Horizons
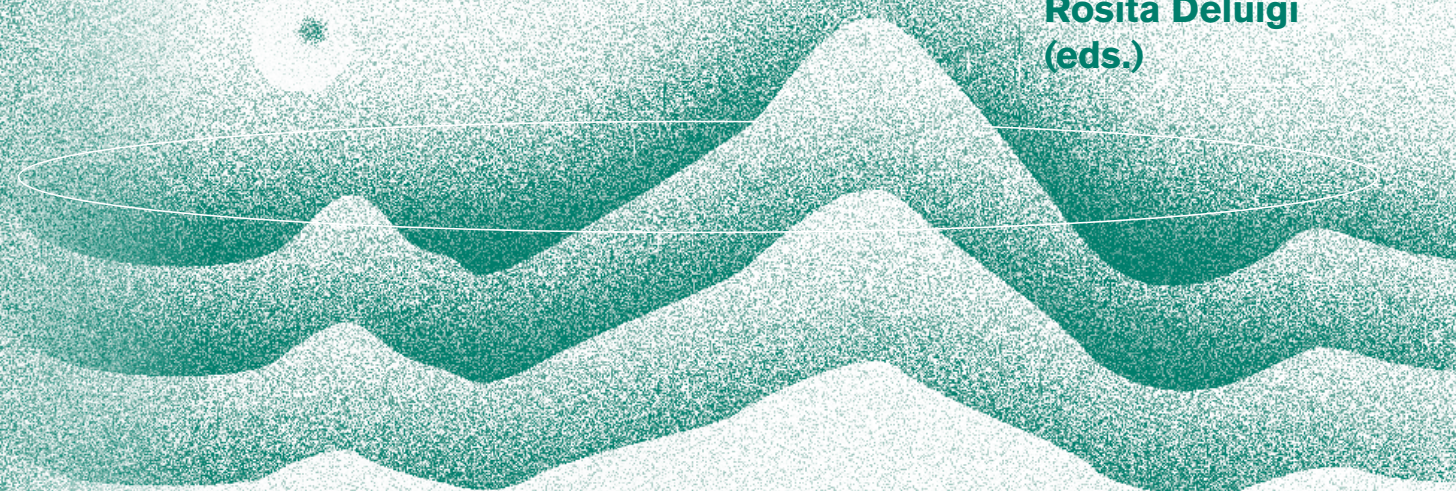# of Interest

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(eds.)

HORIZONS OF INTEREST

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL PREFACE — POINTS TO THE HORIZONS OF INTEREST

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"All our knowledge has its origin in our perceptions."
Leonardo da Vinci[1]

The monograph Horizons of Interest comprises the topics of visual literacy, approaches to education, and the mediation of art through a variety of perspectives. This publication is intended as theoretical material for a deeper understanding of visual imagination and art creation; an educational tool in an interdisciplinary field connected to the dialogue surrounding visuality. The second important connection is intercultural communication and deeper consideration of culture.

The texts presented in this publication put into context the educational aspects of art and culture, and the artistic approach to informal education as discovered during the international TICASS (Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences) throughout 2017 to 2021. This TICASS project involved interdisciplinary research, and prepared two platforms in the form of conferences for common dialogues about visuality and education approaches. The authors of the texts in this collection of monographs were a part of said conferences and discovered a common goal in the form of an interest in education in, and with, art.

The first international conference, titled "P.Art.icipA©tion: Education, Visual Languages and Intercultural Strategies", covered topics including the mediation of art, learning processes, social communication, and multigenerational reading of art, urban space, and cultural identity. Attention was placed on tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with a focus on European and African contexts in connection with the interreligious dialogue.

After the first conference, which took place in Macerata (Italy, 2019), we felt the need to organise the second conference to focus on educational approaches and good practice with development of visual literacy. Widespread interest led to the online conference "Perspective – Educational Aspects of Technologies of

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1   *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*. XIX Philosophical Maxims. Morals. Polemics and Speculations. Paragraph 1147. In: Richter, J. P., Richter, I. A, Bell, R. C. (eds.) (1939). *The literary works of Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Imaging in the Perspective of Visual Literacy" which was managed from the city of Ústí nad Labem (Czech Republic, 2020). The theoretical frame of this second conference was concerned with modes of visual communication, creative thinking and educational aspects focused on visual literacy. An open environment for sharing ideas was cultivated at both conferences, and here began the idea to prepare a monograph exploring the contemporary relationship between education and visual communication.

The authors of the texts herein work in the fields of arts, humanities and social studies, and reflect on the area of visual literacy, on education in connection with contemporary technologies, and on strategies of imaging. It offers a platform for sharing ideas, experience and skills in the fields of visual communication and intercultural dialogue.

The book presents several research paradigms which cross heterogeneous contexts and use multiple languages and methods of investigation in the fields of both art and education.

The dialogue between the authors foresees a continuous interchange between the theoretical dimension and a plurality of practices in specific areas of interest of art education and visual communication. In this way, the research field becomes a critical horizon in which reflections are developed and projects are aimed at promoting participation.

The interdisciplinarity of the texts allows the addressing of intercultural issues supporting the idea of being an active part of the interpretation of artistic languages. The possibility of declining numerous narratives through communicative mediators becomes concrete in community places (such as museums, schools, territories, research institutions, etc.) where different identities enter into relationships and build creative dialogues.

EDUCATIONAL ICONOGRAPHY:
A FIELD OF RESEARCH

Roberto Farné

"Educational iconography" refers to the study and interpretation of figurative repertoires in different media relating to school and other forms of education. These are repertoires of images aiming to communicate information and cultural content, or aiming to facilitate the learning of certain knowledge, make a historical topic and scientific concepts interesting, or – more simply – show and recognise something in order to name and describe it (Farné 2002). Last but not least, they represent the theme of a board game. Some historical points of reference define the profile of this topic. The *first* refers to the progressive legitimation of the use of images in early Christianity; only after the Council of Nicaea in 787 were images officially accepted as an instrument of catechesis addressed to illiterate people. "Bibliae pauperum" (fig. 1a, 1b, 1c) the great iconographic works with paintings and bas-reliefs in cathedrals, bear witness to this.

The *second* aspect is that the circulation of iconographic repertoires increased with the development of printing techniques, aiming to disseminate scientific knowledge (non-fiction) and illustrate stories and tales (fiction). Modern pedagogic theories promoted the birth of a "market" dedicated to children: images for play, abecedaries, illustrated books, trading cards, etc (fig. 2a, 2b).

The *third* historical point of reference concerns the school; starting from the 17th century, when Comenius published *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658, fig. 3a, 3b) the first illustrated schoolbook for children, we can speak of educational word-image synergy. Images were to become formidable didactic catalysts, for those disciplinary fields predisposed for visual repertoires. From the invention of printing onwards, every new communication technology was to be pedagogically stressed to express its educational potential.

Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) was the first to perform a rigorous critical analysis of the cultural and pedagogic value of children's books, books that he collected and preserved with all the care of a collector. An observer and attentive critic of children's culture, able to treat a toy or an abecedary with the same philological rigour he used to review a literary or theatrical work, Benjamin expressed a sophisticated and meticulous skill in analysing materials ignored by official pedagogy. In his analyses, Benjamin created associations and references between apparently distant fields (for example, the relationship between *Biedermeier* aesthetics and illustrations for children), and combined the recovery of an evocative childhood memory with the categories of a severe critique.

Starting with Comenius

Before his time, books and illustrations for children, toys, performances, and everything related specifically to childhood was viewed with general indifference by the adult world, willing to indulge children's playful pleasure, their need to "look at pictures" but without considering the material culture that fuelled these

experiences as part of an important educational process. Benjamin realised that those books and their pictures had a much stronger impact on children than any other book they would read subsequently, because they contributed to their learning and their vision of the world. First and foremost, it is the children who are aware of this, because, as Benjamin wrote:

"The child asks the adult for a clear and comprehensible, but not childish, representation (…). As the child also has a precise sensitivity for what is serious and difficult, provided it is sincere and comes from the heart" (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22). His criticism of most of the publications and illustrations for children is ruthless: the prevailing tone is *"edifying, moralistic and represents a variant of catechism (…). Their aridity, indeed their lack of interest for the child is undeniable"* (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22).

Benjamin states that three works paved the way for a completely new sensitivity towards educational books, works characterised by a fundamental role of imagery: these are *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by Amos Comenius (1668), the *Elementary Book* (Elementarwerk) by Johann Bernhard Basedow (fig. 4a, 4b), magnificently illustrated by the engravings of Daniel Chodowiecki (1774), and *Bilderbuch fur Kinder* by Friedrich Justin Bertuch, the first great illustrated children's encyclopaedia (fig. 5a, 5b): 12 books (over 2000 pages), published in Weimar between 1792 and 1830; a monumental work for those times, considering above all of their intended audience. Benjamin wrote in 1924: *"With its accurate execution, this children's encyclopaedia demonstrates the devotion with which one worked for children at that time. Today the majority of parents would by horrified by the idea of placing such a precious work in the hands of children. In his preface, Bertuch most naturally invites the illustrations to be cut out"* (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22).

Benjamin pays surprising attention to illustrated abecedaries, the first educational materials used to help children learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet and compose their first words: *"The nostalgia that the abecedary arouses in me shows how much it was an intrinsic part of my childhood. That is what in fact I seek: my whole childhood condensed into the gesture of the hand inserting the letters into the grooves to align them. The hand can still dream it, but never retrieve it, never repeat it with the same truth. In the same way, we can dream how we learned to walk. Yet in vane. Now we know how to walk, we can no longer learn to do it again"* (Benjamin 2006, p. 65).

Benjamin observes the long process that, from Comenius onwards, led the syllabary to become an illustrated text for children, rich in decorative graphic elements, to the point in which the letters of the alphabet, in certain cases, became nothing more than "skeletons" (fig. 6a, 6b) dressed up in "decorations on decorations, to make them more attractive", in other cases pretexts for "gathering around them a whole court of objects", in others again subjected to an exasperated biomorphism aiming to identify the shape of each letter within the outline of a real object. The conclusion is that all this responded more to an adult's pleasure and figurative research, rather than an educational clarity functional to the child's learning.

In the best cases, the syllabary became an authentic field of figurative and educational research and experimentation, aiming to identify entertaining ideas to place the child in the condition to actively set out on the journey of apprentice reader. Here, Benjamin not only defines the innovative characters that have made this type of book increasingly rich and enjoyable, but also poses an important pedagogic and educational issue. This is the tendency to include increasingly more

experiences and materials in education in reading (but not only) that make explicit reference to the sphere of pleasure and play, more than that of effort, which has always connoted the authentic initiation into the labours of school work. This issue was also raised by Bruno Bettelheim (1976; Bettelheim, Zelan 1982), a firm supporter of the pedagogic and therapeutic power of the word, and a strong critic of the redundancy of images decorating children's books.

Illustrate and explain
I began with these reflections on the figure of Walter Benjamin in order to broaden my focus to the more general issue of the role images have played – and increasingly play – in children's education. This feature is one that specifically characterises Western culture: the assertion of the centrality of images in the educational processes and widespread culture was a progressive achievement, filled with social and religious conflicts (Farné 2006). Our culture has assigned a huge power to images and the media that produce them, which has also progressively defined a pedagogy of the image. A power that, while on one hand frees extraordinary educational and communicative resources supplying new energy to teaching and learning processes, on the other hand expropriates forms of control and guidance from education: the image is fast, the word is slow. At least apparently, images do not require mediation processes, while formal education is based on initiation processes guided by adult figures.

I thus wondered if, in the field of iconography, images devoted to childhood and education constitute a specific field of study and research. I believe so; I focused on that which I defined "educational iconography" (Farné 2002), seeking to define its historical roots, languages and techniques, as well as the pedagogic intentions and practices, as we are referring to media, i.e. catalysts of relations and, in this specific case, relations oriented to education.

All the repertoires of children's and educational iconography in the modern age, referring to illustrations, games, trading cards and even cartoons, derive from the production and development of popular prints between the 17th and 18th centuries. Popular prints are a complex product in social and aesthetic terms (fig. 7a, 7b). It would be a mistake to define popular prints in a simplistic manner, as a sort of "b-product" compared with those we consider as artistic images, produced also using engraving techniques. References between one and the other field of figurative expression exist, but popular prints define their own identity in production and distribution contexts oriented to a specific - popular - audience, which also included children.

Figures linked to religious or secular fields, illustrated tales and chronicles, images of distant lands, exotic animals and humans, and popular prints induce us to look at that great theatre of the streets and squares, where the humours, sentiments and actions of a "human comedy" (fig. 8) could be expressed as they might appear before the eyes of an observer ready to describe it to the very audience that it interprets, in the form of printed or reproduced images.

The great printing houses that produced and disseminated popular images in Europe defined and consolidated their own style over time, their own catalogue of figures, the reproduction and sale of which was guaranteed by a substantial figurative stability which was permitted only minor variations on a theme. In this iconography, we can often recognise elements and compositions from the high figurative arts, reproduced in simplified and serialised forms.

Benjamin stated that so-called popular art is often only an asset of the dominating class which has dropped to a lower level, where it is welcomed and renewed by a broader collective. That which is normally defined as "popular taste" in figurative terms would therefore consist of a set of representation criteria, characters and topics which, with minimum variations, are repeated in the same way over time, impressing with their exotic or coarse spectacularity, constituting objects of collective cultural recognition. In the 19th century, the great season of children's and educational iconography developed in the furrow of this iconography apparently closed within a sacred and profane imaginary with unalterable features, and the media used to embody and adapt its repertoires was that of the illustrations of popular and children's books and journals, trading cards and board games, as well as comics.

This process underwent a significant development specifically through printed games in which a certain scheme of play (with cards, bingo, or board games) could be based on a figurative and thematic repertoire with an explicit (or implicit) educational content (Seville 2019). Among the products that best represent educational progress in the modern age, we must consider the widespread production of educational games, in many cases based on the transformation/adaptation of existing games, characterised by visual supports oriented to learning notions and precepts (fig. 9). A moralistic orientation, the result also of the Counter-Reformation, blended well with the more modern educational theories expressed (and disputed) in the Catholic world by François Fénelon.

The principle was that of leveraging the child's natural interest for images and play, in order to pleasantly lead them towards the knowledge of notions and arguments, moral principles, or the acquisition of specific logic and linguistic abilities. In psychological terms, it was a matter of enhancing aspects such as the child's motivation and interest towards learning, in contrast to the widespread constrictive or punitive models, producing play instruments that could act as *educational catalysts*.

We are used to thinking of "education" as a rhetoric register of educational communication, which makes a given object or topic boring, unattractive, and in some way "anaesthetic". This is what we think when, commonly, we use the term educational as an adjective; for example, referring to an educational film, an educational television programme, an educational toy, etc. In these cases, it is as if the product has suffered a kind of qualitative impoverishment that is necessary for the purpose of education. Generally, but however linked to this, the neo-idealistic culture and its pedagogy have always denied that a visual or narrative product for children can be recognised as "artistic", as the fact of being "for children" would lessen its creative quality. This prejudice began to wane only from the second half of the last century, and authorship in different fields of children's culture (literature, illustration, theatre, cinema, etc.) was finally recognised and enhanced within their own categories.

A prerogative of education is to explain. The Italian "spiegare" literally means to "unfold", and therefore to open and reveal, make a subject or concept more comprehensible. The same applies to the term "illustrate", so illustration is no more than a device that illuminates, gives light and therefore makes visible (and understandable) something that the text describes but does not show, something it alludes to but hides. Pictures in books, above all educational and children's books, have always aimed not only to make the book itself more attractive and enjoyable, but also to enhance its educational function.

Trading cards

Born in Paris in the second half of the 19th century, in a society where scientific progress can be emblematically represented by the Exposition Universelle, the *trading card* was an advertising gift astutely combined with some products and targeting children to lead adult customers to purchase the goods or return to the same shop (fig. 10a, 10b). Very soon, many manufacturers of meat extract, chocolate, cigarettes, etc. used these small advertising images, inaugurating a competition in which the *gadget* played a role that was no less important than that of the product it came with (Basile 2014).

Due to its contents and communication style, the trading card is perhaps the object that, more than any other, represents the educational concept of positivism in the field of cultural and educational dissemination. Compared with the few poor-quality illustrations children found in school books and educational posters hanging on classroom walls, many trading card series based on historical, geographical, or scientific topics were of thrilling visual value. The graphic precision and attention to colour in these tiny formats was completely lacking in normal children's illustrated publishing. From the mid-20th century onwards, the trading card depended no longer on the commercial products it was a gadget of, but became an autonomous medium, a product of the children's culture thanks to the invention of the pack of trading cards by the editor Panini from Modena (fig. 11).

The pedagogic interest for trading cards is closely linked to their educational versatility, expressed not only in a didactic but also a ludic register. The visual and tactile experience overlap, generating a sensory synergy that is a source of pleasure for the child. Overlapping the visual and ludic registers is an intrinsic feature of the trading card, which not by chance is often treated as an actual "toy". Trading card albums are a kind of irreversible construction set, like models or puzzles composed of many pieces, each of which must be assembled or fitted exactly into its own space in order to complete the final object or image. Here, the child does not act by assembling the pieces in a more or less ephemeral manner, in order to build a construction and then enjoy dismantling or destroying it, but tends to keep the object as the result of a long and patient work-game. Completing a trading card album is not only a challenge but at times also a *mission impossible*.

To conclude: educational iconography aims to study, on the one hand, the different repertoires of images that activate a direct relationship with children in their leisure time, and on the other, the visual repertoires whose didactic dimension is also characterised by the mediations with which they are managed. It is a huge production, with a future full of technological expectations even though, as "didactic" images, they have always suffered from cultural devaluation, like everything else related to the "educational" character (film, children's literature, illustrations…), and from an "aesthetic prejudice". The words of Roberto Rossellini come to mind: in 1962, during an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he said: *"We must have the courage to be 'didactic'. But when one is at the cinema, one is immediately accused of imbecility. And yet, the need for education is an absolute requirement"* (Rossellini 1987, p. 271).

Fig. 1a.
Biblia Pauperum, facsimile and Edition by Avril Henry, Cornell Univ. Press, 1987 (or. XV century).

Fig 1b.
Wiligelmo, Adam and Eve, ow relief, Cathedral of Modena (XII century).

Fig. 1c.
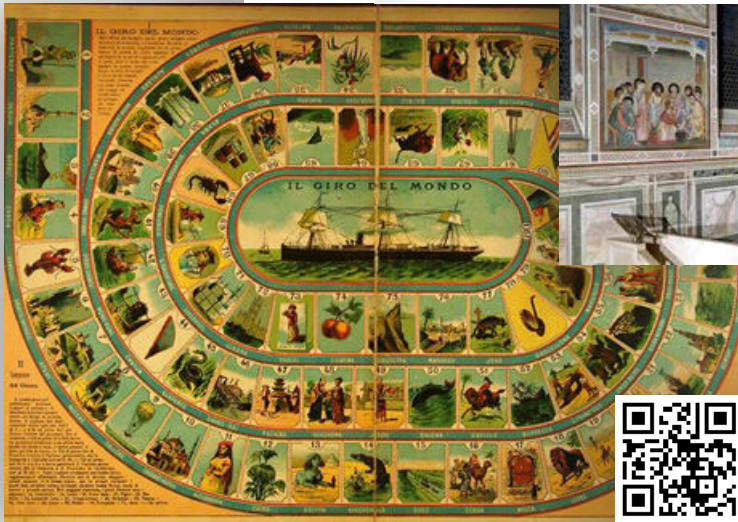Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel, Padova, XIV century.

Fig.2a.
Il giro del mondo (Around the world), educational board game, Italy, about 1890.

Fig.2b.
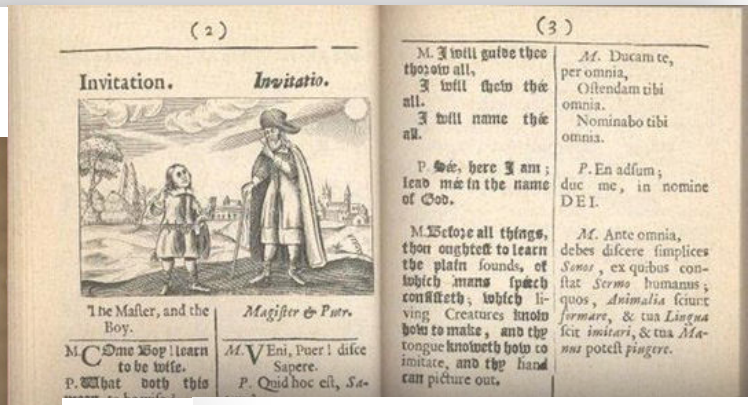Images d'Épinal, Don Quichotte, English edition, about 1880.

Fig. 3a.
Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), Orbis Sensualium Pictus, 1658.
Fig. 3b.
Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), Orbis Sensualium Pictus, 1658.

Fig. 4a,
Johann Bernard Basedow, Elementarwerk, illustrated by Daniel Chodowiecki, 1774.
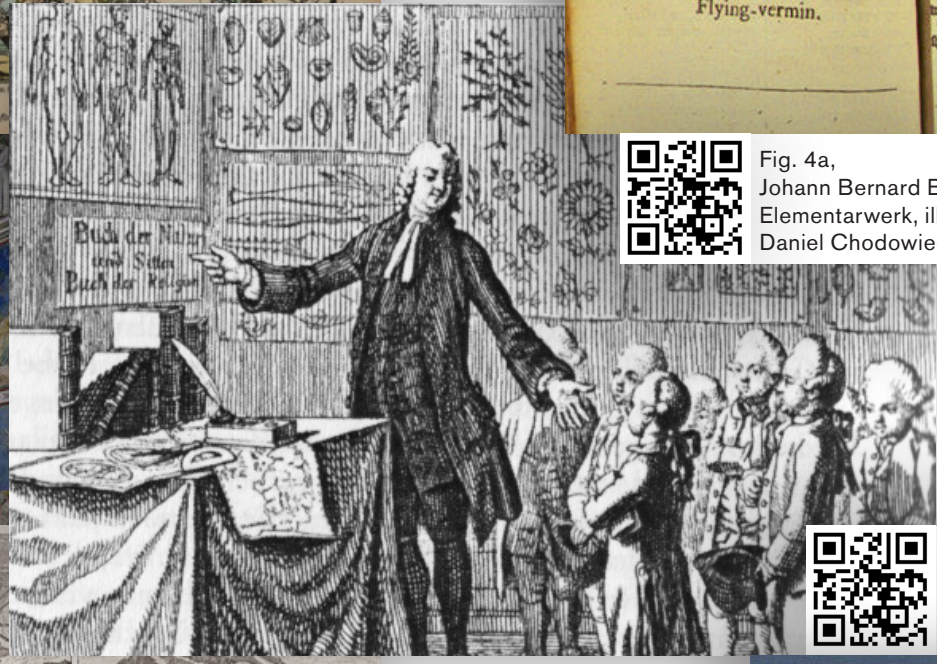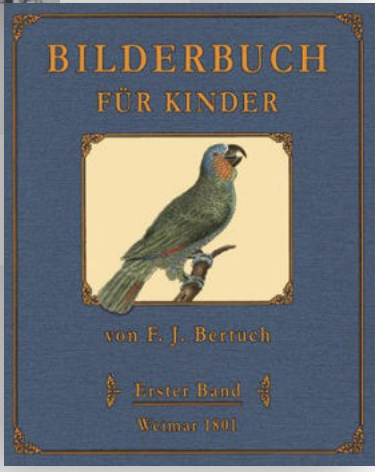
Fig. 5a.
Cover of book.

Fig. 4b.
Johann Bernard Basedow, Elementarwerk, illustrated by Daniel Chodowiecki, 1774.

BILDERBUCH
FÜR KINDER
von F. J. Bertuch
Erster Band
Weimar 1801

13

Fig. 5b.
F. J. Bertuch, Bilderbuch fur Kinder, 1801.

Fig. 6a.
Walter Crane, The Baby's own Alphabet, John Lane the Bodely Head, London, 1874.

Fig. 6b.
Alphabet de Bécassine, illustrated by J. P. Pinchon, Gautier-Languereau, Paris, 1921.

Fig. 7a.
Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, The print seller,1684..

Fig. 7b.
The World Upside Down, popular print, Pellerin, Epinal, about 1880.

Fig. 8.
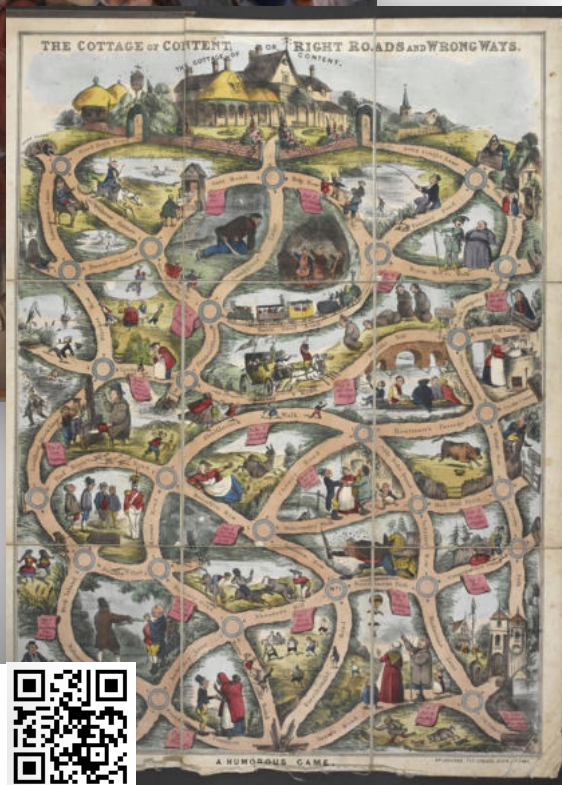Giandomenico Tiepolo, Mondo nuovo (The New World), Venezia, Ca' Rezzonico.

Fig. 9.
The Cottage of Content, Board game, 1848.

Fig. 10a.
Ancient Ships, trading cards,
Stollwerk chocolate, 1902.
Photo: Archive of Author.

Fig. 10b.
Venomous snakes (Italian
edition), trading cards, Liebig,
1903.

Fig. 11.
La Terra, il pianeta sul quale viviamo (The Land is the Planet We
Leave on), Educational trading cards, Panini, Modena, 1966.
Photo: Archive of Author.

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Photo Source:

Fig.1a.   Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Biblia_pauperum,_Nordisk_familjebok.png

Fig 1b.   Source: https://it-it.facebook.com/601406263289996/photos /a.604991339598155.1073741836.601406263289996/61557166608239/

Fig. 1c.   Source: https://www.foliamagazine.it/viaggio-in-italia-la-cappella-degli-scrovegni-a-padova/

Fig. 2a.   Source: http://www.giochidelloca.it/scheda.php?id=362

Fig. 2b.   Source: https://www.alamy.it/francais-imagerie-d-epinal-don-quichotte-don-chisciotte-questo-file-e-privo-di-informazioni-sull-autore-192-epinal-quichote-immagine-image188107094.html

Fig. 3a.   Source: https://www.pinterest.it/pin/226798531211821418/

Fig. 3b.   Source: https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Orbis_Sensualium_Pictus.png

Fig. 4a.   Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/de/Johann_Bernhard_Basedow

Fig. 4b.   Source: https://grafiteria.pl/en/produkt/ilustration-for-elementarwerk-by-j-b-basedow-tab-xciii/?recommended=2&kolor=95854&papier=5&ramka=96090&szyba=zwykla

Fig. 5a.   Source: https://fines-mundi.de/bertuch-bilderbuch-fuer-kinder-band-1

Fig. 5b.   Source: https://www.pinterest.it/pin/410672059761426137/

Fig. 6a.   Source: https://www.artofthepicturebook.com/osborne-collection

Fig. 6b.   Source: https://www.ricardo.ch/fr/a/alphabet-de-becassine-1176729484/ (or other similar of the same book)

Fig. 7a.   Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1852-1009-1041

Fig. 7b.   Source: https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/226585

Fig. 8.   Source: https://www.arte.it/notizie/venezia/il-mondo-nuovo-di-giandomenico-tiepolo-l-evasione-e-la-speranza-in-tempi-di-incertezza-16941

Fig. 9.   Source: https://earthlymission.com/the-cottage-of-content-a-humorous-game/

Fig. 10b. Source: https://filateliadesimoni.com/prodotto/1903-italia-italy-figurine-liebig-italiane-serpenti-velenosi-n-750/