n.p.).

“Speaking with the child” is, of course, another aim of the anti-authoritarian movement, directed against the “speechlessness” of the parental generation. In *Mani das lügst du wieder* (Mani,

You Are Lying Again 1974) there is an explanation addressed to parents on how to deal with their lying children:

Tips for parents:

For children it is often hard to distinguish fantasy and reality. How should parents react to the fantastic stories of a child? Where does showing an understanding interest and a discourse between the big and the little one lead to? What is behind Mani's wildly proliferating story of the animal? Whoever looks at this book together with children, will—maybe—in future be more carefully with the assertion: That is another lie . . . (our translation)

Lying is, of course, a behavior that usually is punished by authoritarian parents. And, some of them certainly tend to expect a moral lesson from a “good” picturebook. Thus, in a separate sheet added to the German edition of *Le chat de Simulombula* (Simulombula's cat 1972) by Jacqueline Held, one reads:

A story's moral does not exist here. And the pedagogical, moralizing undertone does not even come through the loophole. Everything goes mad and you can do a forward roll with your fantasy. The big, coloured pictures are no obstacle to this. Quite the contrary! Because persons and story are shown by three different artists (which are internationally well renowned), the reader and viewer is presented with a true range of opinions. (our translation)

The text does not propose any specific moral, but rather a definitely non-pedagogical offer is made which appeals to the imagination of the reader. Liberal parents are invited to form their own opinion, as do the international renowned artists.

Finally, this new anti-pedagogy is backed up by scientific authorities. For instance, the author of *The Geranium on the Window Sill Just Died But Teacher You Went Right On*, Albert Cullum, is explicitly introduced as an university teacher for early childhood education. Still more explicitly, the world-famous cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget contributes a preface for Etienne Delessert's *How the Mouse Was Hit on the Head by a Stone and So Discovered the World*. Here, Piaget points out that this book is partly a result of three interviews with 23 children aged 5 to 6 years. In the first part of the interview, children discussed pictures and stories from



Eugène Ionesco's and Etienne Delessert's *Story No 1*, and *Story No 2*. In the second part of the three interview sessions, the children were asked how they judged texts and pictures prepared by Etienne Delessert and psychologist Odile Mosmann. In the third part, children were asked to draw pictures themselves. All their responses were analyzed and influenced the final version of the book. For instance, children criticized words that were hard to understand, or they criticized mismatches between the narrative world and their own reality. Apart from the issue of impressing skeptical parents, an experimental approach to children's books where children may have the chance to influence the book, seems to be a revolutionary approach where cognitive psychology and children's literature meet.

A comment that is addressed to the child reader is added on a separate leaf to *Olivia kann fliegen* (Olivia Can Fly 1976) by Franz Buchrieser and illustrated by Erhard Göttlicher. Here it is explained how to use this—ambitious—story:

The story of OLIVIA is not for being read again and again and again. This story is for butting in. You must read it with someone you like and who is clever, too. You must stop reading time and again, and interrupt, question and think often. This story is in no way finished. You can make it much more interesting yourself, if you write yourself into the story. This is exciting, try it sometimes! (our translation)

It is particularly interesting that this book originally appeared with the publisher *Bertelsmann*, but then was edited by the publisher *Grafik & Literatur*. In the same leaflet, this is explained to the child reader in the form of a little anti-capitalist story.

One day, however, the big boss came into the children's literature department and said to the editors: "You are making books that are too complicated, books that children do not want to have. Children are not clever enough to deal with complicated stories." Then the big boss fired the editors of the children's literature department and the poets and painters too. The books already made he also did not want to sell. The boss had the opinion that foolish books were easier to sell and I want [sic] to have a full till with a lot of money in it. (Our translation)

We have shown, then, that boundaries of stories that are too complicated, or are an offense to traditional pedagogical values, are

reflected in paratextual comments that are addressed to parents as well as children.

### **Discussion**

The transfer of these unusual ideas to picturebooks reveals that the artists base their decision to create a Pop Art picturebook on a specific image of childhood which is often explained in the paratexts, that is, foreword, afterword, text insert, or blurb. These texts show that the authors or illustrators obviously rely on a concept of childhood that strongly holds to the idea that children have openness towards new experiences and ideas, while adults are often constrained by prejudices and biased opinions. Nevertheless, the preconditions for the reception of Pop Art are different. Children usually do not have the required world knowledge about mass communication, modern society, and politics, let alone drugs, advertisement, and the often quoted icons of pop culture. It appears then, that Pop Art picturebooks often touch adult perspectives and problems. The particular Pop Art format the artists choose, with respect to the texts as well as the pictures, is of course conditioned by their individual artistic focus or program.

It is our contention that “strangeness” should be considered as a new category or concept when dealing with the reception of children’s books in general or picturebooks in particular. Evaluative adjectives like “strange,” “peculiar,” or “odd” are frequently used by children when they have problems with the judgment on or comprehensibility of stories and pictures (they even apply these categories to other items as well, but this is out of our specific discussion).

Under the precondition that “strangeness” is an adequate notion for this specific experience, one might assume that it should be applied to those children’s books that definitively challenge the child audience in the following cases:

1. children are not able to refer to their world knowledge in order to grasp the sense of the text and/or illustrations;
2. neither text nor pictures support the child’s developing sense of story, picture, or world knowledge;

3. the works in question do not observe the cognitive, emotional and aesthetic abilities of the age group for which the books are intended; and
4. regarding these developmental aspects, the respective books do not pay much attention to this important issue, but more or less exclusively stress the exceptional artistic and innovative concept of the work in question.

With regard to these options, the concept of “strangeness” is strongly linked to the question of the transgression of boundaries. What is, then, a boundary when considering cultural artifacts such as picturebooks?

We would like to suggest the following definition: Boundary is a cognitive, social, and aesthetic convention that refers to mutually accepted knowledge about the functions and meanings of pictures, text, and their relations. Transgressing boundaries aims at shifting these boundaries in order to extend the domain of mutually accepted knowledge with respect to these functions and meanings.

Or, as defined by cognitive psychology, already acquired schemata or scripts must be reinterpreted and revised by a bottom up/top down process, so that the new information rendered by text and/or pictures can be implemented, thus contributing to the existing scripts’ or schemata’s enrichment. In this regard, transgressing boundaries—whatever that comprises, whether it be cognitive, social, aesthetic, or emotional aspects—might be a demanding and satisfying experience for the child.

However, if the child cannot understand the picturebook’s implied meaning and is therefore hindered in finding pleasure when looking at the pictures and reading/hearing the story, this transgressing process is certainly not unproblematic. A picturebook that expects too much of the child audience prevents a successful communication, even under the guidance of an adult mediator. As a result, children will usually lose interest in engaging with the book.

At least some Pop Art picturebooks, so we have argued, transgress the boundaries of the “good” picturebook. In order to flesh out that claim, we introduced the notion of a boundary. If that boundary is crossed, the result is strangeness. Admittedly, this is a pre-theoretical notion, but one which in our view deserves

further exploration. Pop Art picturebooks are a promising field in that regard because of a wild mixture of artistic styles and complex (if not silly) stories. Surprisingly enough, there is very little research here. As a further speculation, we want to add that Pop Art picturebooks paved the way for the development of postmodern picturebooks in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, they appear to be cases of crosswriting in the realm of picturebooks, since many of their pictorial ideas and narrative contents appear to be targeted at an adult audience; therefore, they might be regarded as persuasive examples of “crossover picturebooks.”

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