

## REPRESENTATIONS OF SPACE IN WORDLESS PICTUREBOOKS: «A SUBTLE WAY OF CARE»

### REPRESENTAÇÕES DO ESPAÇO NO LIVRO-ÁLBUM SEM TEXTO: «UMA SUBTIL FORMA DE CUIDADO»

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Places define us as much as we define them. Cartography is an art of mutual recreation (MANGUEL, 2015, p. 182)

We are a circular map, human and excessive. (LEAL, 2016, p. 43)

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to look into the representations of space in wordless picturebooks, focusing attention on *Sidewalk Flowers*, by JonArno Lawson (2015) and *Machine*, by Jaime Ferraz (2017). The theoretical framework of this study draws on: i) the versatility of wordless picturebooks (ARIZPE, 2013; BOSCH, 2017); ii) Borges Filho's proposal for topoanalysis (BORGES FILHO, 2007); iii) the peritextual apparatus of picturebooks (GENETTE 1982, 1987, RAMOS, 2011). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to shed some light on: i) the functions of space in the above mentioned picturebooks; ii) the role of peritextual features to reconfigure space, promoting reading engagement and comprehension. We conclude that it is important to focus attention on the representations of space in wordless picturebooks: i) for the importance of its multiple functions to the comprehension and fruition of the visual narrative; ii) for its silent contribution to the safeguard of «a subtle way of care» (COSTA, 2017) that nurtures generous dialogues with the readers – welcoming and inviting them to actively engage in thought-provoking shared reading experiences. Keywords: spaces; picturebook; peritexts; reading.

#### RESUMO

Neste artigo refletimos sobre as representações do espaço nos livros-álbum sem texto, sendo a nossa atenção centrada em *Flores mágicas*, de JonArno Lawson (2015) e *Máquina*, de Jaime Ferraz (2017). No que respeita ao enquadramento teórico do estudo, este contempla: i) a versatilidade do livro-álbum sem texto (ARIZPE, 2013; BOSCH, 2017); ii) a proposta de Borges Filho relativa à topoanálise (BORGES FILHO, 2007); iii) os aspetos convocados pelo aparato peritextual das obras em estudo (GENETTE 1982; 1987; RAMOS; 2011). Assim, no âmbito da análise realizada, procuramos lançar luz sobre: i) as funções do espaço no livro-álbum sem texto; ii) o papel dos peritextos para a reconfiguração do espaço, promovendo a compreensão na leitura e o envolvimento dos leitores. Concluimos que importa conceder atenção às representações do espaço no livro-álbum sem texto: i) pela importância das suas múltiplas funções para a compreensão da narrativa visual e sua fruição; ii) por possibilitar resguardar, silenciosamente, «uma subtil forma de cuidado» (COSTA, 2017) que potencia reencontros generosos com os leitores – acolhendo-os e convidando-os a participar ativamente em experiências de leitura partilhada desafiadoras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: espaços; livro-álbum; peritextos; leitura.

#### 1. Introduction

The relevance of the study of literary space, in its richness and diversity, is increasingly recognized (BORGES FILHO, 2007, LAUREL, 2013, LOPES, 2016; TALLY JR., 2018). Although the main body of research concerning literary space has put the

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focus on the novel, today, multiple disciplinary areas contribute to redesigning and enriching multifaceted cartographies of spatiality. As Tally Jr. points out (2013, p. 2):

In a manner of speaking, literature also functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live. Or maybe literature helps readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live or will live in times to come.

Regarding children's literature, different representations of space increasingly demand a dynamic interaction with images, creating novel complicities between readers, authors and illustrators. In Portugal, the editorial investment in quality works that promote such dialogues (an investment made, for example, by publishing houses like «Planeta Tangerina», «Kalandraka Editora», «Bruáa Editora», only to name a few) has led readers to find multiple spaces of enjoyment that promote motivation for reading, thus fostering reading for pleasure.

In a recent study on picturebooks, Boulaire (2018) invites readers to follow the paths of meaning generously set forth by the authors/illustrators, and reinforces the importance «(...) to relearn to look and to listen at length» (BOULAIRE, 2018, p. 13). We believe that this is also the challenge launched by the picturebooks we have selected. In other words, what we propose is «a journey of listening» (ONDJAKI, 2018, p. 55), since, as Terrusi (2017, p. 4) poetically puts it, «Silence in wordless picturebooks also means listening to other languages, those of signs, colours, visual sentences and shapes also, in a time that slows down and in that space of solitude where multiple narrations are possible».

We will begin by drawing a brief theoretical framework, followed by some proposals for reading the representations of space(s) in *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017) and *Sidewalk flowers* (LAWSON, 2015). Pointing to the spatial singularity drawn in each one, along with its multifaceted character, we will try to delineate possible «geographies of mobilities» (CRESSWELL; MERRIMAN, 2011) that allow mapping spaces of diversified nature, thus contributing to unveil the narrative dimension of the images and the ways in which they open to a spatial plurality that encompasses and enhances multiple meanings.

The final remarks we make are meant to be a search for new ways that point towards the unexpected, renewed with each rereading of these picturebooks, in a perennial invitation to interpreting what we see.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

In his essay on the textualization of space and spatialization of the text, Reis (2014) draws attention to the relevance of the «expressive and representational» potentialities conglomerated in writing and reading in a «digital environment», which call for a

permanent reconceptualization of space, in its multiple dimensions. Emphasizing the «oscillations and semantic drifts to which the concept of space in a literary context has been subject» (REIS, 2014, 245), he reiterates the need to reexamine its developments, as discussed in the literature (BORGES FILHO, 2007; BORGES FILHO; BARBOSA, 2016; TALLY JR., 2017; 2013).

Borges Filho (2007) understands space as «(...) a broad concept that would encompass everything that is inscribed in a literary work such as size, shape, objects and their relations. This space would be composed of **scenery, nature and environment**» (BORGES FILHO, 2007, p. 22). In this paper, we will follow the proposal of Borges Filho (2007) regarding the spatial architecture of the picturebooks that are the focus of our attention.

The representation of space has been gaining some ground in children's literature (DOUGHTY; THOMPSON, 2011), especially regarding picturebooks (CECIRE; FIELD; FINN; ROY, 2016; SILVA, 2011) – very well defined by Beckett (2012, p. 2) as «(...) one of the most exciting and innovative contemporary literary genres» – because of its intrinsic characteristics that increasingly shape it as an aesthetic object that deserves attention. The deepening of the relevance of these characteristics has not only allowed the recognition of the possibilities of exploration that picturebooks offer in different educational contexts, but it has also fostered the opening of new avenues of research, especially concerning wordless picturebooks. As Terrusi (2017) points out, they «(...) safeguard and generate new visions able to offer new ways for a poetic and aesthetic education to seeing (...) they are extraordinary powerful silent educators». In her research, Bosch (2015, 2017) highlights the importance of picturebooks and stresses its polysemic character, pointing to the need for in-depth research and a categorization of wordless picturebooks subgenres, so that renewed paths of investigation might be pursued, entailing new ways of reading.

Arizpe (2013) strongly reinforces the numerous versatile paths that wordless picturebooks encompass. Her research emphasizes the importance of the renewed role attributed to readers to uncover narrative's multiple meanings, calling for interpretative skills that stimulate imagination and the redesign of curiosity. As stressed by Ramos and Ramos (2011, p. 326-327), «By including a narrative which has not been made verbally explicit, wordless picture books entail the reader's more active cooperation in the process of engendering meaning». Peritexts (GENETTE, 1982, 1987), recognized as important allies for the enjoyment of reading (MOURÃO, 2017, NIKOLAJEVA, SCOTT, 2001, RAMOS, 2011 and SOTTO MAYOR, 2016), are also seen as increasingly relevant, as

they allow readers' access to plural pathways that encourage inference making and predicting, thus greatly contributing to foster reading comprehension.

Considering the theoretical framework outlined, in the following sections we put forward some proposals for reading the representations of space(s) in *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017) and *Sidewalk flowers* (LAWSON, 2015), trying to establish a dialogue between them that echoes the goals set in the introduction of this paper.

### 3. Proposals for reading the representations of space(s)

#### 3.1. Machine

*Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017) is part of the collection «Images that tell», which obey very precise editorial criteria, as explicit in the site of the publishing house, Pato Lógico:

The **Images that tell** collection emerged in 2013 as an area of creative freedom for illustrators-storytellers. Pato Lógico challenges each guest to imagine a narrative told exclusively through images, in a format with a few predefined rules: 32 pages (plus final endpapers), a title with only one word, and reinterpretation of the publisher's logo. (PATO LÓGICO, 2018)

The illustrations of *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017) were selected for the exhibition of the International Biennial of Illustration for Children (8th edition, Castelo Branco, 2018). This picturebook is recommended by the Portuguese National Reading Plan (PNRP), for art projects in pre-school education and in 1st and 2nd years of primary education.

In this first incursion of the illustrator and designer in the picturebook, the title, *Machine*, immediately stands out, as a starting point for exploring unexpected itineraries, expanding the universe of readers' expectations and fostering inference making. As Beckett (2012, p. 2) points out, «Picturebooks offer a unique opportunity for a collaborative or shared reading experience between children and adults, since they empower the two audiences more equally than other narrative forms».

In the space of the book, the front cover and the back cover form a whole, highlighting what readers anticipate as an interior space, in which a table stands out. On opposite sides of the table, lay a laptop, a tablet, a mobile phone and a fan. Alone, looming in its uniqueness, a book is lost in the whiteness of the table, challenging readers to lay their eyes on the unusual. Enhancing readers' interest, the window that ostensibly holds vases and flower jars allows them only a short glimpse of two clouds wandering in a white sky that, perhaps precariously, offers protection from the external noise (of technology, of the city and in the city ...), throughout the visual narrative – perhaps because, as the poet reminds us, «The city is the best place in the world to walk/inside the house» (LEAL, 2016, p. 25).

The front cover and the back cover open the first inner space that will acquire relevance later, throughout the picturebook. In the front endpapers, the city gains prominence, in a silent narrative marked by the emphasis given to pollution in the city and the harsh lines of its tall buildings. The representation of outer space gives readers the opportunity to hear the city's breath muffled by the monotonous rhythm of infernal traffic, helping to enclose an open space where machines and houses have replaced people. The interior/exterior contrast is also very well achieved through the careful portrayal (inviting readers to give particular attention to detail) of urban chaos and rushing, typical of such a space, coupled with the glimpse of daily activities that concurrently take place in some houses, which readers can peer into through the different frames given by the depicted windows, perhaps providing small moments of silence where they can take a deep breath – seeing, for example, people watching TV, playing sports, cleaning the house, using the computer, etc. (but also two cats involved in their «daily routines»...).

Throughout the picturebook, the double pages help to give great status to space, enlarging it and opening a wide range of possibilities of exploration. This is particularly evident in the centrality placed on the boy's room, interior space of concentration (and saturation) of machines of all types: camera, video camera, mobile phone, console, stereo sound system, etc. Such saturation reinforces the enclosure associated with technological devices<sup>2</sup>, and the isolation that can be generated through their use. The predominance of screens of various types – with the largest of them placed in the centre of the double page – also portrays the encapsulation of «digital spaces» in the interior space, unfolding to the reader's gaze, and incites the interweaving with other screens that swarm in the macrocosm previously described – the city. It should be noted that the prevalence of digital devices is also strengthened by the exhibition on the walls of the room of several paintings depicting robots, 3D glasses and icons of digital games, among which the portrait of a factory stands out, for its uniqueness, and its contribution to pollution.

The visit of the boy's grandfather marks a second phase of the narrative, instilling a greater rhythm. The outer space reveals daily life marked by the expansion and immersion in technology and great importance is given to people who look at the screen of their mobile phone, listen to music on an electronic device, take a selfie, etc., in complete disregard for the worlds that surround them. The gift (perhaps unexpected) that the boy receives from his grandfather when they sit on a park bench – a book, maybe the most powerful technology of all – fills the space of the page and opens up a vastness of macro-

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<sup>2</sup> On the relationship we establish with technological devices and their repercussions on our daily lives, fed by multiple screens, see Cardoso (2013); Cardoso, Paisana, Quintanilha and Pais (2018); Martins (2011).  
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spaces which readers are invited to dive in with the boy: i) the solar system; ii) the animal kingdom; (iii) the sea; iv) nature. The space-character relationship makes it possible to focus on the first one, while revealing the complicity generated by the boy's rediscovery of new worlds, coming out of the book that he holds in his hands (transforming him into a tiny dot on the double page, watching the solar system closely, swimming and getting lost in a colourful sea of fish of different species and seizes, or travelling the sky, by hitch-hiking with a bird).

The multiple spaces that open before the reader's eyes are echoed in other reading experiences portrayed in picturebooks, particularly, from our point of view, in *The heart and the bottle* (JEFFERS, 2010), in which the protagonist of the narrative, a girl, plunges eagerly into the diverse spaces (for example, the sea, the solar system ...) that the shared readings with her father/grandfather provide. In this case, the front cover and back cover of the picturebook become spaces made up of multifaceted layers which reinforce the possibilities of enchantment created by the book as an object, as well as by its reading.

In *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017), grandfather and grandson are also engrossed in reading, in a permanent unfinishedness outlined in the final endpapers of the book, where they are both lost again in the whiteness of the page, as if readers were called to share this tasty silence where those who love reading not only protect and safeguard themselves but also find multiple spaces of inquiry – «Silence is, as much as the word, a vital moment of sharing of understandings» (COUTO, 2013, pag.198). A broad space is therefore created, welcoming a renewed reflection on other possible readings of what reading is, which is perhaps what Vergílio Ferreira tries to teach us, in his monumental *Thinking* (Ferreira, 2013), when he says that «The unfinished or mutilated work of art, the sketch, the fragment. More than ever, this fascinates us. Because what matters most in a work of art is what it does not say» (FERREIRA, 2013, 135).

In addition, like in other picturebooks included in the collection «Images that tell», and as Ramos and Rodrigues (2018, p. 52) point out:

The interpretative demands placed on readers allow not only to develop narrative and symbolic skills, but also the discovery of elements related to the structure and functioning of a book, literature and fictional mechanisms. The fact that these books give space for interpretation to the reader, inviting him to be a co-creator of the meanings of the narrative, necessarily entails a different reading process, more active and more involved.

### 3.2. Sidewalk flowers

*Sidewalk flowers* (LAWSON, 2015) is a picturebook whose spaces converge in the beautiful design of silences of different contours that will stimulate readers to discover, at

length, the importance of detail and the incomparable beauty of apparently simple things – perhaps reminding us that «Everyone who opens a book enters in a cloud, either to drink the water of a mirror, or to get drunk like a naive bird» (ROSA, 2014, p. 246).

This picturebook stems from the happy alliance between JonArno Lawson, acclaimed poet and author of several works in the field of children's literature, and Sydney Smith, renowned illustrator, who go hand in hand to offer readers a map of affections printed along a father and daughter' journey, across a city.

If, the author/illustrator of *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017), chose to repeatedly emphasize the dialogue between outer and inner space, Lawson (2015) privileges the first, summoning the myriad of glances of the main character – a girl who reminds us, perhaps, of little redhood – so that, sharing interpretive complicities, the readers inhabit the spaces that the author/illustrator unveils to them, gradually wrapped in a layer of affections that can bring smiles to their faces.

The front cover of the picturebook portrays father and daughter walking the streets of a city (the privileged macrocosm). The preferred chromatic palette, with a predominance of grey, black and white, contrasts, lively, with the girl's red coat, allied to the yellow of the flowers which stand out, sprouting in the middle of the title and the authors' names – but also gaining light in the little bunch of flowers in the girl's hand.

In the front endpapers, and on the front cover page, flowers are greatly emphasized, opening a range of questions about the role they may play throughout the narrative. The importance given to different species of birds that also find shelter in such spaces is also worth noting: first, in the front endpapers and, subsequently, in the small note next to the double dedication of the picturebook (in which the words of the author and the illustrator seem to touch each other, intertwining) – which allows a short pause for the readers to watch three birds sharing their meal. This image creates opportunities for dialogue with the children, teaching them to treasure moments of sharing. It will also engage them to make their own inferences and predictions about the narrative, thus promoting their understanding (PEARSON, CERVETTI, 2015, SOLÉ, 2012).

After the repeated depiction of the dark tones of city buildings, the option for a set of vignettes, gives balance to the space of the page, and allows to putting the focus on the people who make up the urban space, in a continuous movement, while highlighting the first moment when the girl picks some yellow flowers that grow freely, next to a pole, to which a bicycle is attached. It also enables readers to watch the girl stop, on the promenade, next to a fruit shop, because colour invades the black and white space of the

city, flooding it with light, in a moment of temporary suspension while the girl looks and smells the flowers that she picked.

The journey of the girl with her father across the city is, in fact, repeatedly linked to the attention she gives to the flowers, which contributes to increase the importance of the spaces represented, whether it be a covered bridge (illuminated by pink flowers the girl picks and smells), or a bus stop, next to a wall. In this case, the dark tones of the double-page space contrast with the illustrators' choice to highlight the dress of one of the women waiting for the bus – a dress speckled with flowers and stars in various colours – perhaps because she is attentively reading a book (and readers feel almost as if light emanates from it).

In two other distinct circumstances, the streets of the city continue to be fundamental microcosmic axes for the meanings they unveil through the protagonists' eyes. This is due to the relevance given to the flowers that grow freely in one of the streets, next to a statue, or, later, on the pavement tiles, continuously catching the girl's attention. These instants allow readers to value the simplicity of things that so often escape to the hasty look of the city hustle. Therefore, the girl's journey throughout the city opens, step by step, thought-provoking ways of looking at the worlds we live in. As Cresswell and Merriman (2011, p. 5) put it, «Mobile, embodied practices are central to how we experience the world. (...) Our mobility creates spaces and stories – spatial stories». Furthermore, «(...) the comings and goings, the variations or the improvisations of the walk privilege, change or leave aside spatial elements» (CERTEAU, 1998, p. 178).

Along with the girl's actions, the readers' eyes are drawn to her father, who gives excessive attention to his mobile phone, completely oblivious to the spaces that surround him. The organization of such spaces on the double page emphasizes their importance, not only because it provides a broad perspective of the relevance of the whole picture, but also encourages readers to look at small details of everyday life depicted in diversified ways (for example, small birds that wander on the pavement or the shop window displaying several objects that stimulate readers' curiosity).

The city park – firstly presented in its dysphoric character, with the help of the usual grey and white palette so as to repeatedly highlight the red of the girl's coat – is a space of passage that, brings together nature and city, in a hybrid way, marking and promoting the openness to renewed gestures of generosity, affection and care. It is important that readers first have a panoramic view of such a park, enhanced by its setting on the double page, where it cohabits with the noise of the city. This option allows the observation of a traffic jam and the corridor of passers-by, along with the depiction of small contrasting



details such as a man walking his dog, birds perched on electricity poles, and a squirrel on the sidewalk, serenely oblivious to the city spinning.

The actions carried out by the girl along the way through the park – leaving a small bunch of flowers, first next to a bird that lies, inert, in the middle of the road and, then, to a man who sleeps on one of the benches – transform space (initially with dysphoric features), into a place bathed by colour, metamorphosing the grey and black into mild green, and extending the chromatic palette to the streets of the city through which she progressively walks. The abovementioned map of affections will continue to be drawn along the streets of the city until the girl and her father arrive home. The mother and daughter embrace make it possible, to revisit, once again, gestures of generosity, this time represented by the flowers that dance in her hair.

Like the city park, the garden of the house is a hybrid space of passage that allows readers to witness the relevance of nature and the possibilities it offers to regenerate the city space, appealing to the harmony and sharing of affections between living beings. Its brightness, very well achieved by the choice of the shades of green that bathe the double page, helps to establish the city park as a large welcoming space, involving the readers and inviting them to catch breath in its beautiful simplicity.

On the back cover of the book, like in *Machine* (FERRAZ, 2017), readers are called to share the unfinished journey of the main character, resting in the portrayal of her caring for the small yellow flowers, a place of refuge in the inhospitable city and of comfort through the commitment of sharing – believing, perhaps, that «(...) many times/for everything to go well,/it is enough to know how to wait" (MARTINS, 2017, n/p). And, again, other paths of reflection are renewed.

#### **4. Final remarks**

In the two picturebooks that have been the object of our study, the intersection of intertwined spaces of affections overlaps with the dysphoric character of lack of attention that characterizes some of the city's micro-spaces. Therefore, space assumes multiple functions, thus contributing to:

- Increasing expectations about the narrative development, powerfully generating curiosity, due to its diversity and versatility, promoted, for example, by the option for the double page, which brings readers close to the city daily life, while also portraying instants of generosity framed by the streets;
- Promoting and encouraging the use of strategies to develop reading comprehension, such as making inferences and predictions, thus adding increased interest to the path readers choose to take;

- Revealing itself as a canvas that welcomes and cherishes the attention to detail, instigating the readers' gaze to linger, at length, on the different routes followed by the characters;

- Creating unusual complicities with the readers, by stimulating the drawing of affection maps that are reconstructed as the images unfold before their eyes. Spaces of passage, such as the city park, make it possible to reconnect with nature, in distinct but very beautiful ways.

It should also be noted that the opening and closing of the spaces depicted are greatly influenced in both works by the omnipresent macrocosm – the city – whose agitated everyday life is revealed in the space of the page and overflow it, involving readers in different ways. In the picturebooks under analysis the city streets also open multiple windows that allow readers to scrutinize details that teach them to look and listen to the various rhythms of the «superb tiny things» (BARROS, 1998, 27), which appeal to the reflection of all readers about how they want to position themselves in the world and in the diverse places of citizenship(s) mirrored in it.

To sum up, in the two books under study, space plays a fundamental role in shaping the visual narratives, helping readers to redefine the concept of reading, through the ways in which they offer thought-provoking paths of reflection reopened by silence as «(...) the mat in which we can lie» (ONDJAKI, 2013, p. 18). The spatial categorization carried out in this work has made it possible to: i) unveil the multifaceted nature of the settings portrayed; ii) instigate close attention to the importance we should give to small relevant details of daily life; iii) contribute to the understanding of the multiple layers of meaning to be gradually revealed to readers as they progress throughout the picturebook. In both cases, we inferred that spatial multiple meanings are nourished by the absolute centrality given to image – «Image is mediation and mirror, window and summary of the world» (TERRUSI, 2017, p. 9).

In the light of the above, we believe that in the wordless picturebooks we have selected, the versatile ways of portraying space play an important role, and have repercussions at various levels, namely in the relationship of greater complicity with readers, questioning them and surprising them with a diversity of itineraries that can be rebuilt during shared reading, silently welcoming «a subtle way of care» (COSTA, 2017, p. 42).

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