

## Without having seen it before, one cannot see it: intericonicity in wordless picturebooks

Sin haberlo visto antes, no se puede ver: intericonicidad en álbumes sin palabras

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### Abstract

Wordless picturebooks and comics tell stories using only the resources of visual language. Readers must be able to search their personal background knowledge to decipher the graphic signs. They should fill the iconotextual spaces using their experiential and intericonic knowledge. In this paper, after presenting a classification of the intericonic images, we will go on to analyze how the graphic representation of items of furniture and decorative objects in graphic narratives, could be a useful method of characterization. We will also present a reading-image-experiment done with a group of readers of different ages and origins with the wordless picturebook *Unser haus!* (Von Stemm, 2005). It will prove that only by having already seen those objects is it possible to recognise them; if not, they are invisible. We will reach the conclusion that the role of the mediators is essential to achieve a satisfying reading. They should help readers to recognise the hyperimages and foster knowledge of the hypoimage, increasing the cultural awareness of less expert readers. Recognising intericonic images aids our understanding of the characters, which leads to a better understanding of their stories and, what is more, allows us to better appreciate the richness of our cultural environment.

**Keywords:** Picturebooks; children's literature; characterization; visual literacy; reader response; reading skills; aesthetic education

### Resumen

Los álbumes y cómics sin palabras usan exclusivamente los recursos del lenguaje visual para explicar historias. El lector de estas narrativas deberá buscar en su bagaje personal los recursos para descifrar los signos gráficos. Es decir, llenar los vacíos iconotextuales usando sus conocimientos experienciales e intericónicos. En este artículo, después de presentar una clasificación de las imágenes intericónicas, se analiza cómo las representaciones de piezas de mobiliario y decoración que aparecen en algunas narraciones gráficas pueden servir para caracterizar los personajes. Para ello, se presenta un experimento de lectura de imágenes realizado con un grupo de lectores de edades y procedencias diversas usando el libro *Unser haus!* (Von Stemm, 2005) en el que se demostrará que si el lector no ha visto nunca esos objetos, estos son invisibles. Se llegará a la conclusión de que, para conseguir



una lectura satisfactoria, la función de los mediadores es esencial. Ellos son quienes deben ayudar a reconocer las hiperimágenes y promover el conocimiento de las hipoimágenes para ampliar el bagaje cultural de los lectores menos expertos. Reconocer las imágenes intericónicas ayuda a entender a los personajes y, en consecuencia, comprender mejor sus historias. Además, implica apreciar la riqueza de nuestro entorno cultural.

**Palabras clave:** Álbum ilustrado; literatura infantil; caracterización, alfabetización visual; respuesta del lector; habilidades de lectura; educación estética

## Introduction

Wordless picturebooks and comics only use the resources of visual language to explain stories. The process of reading these types of books thus consists on deciphering the visual signs of which they are composed. Arizpe (2011), summarising the work of Nodelman (1988), Rowe (1996), Nières-Chevrel (2010) and Beckett (2012), lists the main skills any reader of wordless picturebooks should have. She states that - among them - the reader should look to his background knowledge for the resources to decipher the signs and make sense of what he is seeing. To that end, he must be willing to fill in the iconotextual gaps using his experiential and intericonic knowledge.

Intericonicity is the process of creating an image from the appeal, adoption or transformation of another image. It would be the equivalent of intertextuality, a term developed by Genette (1989), but using iconic forms. Following this translation, the hypotext or original work would be called hypoiimage and the hypertext or final work would be the hyperimage. Although there are other terms for this process (interpictoriality, intervisuality, transpictoriality, etc.), we choose to use the term “intericonicity” and classify images as intericonic when objects or subjects belonging to the field of visual culture can be recognised in them.

Zuschlag (2006) argues that the term intericonicity first appeared at the “Text und Bild, Bild und Text” symposium in 1988 and that the first documentation of its use dates back to 1997, in Bleyl’s lecture entitled *Interikonizität bei Joseph Beuys*. Zuschlag points out that there are many terms that describe the relationship between works of art: replica, copy, variation, version, reproduction, quotation, paraphrase, parody, imitation, *pastiche*, reference, influence, plagiarism, forgery, homage, etc. He also stresses that the study of this phenomenon is of enormous importance in the history of art and that, despite being one of the favourite interests of art historians, neither the definitions nor their use are unified.

In this article we will identify the intericonic knowledge that the reader of wordless picturebooks and comics needs in order to achieve a complete reading. To that end, after presenting a classification of intericonic images, we will analyse how graphic representations of furniture, household appliances and decorative objects that appear in the rooms of picturebooks and comics without words can be a good mechanism to characterise the characters. Finally, a small experiment in image reading is presented in which the aim was to verify that, if the reader had never seen the objects depicted, they were completely invisible.

## An approach to intericonic imagery in wordless books

In a previous work (Bosch, 2015), intericonic images were classified according to the following criteria: author, nature, amplitude and faithfulness (pp. 369-378) (table 1).

**Table 1.**  
*Classification of intericonic images*

Intericonic images	Author	Intraiconicity			
		Extraiconicity			
	Nature	Object	Two-dimensional		Illustration
					Graphic design
					Work of art
		Three-dimensional		Industrial design	
				Work of art	
				Architecture	
	Subject	Celebrity			
		Fictional character			
	Amplitude	Complete work			
		Fragment			
		Decontextualised element			
		Composition			
	Faithfulness	Copied image			
Evoked image					

Referring to the author of the hypoimage, two types can be found: intra-iconicity and extra-iconicity. Intra-iconic images are those made by the same author. In the field of illustration, the author makes graphic references to his other works. It could be said that these are “winks” to their most loyal fans. The labels stuck on a trunk that appear in *Rainstorm* (Lehman, 2007) refer to other works of the author: one shows the tower of one of the labyrinths into which the main character of *Museum Trip* (2006) enters, another shows the cover of *The red book* (2013), and the train of *Trainstop* (2008) in another one. Extra-iconic images are those in which the hypo-image belongs to another author (illustrator, artist, designer, publicist, filmmaker, etc.). The book *The Scar* (Moundlic & Tallec, 2009) is an example of this, lying on the floor the messy room of the main character of the picturebook entitled *Prudence and her Amazing Adventure* (Gastaut, 2011).

Depending on the nature of the hypoimage, we distinguish between objects (two- or three-dimensional) and subjects (celebrities or fictional characters). Two-dimensional objects can be illustrations, graphic design pieces and works of art. Johnny Walker, the whisky brand walker, is an example of intericonic image from the field of design created by Browne (1908). We can see him strolling through the countryside in *Anno’s Britain* (Anno, 1982). As an example of an intericonic two-dimensional image based on a work of art, we want to highlight *Alt vi ikke vet* (Roskifte, 2003) where the famous poster with the wrestler André the Giant by the urban artist Obey can be seen on a building.

If the images represent three-dimensional objects, they can be industrial design products, works of art or architectural constructions. We can find emblematic objects of all kinds as industrial products: electronics, toys, furniture, automobiles, etc. For example, the pink and green Chevrolet Bel Air (1956) is clearly recognisable in *Le jacquot de Monsieur Hulot* (Merveille, 2012). Duchamp’s ready-made (1913) *Bicycle Wheel* in *Le colis rouge* (Perrin, 2007) is an

example of three-dimensional work of art. As an example of an architectural work we can point out the shape of the roof of the building in *Re-zoom* (Banyai, 1995) inspired by Le Corbusier's *Villa Savoye* (1931).

If the image depicts a subject, the subject may be a celebrity or a fictional character. Celebrities from the world of art, politics, science, philosophy... are featured in *Anno's Britain* (Anno, 1982) where we can see the Beatles playing in the street, for example. Charlott's poster in *The flower man* (Ludy, 2006) is a reference to fictional characters, as well as the Felix the Cat cartoon printed on a T-shirt in *Re-Zoom* (Banyai, 1999).

With regard to the hypoimage's amplitude (Hoster & Lobato, 2012), i.e., when the ratio between illustration and referent is taken as a basis, four types can be distinguished: complete work, fragment, decontextualised element and images that imitate the compositional structure. An example of a complete work or complete retrieval of the hypoimage could be the book covers of the library of the cultural centre of the wimmelpicturebook *All Around Bustletown: Nighttime* (Berner, 2009), among which *Nachts* (Erlbruch, 2001) can be identified. As an example of a partial retrieval, we would like to highlight a scene from *Museum Trip* (2006) where the framing only allows the lower part of several paintings to be seen: *The birthday* by Chagall (1915); a self-portrait of Van Gogh (1889); *Is There Not an Invisible World* by Redon (1887); and *The flamingos* by Rosseau (1907). As an example of the use of decontextualised elements of the hypoimage, we would like to highlight *Le colis rouge* (Perrin, 2007), where fragments of *Carnival of Harlequin* by Miró (1924-1925) are intensified and *The Sheaf* by Matisse (1952), which have been extracted from their original background and scattered across the scene. A very illustrative example of the use of the same compositional structure of the hypo-image can be found in *You can't take a balloon into the Metropolitan Museum* (Preiss Weitzman & Preiss Glasser, 2000). This comic tells two parallel stories: the visit of a little girl and her grandmother to the museum and the caretaker's attempts to recover the little girl's balloon that has flown away. The urban scenes "imitate" the works of art admired by grandmother and child. For example, we thus see the resemblance between a seal keeper and the statue *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* by Canova (1806).

As for faithfulness of the hyperimage in reference to the hypoimage (Hoster & Lobato, 2012), a distinction can be made between copied image and evoked image. In copied images, the hyperimage is more or less faithful to the hypoimage. It may be a photographic reproduction, as in the aforementioned comic, or it may be a copy of the illustrator, as in the "imitations" of works by Munch, Picasso, Hopper and other artists in *Kunst met tart?* (Tjong Khing, 2018). We can find an example of evocation or re-elaboration of the hypoimage in *Le colis rouge* (Perrin, 2007), with the simplification of sculpture called *Halebardier* by Calder (1971).

As this classification has shown, there are many types of intericonic images and many ways of referring to hypoimages. In wordless narratives, as there is no text to give clues to these intertextual relationships, the burden of identifying the hypo-images and the consequent interpretation falls on the reader.

## Objects and furniture in picturebooks and comics tell us about the characters.

In wordless picturebooks and comics, all the elements depicted may be able to provide information. Set design, props, characterisation and costumes can be used for narrative purposes and give the reader clues as to what the characters are like. In fact, illustrators do nothing but imitating life. In other words, do not the way we dress and style our hair and the furniture and objects in our homes say how we are?

This is crystal clear in documentary picturebooks, those narratives in which showing rather than telling is more important (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). But it is not only in documentary works (chronicles and panoramic storybooks) that contexts and settings are important (Bosch, 2015, pp. 224-226). They can also be in fiction. If the illustrator chooses to do so, furniture, objects and decorative elements can tell us about the age, hobbies, socio-economic level or origin of the characters, as these examples show:

The objects tell us about the characters' age. In the chronicle picturebook entitled *Window* (Baker, 2002), which shows how a natural environment is urbanised over the course of a young man's life, the author creates trail on the windowsill so that the reader knows Sam's age in each scene.

The objects tell us about the characters' hobbies. In *La balade de Max* (David & Caudry, 2008), the simple, practical and comfortable furnishings of the main character's hut are a sign of his austere life. Travel books, maps and objects such as the globe and compass tell us about Max's interest in travel. Books on atmospheric phenomena, as well as the posters of a hot-air balloon, a winged man and Hermes, and the telescope and models of a zeppelin and a light aircraft, reveal this passion for aeronautics. All these objects give us clues to the transport chosen by Max for his journey.

The objects tell us about the economic level of the characters. The main character of *Rainstorm* (Lehman, 2007) lives in a big house. Thanks to the classical furniture, the portraits on the walls, the sculptures and other valuable objects such as armours, glass cabinets and wall clocks, we know that this lonely boy who is bored on a rainy day is very rich.

The objects tell us about the characters' origin. *Doña Elba* (Díaz Prieto, 2015) tells the story of a woman who suffers the invasion of white dragonflies in her home. Looking at the furniture and decoration of the house, we can be sure that the main character lives in Buenos Aires. One of the clearest signs is the SIAM refrigerator, a household appliance created in 1935 that was a great sales success in Argentina and became a national icon. Another sign is the statuette of the Virgin of Luján, patron saint of Argentina, above the television and fridge and on the cupboard in the dining room.

These examples show that the signs used by the authors can only be decoded if the reader has seen these objects before, i.e., has a sufficiently broad background to be able to interpret these signs.

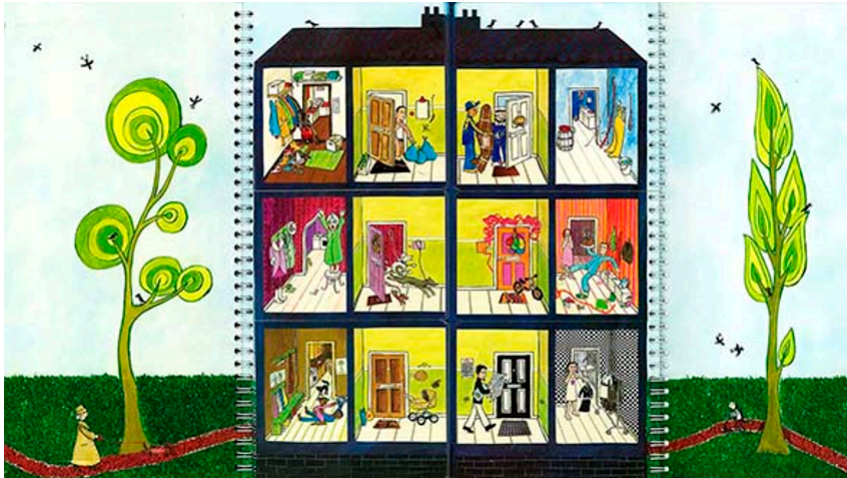
## Methodology

To what extent can objects speak about their owners? And to what extent can readers interpret what these objects say? To answer these questions, we carried out a small game-experiment of image reading that we called *Who lives here?*, where people of different ages and origins trying to discover who the inhabitants of a house might be by looking only at the furniture and decoration of the rooms.

In order to conduct this experiment, we used the picturebook called *Unser haus!* by Antje Von Stemm (2005). The book has sectioned pages and thanks to the binding with a double spiral and French door opening, the various pages where a series of rooms of six flats in the same building are depicted can be turned at the reader's will (figure 1). The author's work as an interior designer is essential for the reader to get to know the inhabitants of the six flats. In fact, on the back cover you can read that the neighbours are as different as their dwellings. And so it is.

**Figure 1.**

*Main image of Unser Haus!*



Even at the beginning of the book, these differences are clear in the variety of entrances to the dwellings. Just by looking at the stair landings, the reader can get a first idea of who lives in which flat. For example, in the attic, a box of empty drink containers, a pile of bags of rubbish and a doormat with the image of the Pink Floyd album *Dark Side of the Moon* gives us a picture of the way of life of their tenants and their musical preferences. But only those who can read these images, these references, will have a complete reading experience. If the reader has never seen this cover, he will only see a prism that breaks light into a rainbow. If it has not been seen before, it is impossible to actually “see” it. It cannot be seen, because it is not known.

*Unser haus!* is ideal for dealing with intericonicity because of its wide range of intericonic images. Intraiconic images, such as the author's own books lying on the floor in flats with children: *Nightmare Hotel* (1997) and *Nightmare Cafe* (1998) written by Henry. There are also extra-iconic images, such as the book *The fox who ate books*, by Biermann (2008), lying on the floor of another children's bedroom. There are also pieces of graphic design (Apple branding on a computer in the flat of a couple of designers) and paintings (*Composition with Red, Yellow,*

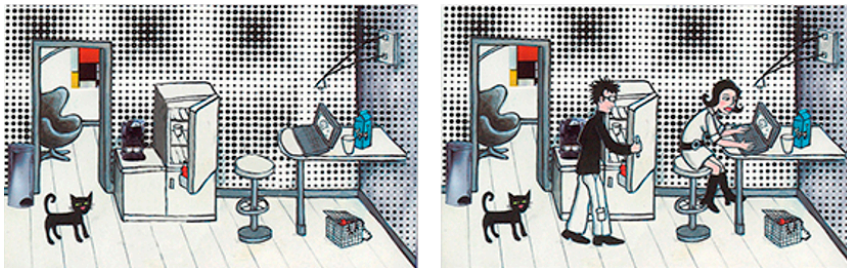
*Blue and Black* by Piet Mondrian, 1921), as well as well-known industrial products (Castiglioni's *Arco* lamp (1962), Jacobsen's *Egg* chair (1958), a chair similar to Van der Rohe's *MVR3* (1930), Reina's *OJ Nomon* wall clock, as well as the *Smila Luna* lamp and the *Snake Alleby* cuddly, both marketed by Ikea). There are also famous celebrities (Comandante Ché Guevara appears on a poster in one of the kitchens) and fictional characters (Disney's Mickey Mouse (1928) on a television screen).

### **Procedure**

To carry out the experiment, all the scenes of the book were scanned and the characters were digitally erased (figure 2).

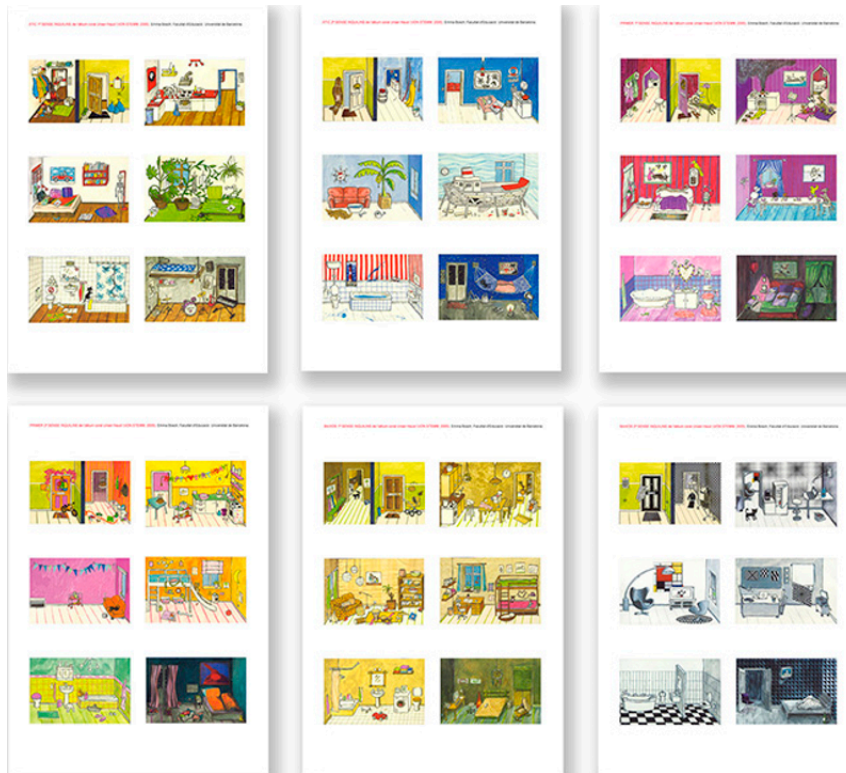
#### **Figure 2.**

Example of a room in which the characters have been erased from a flat in "Unser Haus!" and as it appears in the book.



On a DIN-A3 size sheet, the rooms of the same flat were grouped together (keeping the original size of the illustrations). Thus, on six sheets of paper, the rooms of each floor, now completely empty, were on display (figure 3).

**Figure 3.**  
*Empty rooms of the six Unser Haus! Flats*



### ***Participants***

Seventeen people participated in this game-experiment, six children aged between 6 and 11 (table 2), five young people aged between 15 and 21 (table 3) and six adults aged 47 and 79 (table 4). Of these, ten were born and live in Barcelona, one was born in Germany and lives in Barcelona and five were German. They all belong to an upper-middle social class and have some connection with the visual arts, medicine and education. Family or friendship connections with the participants allowed for contextualisation and verification of their responses. As it can be seen from the number of individuals and their circumstances, this is a small experiment with no statistical expectations.



**Table 2.**

*Children participating in the game-experiment Who lives here?*

Alias	Age	Gender		Nationality	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation
		F	M			
IF6	6a 1m	X		SPA	Exhibition designer	Graphic design producer
iF7	6a 10m	X		SPA	Health technical assistant	Clerical employee
IF9	8a 7m	X		GER	Masseur	Gynaecologist
vM9	9a 2m		X	SPA	Marketing analyst	Psychologist
mM10	10a 6m		X	SPA	Music teacher	Graphic designer
nM11	10a 7m		X	SPA	Marketing analyst	Psychologist

Note: The alias is made up of the initial letter of the name plus the letter F or M (depending on gender) and the number of their age.

**Table 3.**

*Young participants in the game-experiment*

Alias	Age	Gender		Nationality	Father's occupation	Mother's occupation	Studies
		F	M				
aF15	14a 11m	X		SPA	Music teacher	Graphic designer	Secondary education
kM15	15a 4m		X	GER	Graphic designer	Graphic designer	Secondary education
lM18	18a 2m		X	GER	Graphic designer	Graphic designer	History of art
nF19	18a 7m	X		SPA / GER	IT service manager	Graphic designer	Journalism
pF21	20a 8m	X		GER	Graphic designer	Graphic designer	Industrial design

**Table 4.**

*Adult participants in the game-experiment*

Alias	Age	Gender		Nationality	Occupation	Children
		F	M			
rM47	47a		X	SPA	Marketing analyst	2
gF50	50a 5m	X		SPA	Architect	2
gF52	52a 3m	X		SPA	Graduate in History of Art and Teacher	2
iF53	53a 1m	X		GER	Graphic designer	3
tM60	60a 6m		X	GER	Graphic designer	3
rM79	78a 10m		X	SPA	Cardiologist	3

In order to compare the reading strategies, the flats were always displayed in the same order. The instructions were simple: readers had to say who lived in each house, specifying the age, sex, profession and hobbies of its inhabitants. While looking at the images, they had to point to the “evidence” that supported their opinions. After reading each flat, they were asked if they had seen some of the objects and where they had seen them. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate further analysis.

**Figure 4.***Some participants in the game-experiment*

## Results

### *Some notes on object reading*

This simple test proved our hypothesis: the objects could speak about the characters, but only those who had seen them before could see them in the images and read them accordingly. Some of the results are discussed below.

Do the objects tell us about the characters' professions and hobbies? The book contains clues to the profession or hobbies of some of the characters, and the participants in the experiment identified them with varying degrees of accuracy. The easiest one was the opera singer as many recognised the music stand with the score, the portraits of a lady singing and the pictures of singers in a mirror (IF9/vM9/mM10/nM11/aF15/nM19/gF50/gF52/rM79). Only two younger readers did not read these clues (IF6/iF7). It should be noted that a certain vocabulary was used depending on the reader's background. For example, in the students' flat, the skeleton and the books (especially the anatomy book) were read as objects belonging to a student of medicine (mM10/nF19/pF21/gF52/rM79) or physiotherapy (gF50), or a scientist (vM9). The younger ones simply said that they "like skeletons and reading" (iF7) or "the human body and books" (mM11) or that "she is a girl who studies skulls" (IF6). On the other hand, the multiple plants in one of the rooms suggested that the tenant was very fond of plants (IF6/iF7), gardening (aF15), nature (nM11/nF19/rM79), that he was a botanist (vM9), an agronomist (gF50), a Greenpeace activist or biologist (gF52). But only four saw the hat, the cookbook and the knife box (nM11/mM10/nF19/pF21) that defined his actual profession as a cook. By not relating these signs to a cook, the knife box and the book with the image of a carrot were read as a toolbox and a crop book (rM79) and those who thought that he was a botanist they believed they were laboratory instruments and a box of seeds (gF52). More images confused the readers. For example, one tenant's dress was interpreted as a police uniform (vM9) or a roll of wrapping paper, scissors and thread on a table were interpreted as fabrics, so readers thought that the inhabitants liked to sew (iF7/mM10/nM11/nF19/gF52) or that a tailor lived in that flat (vM9). Only one person interpreted the scene correctly, saying that a gift was being packed (iF53).

Do objects speak of age? Cot, highchair, pushchair, bottle... were obvious signs that a baby lived in a flat; and toys, bunk beds, children's drawings, clutter... were signs of the presence of older children. All participants recognised those signs very easily, but it was more difficult to determine age. Even if there were clues as to the age of a character (a birthday cake with three candles) (IF6/vM9/mM10), some of them counted the balloons at the entrance: 7 years (vM9). Some of them, despite counting the three candles, did not understand why the child slept

in such a high bed at that age (aF15/gF50). It was more difficult to determine the age of the inhabitants of a shared flat. Age range was between 19 and 30 years. They were considered with the generic term “young people”, between 19 and 22 years old (gF52), between 20 and 25 (nF19), or they simply defined them as adults because they owned a car (RrM79). Some argued that students with a Ché Guevara poster and a Pink Floyd doormat could not be young, and perhaps not students either, so they believed they were in their 30s (gF50).

Do the objects speak of the characters’ origin? Reference was only made to the nationality of two of the tenants. There was no consensus on one of them and as for the other the response was very ambiguous. Based on the paintings, coats and door frames of the opera singer's home, she was identified as Russian (nF19/gF50/iF53) or of a Baltic origin (gF52). Carpets and slippers were also identified as clues (rM47/gF52) but nationality was not identified. The sofa, telephone, wallpaper and hat identified her as British or French. (IM18/pF21). Some dared to say she was Greek because she was Maria Callas. (tM60). Less concrete was the reading of the drums, the lamp, the double bed and the giraffe print on the sofa, to say that the family living there had visited Africa, (gF50), had influences from African culture (kM15) or was of African origin (aF15/nF19/gF52). However, some saw no evidence of the African origin of the objects (IF6/iF7/vM9/mM10/nM10), not even if expressly asked about it (rM79).

Do objects tell us about character and personality? In reference to the opera singer, it was said “she is very posh” because she places animals to eat at the table to eat and she has carpets in the bathroom and a mirror in the shape of a heart (aF15). That she is “a bit eccentric” because she ate at the table with her animals and slept with them (gF50). Or that she is very conceited because she had a poodle and “the colour pink says she is a flirt”. (nF19). Some readers simply thought she is “absent-minded” because he had forgotten the saucepan on the stove (nM11). Others said it was a sign that she was suffering “Alzheimer’s or senile dementia” (gF50). The order of the rooms was often referred to. Students sharing a flat were described as untidy, with dishes left unwashed, shoes unmatched on the floor, rubbish bags piling up (IF9/nM11/pF21/gF52). In fact, some said that the individual rooms in the house were “spotless” and the common areas were very messy (nM19/gF52/iF53).

### ***We only see what we have seen and experienced***

There are universal images that cross all borders (gender, age, origin...). In the experiment Mickey Mouse and the Apple Macintosh computer stand out. Interestingly, the dreamcatcher was one of the best-known objects (IF7), most had one in their homes (aF15/kM15/IM18/nF19/rM47/gF50/gF52/iF53/Tm60) and some even made one themselves. (IF6/vM9/nM10/mM11). Only the older reader neither saw nor asked about this image (rM79). He later stated that he had never seen one before.

What has not been seen before is invisible, unseen, unnoticed and unquestioned. For example, if you have never been in a shared flat before, you will not see the task-sharing sign (IF6/iF7/aF15); or, on the contrary, if you have, in addition to seeing it quickly, you may know that one of the students performs more tasks than the others (gF52/iF53). On the other hand, not seeing a house without a living room (IF6) or not having been in a student flat (iF7) will make readers always speak in terms of family (father, mother, children...). Nor can some readers

conceive that an adult bedroom has dolls, picturebooks and clothes all over the floor (rM79) and so it was said that an adult and a child slept there (gF52/tM60). Additionally, if there are two duvets on the double bed, the idea that a couple is not sleeping together is reaffirmed (nF19/gF52).

Only older readers named Comandante Ché Guevara and deduced the left-wing affiliation of its inhabitants (rM47/gF50/gF52/rM79). The only minor who claimed to know him, failed in her interpretation: “He’s a rocker because my father has the same poster and he likes rock” (iF7). The other participants were not even interested in who he was.

Only German readers were quick to identify the upside-down cooking pot on the floor of one of the rooms with the game *topfschlagen* (hit the pot), often played at children’s birthday parties (IF9/IM18/pF21/iF53/tM60). There was one participant who said when she saw it that it did not belong there (nF19). The other participants did not even mention it. Germans and those who had some connection with Germany (nF19/rM47/gF52/rM79) also recognised the very famous cartoon character from *Die Sendung mit der Maus*. And only the Germans named the Bobby Car toy car. On the other hand, not being German led to misinterpretations. For example, in her search for clues to confirm the presence of a cat, one reader (gF52) said a packet of soap on top of the washing machine was cat food. When she realised there was a drawn frog, she rectified by saying that it was a catalogue of plastic images to see in the bathtub, even if there was no bathtub at all. She needed to give meaning to an object that the Germans instantly identified as the Frosch (frog) ecological laundry soap (iF53).

Experts were able to identify situations that went unnoticed by others. Seeing with the eyes of an architect led to the detection of “serious flaws” in representation and, on seeing a lamp too close to a bathtub, some claimed: “It is not up to standard!” or “This toilet is missing the flush!” (gF50). Being a music teacher made it possible to name all the percussion instruments in a scene: *maracas*, *djembé*, *bongos*, *güiro* and tambourine (gF52) where others saw “drums” only (IF6/iF7/vM9/mM10/nM11/aF15/kM15/nF19/gF50/rM79). Having never seen a *güiro* before, one young reader mistook it for a bread loaf and, although it made no sense for it to be on the floor, she said “they like music and bread” (IF6). Having a degree in art history allowed some to identify the Op Art movement (gF52). As for the artistic background of the participants, only three of the youngest said they had ever seen Mondrian’s painting (iF7/nM10/mM11), some people mistook the author of the work for Kandinsky (tM60) or Klee (rM79) and only four of the eldest knew the artist’s name (IM18/nF19/gF50/gF52). One of them added that Mondrian was a Dutch artist from the 1920s who belonged to the “De Stijl” movement. She was a young man who wanted to study Art History (IM18).

In addition to their own home, the sources on which the participants said they had relied were the homes of family and friends, shops, hotels, doctors’ surgeries... but also films, furniture catalogues on the internet or on Instagram. However, it should be borne in mind that some of the answers regarding sources were unreliable. For example, when a lamp very similar to Castiglioni’s Arco lamp was in the same room where the interview took place, some said they had never seen it before (IF6/gF52); or the fact that a girl (IF6) said that one of the picturebooks lying on the floor of one of the children’s rooms was in her grandparents’ beach flat and the grandfather said he had never seen it when we know he had read it to his granddaughter (rM79).

### ***A few notes on stereotypes***

Most readers referred to heart-shaped lamps and mirrors, dolls, kitchenettes, curtains, shaggy rugs, books, cats and, in short, pink things as “feminine” objects (IF6/iF7/IF9/mM10/aF15/kM15/IM18/nF19/gF50/gF52/rM79). Examples of “masculine” objects: drawings of animals, musical instruments, toy cars and bicycles (IF6/iF7/nF19/rM47), plus all green things (iF7/IF9/kM15/nF19/gF50/gF52). In fact, one of the younger readers stated categorically: “There are boys’ things and girls’ stuff, there are girls’ colours and boys’ colours” (IF6). However, a few readers realised that her interpretation was biased and reflected on how these objects were used in the real world and, consequently, how the illustrator had translated them into the book (aF15/nF19/pF21/gF50/gF52). “We cannot assume that it has to be a girl just because there's a kitchenette” said one participant (gF52) who was reluctant to read the images through that prism as she searched for clues in a children’s bedroom. Therefore, in order to make it clear that they did not share this view, many girls and women used the following formula “following stereotypes, we would say that...” before giving their feedback (aF15/nF19/pF21/gF50/gF52). Some were also pleased to see that the illustrator had broken “stablished patterns”, such as giving a boy a pink drum kit and a cloud-printed duvet and putting a “no standing urination” sign on the toilet in an all-male flat (nF19).

### ***A few notes on image reading processes***

Different styles of image reading could be identified among the participants in the experiment. These differences were not due to age or origin. Some very systematic readers followed the Western reading order from top to bottom (iF7/nF19/rM79) and even from the bottom up (gF52). They went through the rooms one by one and did not move on to the next one until they had listed everything they saw. On the other hand, some took a quick glance and spoke based on the most obvious objects (vM9/kM15/IM18/pF21/gF50/iF53/tM60). Some quickly understood the dynamics of the game and soon used formulas similar to “I know that a person with such characteristics lives here because I see this object” (iF7/nF19/iF53). Others, more reserved, only spoke when asked and answered tersely (IF9/vM9/mM10). But some also linked the images to personal experiences and anecdotes (iF7/tM60). Some of them, late in the activity, began to make up stories based on the images (iF7/gF52/tM60/rM79). They were thus reminded to base their interpretations on objective evidence.

When a reader discovered that an object had given him information he believed to be reliable, he looked for it in the other flats. For this reason, some based their first hypotheses on studying the coats hung in the lobbies (IF6/iF7/rM79) or the pictures on the walls (IF9/vM9/nM11). Nevertheless, these clues were sometimes misleading. For example, in the flat where three students live there are seven coats, or the opera singer, who lives alone, has two coats (nM11/gF52). Such misinterpretations could mislead readers. For example, if one followed the pictures, the image of the opera singer with the pianist could lead one to believe that there were two people living in the flat (IF9/mM11/gF52/rM79).

Some forgot that the characters had been erased and were surprised to see flying objects like cakes (aF15) and newspapers (nF19/gF50/rM79), or to see lumps in beds (iF7).

### ***A few notes on the experiment and the material used***

Some described the activity as fun (iF7/nF19/iF53), exciting (IF9) and surprising (gF52). As for the level of difficulty, there was a wide range of opinions: from a little difficult (iF7/IF9/mM11), normal (IF9), quite difficult (vM9) to very difficult (gF52). Some said that difficulty depended on the flat (nF19). Some were interested to know how the characters had been erased (iF7/gF52) and admired the erasure and the reconstruction of the settings (iF7/nF19/gF52/iF53/tM60). On going through the book, some people wanted to compare the images with the empty rooms (iF7/mM10/aF15) and went through the flats commenting on their successes and failures (mM10/aF15/gF-50/gF52). The book surprised and delighted both young and old, especially because of the interconnectedness of the stories (aF15/mF19/gF52/iF53). Some said that “just because it looks like a children’s book, it is not necessarily for children” (pF21).

### **Conclusions**

Thanks to this simple experiment, we have been able to prove that the meaning of an intericonic image lies in its relations to other texts or cultural forms. In wordless narratives, there is no written information about these relationships. Therefore, is it only possible to recognise certain objects, pieces of furniture, works of art, etc. just by having previously seen them. These references help to better understand the characters and their stories. Identification of these relationships is a source of pleasure and, more importantly, it allows us to better appreciate the richness of our cultural environment. According to Salisbury and Styles (2012), “Recognising intericonic images gives readers great pleasure. To develop this skill, the role of the mediator is essential in helping readers to recognise the hyperimages and foster knowledge of the hypimage, thus increasing the cultural awareness of less expert readers” (p. 189).

In this vein, it is important for wordless book facilitators to design activities to make readers read the pictures more carefully and ask themselves about signs they do not know. Participants in this experiment acknowledged that they see pictures in books too quickly. Many said that with this game they had discovered that the “things” gave a lot of information and that from now on they would take more time to read the illustrations. Looking closely is an essential first step in order to recognise the images and wonder about them if they are unfamiliar. The mediator should arouse the reader's curiosity for the (visual) world where he lives and help him to increase his knowledge by pointing out that he is not seeing the signs he does not know about. The activity *Who lives here?* serves this purpose and can be easily replicated using other intericonic works.

The experiment presented herein could well be a pilot for the implementation of a larger research project that could be conducted with an international team made up of two working groups located in Spain and Germany with expertise both in Didactics of Visual and Plastic Education and in Children's Literature. The sample would be extended in terms of number of individuals (children and young people and their parents) taking into account age and gender balance. It would also be advisable to select subjects from different socio-economic backgrounds. An extended and diverse sample would allow comparison of the readings made according to different parameters and the subsequent analysis would acquire statistical value.

Knowing the image reading strategies of readers with different characteristics should facilitate the creation of effective mediation projects in which readers can activate their visual attention and awaken their interest in “knowing” the reality that has been represented in order to better understand the world in which we live.

As we said before, illustrators imitate life. But it is exciting to see how picturebooks can reconnect the reader with life. This is illustrated by the following anecdote: days after the reading, one of the girls (IF9) played a game with a friend to look for clues in the rooms of her house to identify who lived there together. The young reader reconnected her reading experience with real life.

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## Notes

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