VISUAL COMMUNICATION AND DRAWING

A LABORATORY EXPERIENCE FOR THE SCIENCES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION DEGREE COURSE

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This paper describes the experience of a three-day workshop at the end of the Visual Communication and Design course, in the first year of the Sciences of Primary Education degree course. The days of full immersion turned into a lively and creative "happening" during which communication and representation strategies for children were put into practice. The activities of painting, comics, photography, art and geometry were combined and integrated in order to experiment with reading images and to learn how to compose with them. At the end of the workshop, an exhibition of the final works was held, open to pre-schools and primary schools.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the experience of a three-day work-shop at the end of the Visual Communication and Design course, in the first year of the Sciences of Primary Education degree course. The days of full immersion turned into a lively and creative "happening" during which communication and representation strategies for children were put into practice. The activities of painting, comics, photography, art and geometry were combined and integrated in order to experiment with reading images and to learn how to compose with them. At the end of the workshop, an exhibition of the final works was held, open to pre-schools and primary schools.

BACKGROUND

On this basis, the first Visual Communication and Design Workshop for the new Master's Degree Course in Sciences of Primary Education was held on December 4, 5 and 6, 2018. The workshop was held immediately after the closure of the course and gave the students the opportunity to put communication and representation strategies for children into practice. The activities of painting, comics, photography, art and geometry were combined and integrated in order to experiment with reading images and to learn how to compose with them.

About 150 students worked with 10 teachers and experts in the fields of design, representation and visual communication to develop and enhance artistic skills and to communicate creatively and formatively with the world of children.

The workshop was organized in a coordinated manner into ten work groups and took place in a large fully-equipped room, as well as in a multimedia room.

INTRODUCTORY MANIFESTO

In the final days of the theoretical course, the themes of the ten thematic work groups were revealed and an overall manifesto was drawn up that could give a summary of the contents that would be developed in the three days and the materials needed to realize them.

The ten work groups included from 12 to 20 students each, coordinated by tutors, experts in the field of drawing, representation and visual communication, in order to complete the planned theoretical/practical activities in three days.

TEACHERS AND THEMATIC WORK GROUPS

Speakers and their topics:

- Marinella Arena: *Astrafavole, narrazioni in geometria* (*Astrofavole,* narrations in geometry);

- Manuela Bassetta: *Parolibere, il disegno delle parole* (*Parolibere*, word drawings);

- Gianni Brandolino: *Il gioco dell'oca, il labirinto ermetico e la struttura simbolica* (The Game of the Goose, the hermetic labyrinth and symbolic structure);

- Francesca Fatta: *I teatrini delle figure parlanti: commistioni tra arte e comunicazione visiva* (Talking Figure theaters: a mixture of art and visual communication);

- Natale Mancuso: *Il teatro delle geometrie volanti: pattern, forme, figure* (The theater of the Flying Geometries: patterns, forms, figures);

- Andrea Marraffa: *Nobody is perfect, ritratti in movimento* (Nobody is perfect, portraits in movement);

- Domenico Mediati: *Simmetrie: giochi d'incastro con figure geometriche semplici* (Symmetries: puzzles with simple geometric figures);

- Claudio Patanè: *City-mending, rammendi di paesaggi urbani* (City-mending, the mending of urban landscapes);

- Paola Raffa: *Pop-up book, libri in 3D*; (Pop-up books, 3D books)

- Agostino Urso/Francesco De Lorenzo: *Fumetti e fila-
strocche: processi comunicativi ibridi* (Comics and nursery
rhymes: hybrid communicative processes).

THEORETICAL AND APPLICATIVE CONTENTS

The themes of drawing and visual communication are
the first language used to develop and strengthen the abil-
ity to express oneself and to communicate in a creative and
personal way:

-For observing

To observe and understand an image with awareness,
recognize grammatical and technical elements and iden-
tify their expressive meaning. Identify in different visual lan-
guages the different types of codes, narrative sequences and
decode, in an elementary form, the different meanings.

-For expressing

Creatively elaborate personal and authentic productions
to express feelings and emotions; represent and communi-
cate perceived reality, experiment with different tools and
techniques to enhance the richness of children's spontaneity,
their need to assert their own world.

-For understanding

It is necessary to master the grammar of signs and the
rules of composition in order to be able to "read" images and
"write" with them. Each language has its own rules (paint-
ing, comics, photography, cinema, television...). Reading and
interpreting in a critical and active way the languages of im-
ages with a workshop approach to create an attitude of curi-
osity and positive interaction with the artistic world.

-For constructing

Develop a hermeneutic process, a construction that is
also interpretation and interaction with the object of study.
The subject must be involved in a complex reality of which
he is a participant. You must learn to produce various types of
visual texts and creatively rework the images with multiple

techniques, materials and tools to appreciate the works of art and crafts from different cultures.

THE *ASTRAFAVOLE* WORK GROUP: NARRATIONS IN GEOMETRY
(Marinella Arena, associate professor)

In this work group, we wanted to explore a playful dimension that, with the "lightness" of games, would subvert consolidated mechanisms of narration and figuration, using simple formal elements according to new patterns that give unexpected and sometimes amusing results.

Borrowing from the experience of Warja Lavater, in her books of fairy tales, and the combinatorial taste of Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1947) we attempted to tell fairy tales while considering how the formal, graphic and chromatic choice alters the perception of the story.

During the three days of the workshop, the students designed and produced ten books of abstract fairy tales, called *ASTRAFAVOLE*. The fairy tales, the most classic ones, were told using only simple geometric elements and, by varying the size, the color scale and the arrangement, with a simple combinatorial game, a well-known fairytale was told in a creative and entertaining way.

Fig. 1 Astrofavole work group.

Each book was designed according to a common scheme of 10/20 frames and divided into a number of pages that allows it to open like an accordion. In this way, once the book is opened, all the steps of the frames can be seen. (Figure 1)

THE PAROLIBERE WORK GROUP: WORD DRAWINGS
(Manuela Bassetta, PhD)

Taking its cue from Bruno Munari's book, *Alfabetiere* (1972), the work group invited the students to play with the sounds and shapes of words, cutting out and gluing letters and words to define images referring to the words themselves.

Thought was given to why one learns to read and the methods used to teach a child to read. We retraced the experience of calligrams and wanted to experiment with a fun, creative method to lead children, but not only children, to games, even non-sensical ones, able to create links between letter, word, sound and image.

Fig. 2 Parolibere work group.

The study of letters, of graphemes, in fact, leads us to discover that, in addition to having a sense and a sound related to linguistic conventions, these are also signs drawn on paper and, first of all, they are images.

The work group decided to draw from the calligrams of Apollinaire (1918), the *Parole in libertà* (words-in-freedom) by Marinetti and the pictorial alphabets of Paul Klee and Vasilij Kandinskij, to create "visual texts" with a close relationship between letters, shapes and colors. (Figure 2)

THE LABYRINTH AND THE GIOCO DELL'OCA WORK GROUP
(Gianni Brandolino, associate professor)

Starting from the famous Gioco dell'oca (Game of the Goose), which has a spiral structure, divided into 63 spaces in which several fixed symbols recur, that leads towards the center, the "goose's garden," the goal of an "initiatic sapiential path."

We reflected on the game's spiral track that always turns counter-clockwise, as if to indicate that the achievement of reaching the center is to be understood as "a climb back to the origins" (Scolla, 2014).

We came to understand the symbolic meaning of the game, which can be considered a symbolic representation of the path of life, and whose symbols describe all the possible stages of human existence.

We then considered the game board itself, that is, the surface where the game is played. A board can be a tablet, a chart, a panel, a plane, a game sheet characterized by squares, borders, lines, boxes, subdivisions, symbols, figures, arrows and writings. On the game board the pieces are moved after throwing dice.

With all this in mind, the work group focused on the recovery of the ancient board game as a metaphor for life.

On the basis of a board with 63 spaces + 1 (arrival), the story of Pinocchio was mimicked, creating a mix of classical and modern pedagogical literature, with a certain dose of
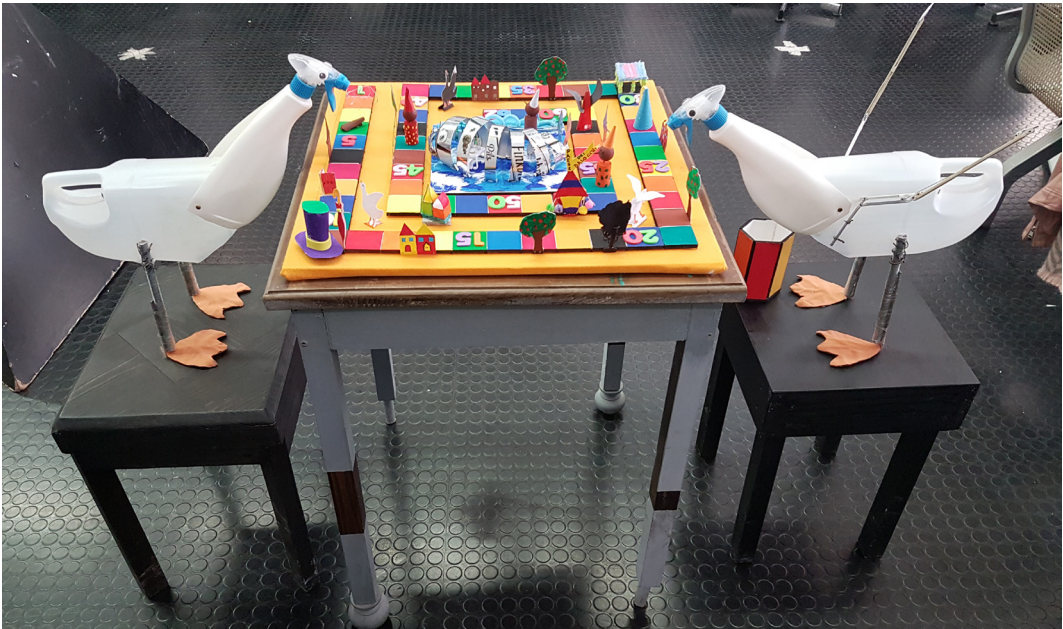
Fig. 3 Labyrinth and Gioco dell'oca work group.

disillusionment and irony, redefining the accidents (the Cat and the Fox), unexpected events (the Whale), rewards (the Blue Fairy) and –at the end– the coveted goal in the cathartic transformation of Pinocchio into a real boy. (Figure 3)

THE TALKING FIGURES WORK GROUP:
THE THEATRE OF COMMUNICATION
(Francesca Fatta, professor in charge of the workshop)

This work group dealt with the reading of images. In the theoretical part, the theme of the emotional evaluation of a work of art was addressed. Subsequently, a higher-level assessment was made, which implied a minimum knowledge of artistic techniques, types of works of art and the historical and cultural periods in which they were realized.

The same was done for a few advertising posters, often created by famous artists or by important graphic designers who are experts in visual communication.

The reading of a work and of an advertisement represent-

ed an opportunity for making images "speak," even to each other, finding and discovering in art meanings and connections between signified and signifier.

The re-reading of the works assigned, both of a pictorial nature (from the Renaissance to the present day) and of a communicative graphic nature (advertising from the first post-war period to the present day), went through various phases: from the acquisition of preliminary information on a work (type, author, dating, technical data, size, commission), to the analysis of the subject (iconographic and iconological reading), to conclude with the reading of the visual language.

Fig. 4 Talking figure work group.

On the basis of the manual redesign of the visual composition, the elements of this language (shapes, lines, figures, colors, light) were redrawn, then moving on to the structures (configurations, weights, lines of force, rhythm, symmetry).

Finally, in a creative and arbitrary blending, a small theater was created (20x20x20 cm) in which the combination of painting and communication brought into play elements of the foreground, those further back, and finally the background itself, as if to recreate a spatial dialogue between parts of the representation. (Figure 4)

THE THEATER OF THE FLYING GEOMETRIES WORK GROUP
(Natale Mancuso, artist)

The work group's aim was to guide the student to the conscious use of geometric scanning in space, working in three steps.

The first step was a simple exercise on a square sheet of A4 paper (0.5 x 0.5 cm.), a plane surface with a rigid, predefined grid, within which to move according to constraints and freedom. Inventiveness, ingenuity and inspiration were the premises from which we started to create real patterns drawn with fine-tip black markers.

Each student, initially forced into a limiting and obsessive context, once they had taken possession of the theoretical grid, creatively tackled the filling in of the spaces, creating increasingly complex patterns.

Fig. 5 Theater of the flying geometries work group.
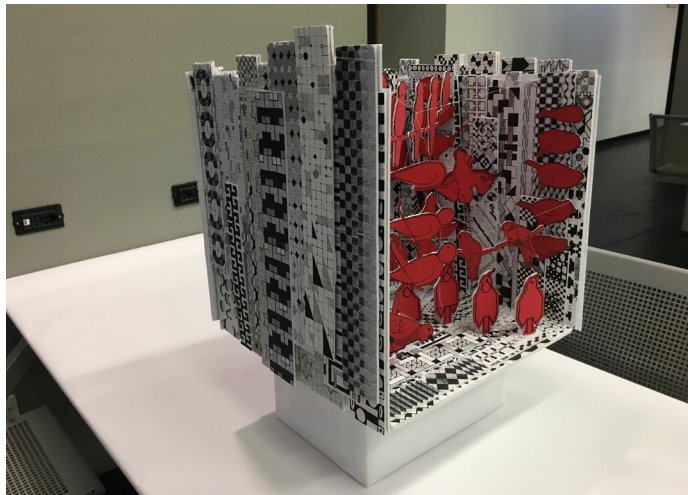
The next step was to use the sheets of paper with the drawings of patterns to cover the inside of a foam board structure measuring 50x50x50 cm. The decorations glued together, defined the walls and the floor of an ideal geometric theatre; a total black and white covering with an optical graphic result. The third step served to break the obsessiveness of the black and white and of the basic grid

thanks to the composition of a few animal shapes consisting of simple geometric figures realized on red cardboard, suspended between the walls of the box. The final effect of the collective composition was a sort of "aviary theater" animated by mobile figures. (Figure 5)

THE NOBODY IS PERFECT WORK GROUP.
FACES, SYMMETRIES AND PROFILES
(Andrea Marraffa, PhD)

This thematic work group dealt with the study of the human face: symmetries, asymmetries, canons, golden proportions, profiles, were the theoretical-methodological tools through which each student tried to break down his own face, analyzing every little nuance and possibility of combination. Starting with 15x15 cm black and white photographs of each participant's face, one frontal and one in profile, they experimented with mirror games

Fig. 6 Nobody is perfect work group

(the reflection on a central axis of the right and left half of their face); the redrawing of the missing half (left and right) of their face (mixed photo/drawing configuration); the definition of the main geometries that dominate their face; the portrait of each other, the self-portrait from memory, and in the mirror, of their face.

During these exercises, the mnemonic and associative capacity of each participant was tested.

On the last day, a second practical exercise took place, in which the participants tried to condense what they had learned, synthesizing it in a plastic composition (papier-mâché sculpture), based on the theme of face masks, to create bizarre, grotesque and apotropaic figures. (Figure 6)

THE SYMMETRY GAMES WORK GROUP
(Domenico Mediati, research professor)

This work group proposed a study on the theme of tessellation of surfaces and of space. Some essential notions about symmetry movements, tessellation techniques and the use of these geometries in art and decorative works over the centuries were provided, with particular attention to the experiments of M.C. Escher.

The aim of the work was to acquire the ability to interpret geometric structures and decorative motifs and then propose them again through experiments in edutainment, that is to say, games and learning.

During the three days of the workshop, drawings and motifs taken from Escher's works were created, using decompositions and recompositions of the constituent elements of complex graphic textures. In this way, both flat and three-dimensional puzzles were created, useful for understanding the rules and potentials of periodic repetitions. (Figure 7)

Fig. 7 Simmetry games work group.

THE CITY-MENDING WORK GROUP
(Claudio Patanè, doctoral student)

The aim of this work group was to encourage the partici-
pant to listen to the city in which he lives in a new "perceptive
and conscious way."

The context the student dealt with was that of the urban
space he crosses on a daily basis, and he was stimulated to
make an active experience of it, "pinning" and "mending"
those invisible plots and connections, which involve his body,
his mind, his memory and the places he perceives when he
passes through them.

Fig. 8 City-mending work group

Discovery, play and invention were the ingredients of this
new narrative, aimed at training future teachers to encourage
future generations to take a more sensitive and emotional ap-
proach to what surrounds them, to unveil reality starting from a
careful, curious, sensitive, playful gaze like that of Calvino's *Marco-
valdo* (1963), during his "seasons in the city."

Borrowing the experience of "mending" present in the work
of the artist Maria Lai, the students were guided to investigate
the everyday urban landscape and, like the artist from Nuoro, to
transfer the sensations, visions, colors, materials and spaces into
final works, into "works of art," thus bearing material witness to

the actual passage from what they had encountered and consumed through observation. (Figure 8)

THE POP UP BOOKS WORK GROUP. 3D BOOKS
(Paola Raffa, research professor)

The work started with the consideration that a pop-up book is an animated artifact with movable and transformable pages. A book whose form is subject to modification and movement and whose language is expressed in a tactile communicative space. The reader becomes an observer of episodes narrating events that can be transformed by activating mobile devices. It is a hypertext in which the transmission and reception of information are different from the alphabetical text; they refer to visual, tactile, olfactory and sound

Fig. 9 Pop up books work group

components. The traditional communicative canon is modi-
fied and information is communicated through an intuitive
and experiential metalanguage.

The work group's aim was to design and produce pop-
up books for communication, learning and teaching in
primary schools. Books thus became the object of a proj-
ect in which content, visual aspect, choice of materials,
graphic rules and overall readability tend towards inter-
active expressive codes. (Figure 9)

THE COMICS AND NURSERY RHYMES WORK GROUP:
HYBRID COMMUNICATIVE PROCESSES
(Agostino Urso, research professor and Francesco De Lorenzo, PhD)

In this context, a reflection was conducted on new and origi-
nal ways of hybridizing different artistic media with the aim of
creating original communication tools. An operation that can be
accomplished, in this case, through the concurrence of two me-
diums: drawing (the graphic sign that can be expressed through
the use of comics) and writing (in this case through Rodari's nurs-
ery rhymes), to which a conceptual space of reference (the graph-
ic grid) is added, on which the first two rest.

Fig. 10 Comics and nursery
rhymes work group

Fig. 11-12 Final exhibition.

In short, an attempt was made to expand the need to commu-
nicate the themes investigated through the use of an immediate,
synthetic, dynamic language. That is, an attempt to deal with a
new audience of individuals – the so-called digital natives–not

necessarily accustomed to the rigidity and formalism typical of academic languages.

Each student reinterpreted a nursery rhyme by Gianni Rodari in a graphic –and therefore reinterpretative– key agreed upon with the teacher using the technique of "collage" for overlapping, contrasting and juxtaposing freely identified, selected or constructed images and/or drawings. From the realization of a storyboard, to the construction, research and graphic implementation of all the individual drawings and/or images provided, the work concluded with the final editing and digital printing of the 8-page comic book, including the cover. (Figure 10)

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