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on image, imagery
and imagination

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04/2020
GRAPHICS

EDITED BY
Enrico Cicalò

ESSAYS

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Maurizio Unali
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INDEX

ISSUE 02 APRIL 2020 Graphics

6

EDITORIAL

Enrico Cicalò

CONTRIBUTIONS

12

Anatomographics

Carlo Bianchini

32

Photo-graphics: memories of the eternal presence in the age of digital mortality

Letizia Bollini

52

The labyrinths of Peter Sís. Picture books to travel through space and time

Camilla Casonato

76

Interconnections between form and matter in twentieth-century Murano glass

Irene Cazzaro

86

Paper models of architectural surfaces: images for implicit and explicit geometries

Caterina Cumino, Martino Pavignano, Ursula Zich

116

About sound mark: considerations of identity connotations

Maria Linda Falcidieno

128

The playful character of creative alphabets. The case of cover art between the 1930s and the 1970s

Francesca Fatta

148

**Seeing, Feeling, and Hearing Time.
Extensions of Representation
Between Diagrams and Figures**

Elena Ippoliti

180

**Visual learning and education
for augmented reality environments**

Anita Macaudo

200

**Image and Imagination. A research path
between cross-sections and etchings**

Andrea Oldani

218

**The new boundaries
like exile of conscience**

Domenico Pastore, Francesca Sisci

234

**Memory and Absence.
The family house
in two autobiographical graphic novels**

Ilaria Trizio

258

**When does the Image become a Document?
More History of Representation
for New Drawings**

Maurizio Unali

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EDITORIAL

ISSUE 02 APRIL 2020 Graphics

Enrico Cicalò

The second issue of *IMG journal* publishes some in-depth contributions presented at the second *IMG* conference held in Alghero in 2019, after the first edition held in Brixen in 2017¹. Although all the contributions have been already published in the proceedings of the conference², has emerged the need to deepen and to give more visibility to the debate on the topic of the conference, or the exploration of the ‘graphic sciences’ and their role in contemporary society. Indeed, the *IMG2019* conference was aimed to recompose the elements detectable in the international panorama of research in the fields of studies focused on the production of images; that can be labelled through the “expression graphic sciences” (Cardone, 2016).



Within the international literature, the “graphic sciences” are only partially recognizable through this name (Massironi, 2002; Suzuki, 2002). Instead, these fields of investigation are often included within academic disciplines that assume different names, such as, the “visual sciences” (Bertoline, 1998), or the “image sciences” (Mitchell, 2015). ‘Visual sciences’, ‘image sciences’ and ‘graphic sciences’ are just some of the different possible definitions that can be found in literature which, although representing different approaches and disciplinary traditions, are often used as synonyms.

The *IMG2019* conference was conceived not only as a collection of research presentations but was itself a research experiment aimed at verifying a hypothesis—i.e. the definition of a field of knowledge definable as ‘graphic sciences’—, through a method—i.e. the collection and analysis of data from call responses—, to achieve a result—i.e. the verification of the possibility of defining and representing the hypothesized ‘graphic sciences’ and its different fields of investigation. The verification of the hypothesis was made by analysing the submissions sent in response to the call for paper and for images and by creating a knowledge taxonomy linked to the contents of the ‘graphic sciences’, also through the use of a infographic representation able to visualise the complexity of the results thus obtained.

Each edition of the *IMG* conferences explores the world of images through a particular focus, and the *IMG2019* does so by proposing the keyword *-graphics* with the following meanings. *-graphics* is a linguistic suffix that adjectives what come from the sphere of *-graphia*, that is, description, study, writing, drawing. What is graphical uses signs on different supports and means. What is graphical consists of a weave of significant signs, concerns the drawing, is expressed in an image.

-*graphics* is the suffix that distinguishes the arts and sciences that have as their object the description of a subject also through images.

-*graphics* is a suffix that can be combined with several roots to create neologisms and new images, experimental and alternative forms for the description of subjects, even unusual.

-*graphics* refers to a plural vision of the modes, techniques, sciences and arts of description and representation drawn through images.

-*graphics* can be the scientific visualizations, design images, communication techniques, modes of expression, works, forms of narration, strategies of learning and construction of thought.

-*graphics* are the bodily or mental elaborations that the individual produces through his perceptive, cognitive and executive functions.

-*graphics* are the encodings through which the representations of invisible, intangible, ephemeral or immaterial phenomena and subjects are experienced.

-*graphics* can be defined the sciences involved in the study of methods and techniques for the production of visual artefacts, images and their uses in the most varied fields of knowledge and society.

Therefore, -*graphics* is the extension that *IMG2019* imagined to use to indicate the nature of the subjects on which it intends to focus and the domain to which the themes that the conference intends to study and deepen belong.

The responses to the conference calls have declined the proposed keyword in a plural way, outlining six major fields of interest of the 'graphic sciences' hypothesized:

- graphic thinking and learning;
- drawing, geometry and history of representation;

- digital modeling, virtual and augmented reality, gaming;
- graphic languages, writing and lettering;
- graphic communication and digital media;
- data visualization and infographic.

These areas have made it possible to represent the complexity of genealogy and geography of what have been hypothesized to be the 'graphic sciences' that find different names and characterizations in the international arena but that are united by their contents, belonging to the sphere of production, analysis and interpretation of images in the most varied fields of application. This genealogy and geography of the 'graphic sciences' has been represented in infographic form through an image that has been taken as a map and graphic index of the conference. Starting from Massironi's diagram of the graphic production (Massironi, 2002), and in line with his internal rules, an update of the diagram has been hypothesized in the light of the new digital technologies.

The diagram drawn takes into account not only the technological innovations, but completes the taxonomy of Massironi with the elements missing in it but present in the other taxonomies analyzed³. The new graphic representation of the subjects of study of the 'graphic sciences' thus obtained, even if without any ambition of exhaustiveness and objectivity, allows to highlight the genealogy, the geography and the taxonomy of these knowledge to start a discussion on the different fields of their study and on their mutual relations.

In conclusion, Massironi's graphic model inspired by a river network continues to highlight the possibilities of movement, exchange, contributions, confluences and ramifications within a liquid network and therefore in a continuous transformation in which the knowledge produced in one node passes through the

various ramifications reaching all the others, almost following the principle of communicating vessels that restores unity to a system of apparently non-communicating nodes that are actually strongly connected, as the fields of the ‘graphic sciences’ which appears to be not a single discipline with monolithic methods and univocally and preventively determined objectives, but rather as a set of linked fields of study with a non-unitary repertoire of interests.

Notes

- 1** The proceedings of the first IMG International and Interdisciplinary Conference - Immagini? Image and Imagination between Representation, Communication Education and Psychology are published by MDPI at the link <https://www.mdpi.com/2504-3900/1/9>
- 2** The proceedings of the second IMG International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Image and Imagination are published by Springer at the link <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-41018-6>
- 3** The full version of this article was published in Cicalò E. (2020). Exploring Graphic Science, in Cicalò E. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2nd International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Image and Imagination IMG 2019*, Springer, pp. 3-14.

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THE LABYRINTHS OF PETER SÍS

PICTURE BOOKS TO TRAVEL THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

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ESSAY 30/02

PICTURE BOOKS

MAPS

VISUAL CULTURE

GRAPHICS FOR CHILDREN

SPATIAL EDUCATION

This essay assumes the concept of the labyrinth in a broad sense, as a picture, as a symbol and as a geometric structure, but also as a narrative structure and as a metaphor: the labyrinth of History, the labyrinths of the mind, the labyrinths of life. The study takes into consideration the special relationship that links spatiality and identity in the Czech-born American artist Peter Sís's work and examines a selection of the many 'labyrinths' present in the author's biographical and autobiographical picture books, which seem designed to make the reader travel in

space and time and to take him off the usual routes.

Sís's illustrations actually seem to be imbued with the mentality of the time the story is set in, furthermore telling biographies far away in time or stories that take place in distant lands, the author invites his young readers into the meanders of personal and collective memory. Moreover, Sís's books can be considered a means to introduce young readers to topological structures, projective forms and the codes of cartographic language, a means to develop their spatial and reading and prefiguration skills.

INTRODUCTION

Landscapes, cities, buildings and more in general references to space both narrative and iconic are very frequent in children's literature. In picture books where iconic and textual languages are inseparable, these representations take often a fundamental role in storytelling and predominant graphic relevance. The topic has mainly been considered in literary and pedagogical studies but also represents an emerging field of inquiry for geographers (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer, 2015; Goga & Kümmerling-Meibauer 2017; Gollapudi 2010; Meunier 2016, 2017; Pavlik 2017, Patton & Ryckman 1990). The ongoing research indicates that picture books are a basic source for childhood education in spatial and geographical thinking. Actually, by relating with children's real spatial experience, texts and images assume an important role in the construction of the idea of space and dwelling in young readers. Pictures eventually become the primary vehicle by means of which considerations on space and the relation between individuals and their surrounding environment are offered.

French geographer Meunier has dedicated extensive studies (Meunier, 2016) and an online *carnet de recherche* (research notebook) entitled *Les territoires de l'album* (The territories of picture books) to the issue. Meunier (2016) explores picture books from the perspective of cultural geography and assets that illustrated children books do not just 'transmit' space, but also 'generate' space, create new spaces by means of their system of texts and images. According to him picture books are a privileged place for children's encounters with representations of the surrounding territory, city and architecture that connect them with the implications of the drawing of space within an extraordinary variety of expressions. These implications moreover are not only cultural, but also symbolic, semiotic and geometrical.

Meunier (2015) defines Czech-born American artist Peter Sís a "*voyageur en images*" ("traveler by images", p. 17), in

his books, in fact, the representation of space is important and closely related to the narrative. Moreover, in Sís's illustrations it is possible to glean a passionate interest in the spatiality, forms and details of architecture, cities and landscapes. The reproduction of existing cities and landscapes of the present and past is accurate, even if often accompanied by hybridisations, transfigurations and symbolic or psychological interpretations. According to Latham (2000) Sís's books are also a stimulus to observation, definitely they "are sophisticated, detailed, and filled with symbols and allusions; as such, they encourage and reward careful observation" (p. 179). Indeed, these works present an extraordinary repertoire of spatial representations and bear witness to a rare degree of attention towards geographic and architectural perspectives. Moreover, Sís's drawings demonstrate a knowledgeable and precise use of the codified forms of spatial representation and their continuous personal and expressive reinterpretation.

The theme of the labyrinth often appears in Sís's stories and illustrations. This essay assumes the concept of labyrinth in a broad sense, as a picture and as a symbol, as a geometric and spatial structure, but also as a narrative structure and as a metaphor: the labyrinths of History, the labyrinths of the mind, the labyrinths of life. In the first part, this essay takes into consideration the special relationship that links spatiality and identity in the Sís's stories and outlines the field of investigation and the resources taken into account. In the second part the text examines a selection of examples of the many 'labyrinths' present in the author's artworks and the 'maps' that he provides his characters and the reader to get out of them. This sort of short 'atlas' essentially highlights some recurring types of labyrinths. By analysing texts and illustrations, it gradually emerges how focusing on this topic can be a stimulating way to investigate the special spatiality of the Sís's picture books.

SPACE AND IDENTITY

Filmmaker, muralist, illustrator and writer Peter Sís was born in Brno in 1949 and moved to the USA in 1982, where he lives and works to this day. His personal life, as well as his childhood and teenage years, marked by the climate of totalitarian oppression of the Communist regime and Soviet influence, is deeply present in his works (Parmegiani, 1997). Sís often chooses main characters who share his dream of escaping and asserting themselves from a hostile environment. In his books, particularly biographical ones, he describes the lives of his characters as a labyrinth of open possibilities and barred paths, through which everyone pursues his dream. The reader follows the protagonist in his adventures, gets lost following his difficulties and failures, but then finds his way back when the character finally manages to assert the destiny he has chosen.

The theme of the journey is very important for Sís who has also been called “artist of wandering” and “migrant geographer” (Meunier 2015, p. 288). His stories indeed portray travelling as an experience leading to discovery and freedom, a concept that dominated his whole youth spent within the boundaries of the regime and lived, throughout his childhood, through his father’s trips on the other side. According to Cantavella (2017a) “the profusion of maps found in in Sís’s biographical picture books expresses an understanding that the exploration of identity is intimately linked with the exploration of the spaces in which that identity is formed” (p. 39). In his works, space and time are inextricably bound (Cantavella, 2017a, p. 49), moreover, descriptions of places and their connection with his characters’ stories is particularly significant. For this reason, as we shall see, it has been said that Sís carries out a ‘spatialization of identity’.

Within Sís’s extensive body of work, here the focus will be on those where he appears as both author and illustrator,

and particularly his biographical and autobiographical ones. Four volumes have been examined telling the lives of Christopher Columbus (*Follow the Dream*, 1991), Galileo Galilei (*Starry Messenger*, 1996), Charles Darwin (*The Tree of Life*, 2003) and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (*The Pilot and the Little Prince*, 2014). In addition, three autobiographical works dedicated to Sís's childhood and youth have been considered. Two of these are set in Prague, i.e. *The Three Golden Keys* (1994) and *The Wall, growing up behind the iron curtain* (2007). In the third one, *Tibet Through the Red Box* (1998), the author recounts his father's experiences in Tibet during the 1950s, referring to his father's long-hidden diary.

In all these books the theme of the labyrinth appears several times, sometimes explicitly, with the traditional iconography of the maze, other times in the labyrinthine transfiguration of real spaces, others indirectly, in the structure of the story or even in the graphic structure of the pages.

Actually in order to inquire into the matter of the representation of space it is necessary to take the book-object itself into consideration by analysing its narrative structure, format, graphical composition, etc. Sís also shows particular attention to the use of space in the relationship between words and text and in the composition of the page. As Latham (2000) observed Sís uses paratextual elements and multiple formats, moreover he merges text and pictures to achieve synergy and places sentences in such a way as to form shapes and to transform words in pictures. This way his pictures and texts interact with each other, and they invite the reader to interact with them.

PETER SÍS'S LABYRINTHS

Whether it is a place or a system of places, the labyrinth can be considered first and foremost a geometry; more precisely, a geometry of topological character, in the sense that it is based on notions such as those of frontier, order, continuity,

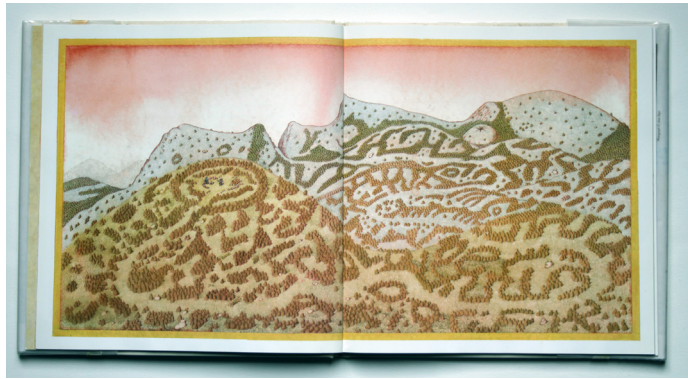
inclusion, and lends itself to homomorphic transformations without alteration of structure. From a geometrical point of view, the labyrinth is a space in which the relationships of continuity and contiguity are dominant: the different parts relate only to those contiguous, connected or accessible to them (Ugo, 1991, pp. 152-153).

The labyrinth is therefore an essentially topological space, although it can be represented graphically in many ways. Typically, it is portrayed with a plan, but it can also be represented with a scheme, or even a perspective or an axonometric projection. It can be simply a drawing, a grapheme, but it can also be a building or a garden or even a larger area. Sís's drawings often represent mazes or contain mazes (Figure 1) and frequently the artist draws real spaces (city plans, gardens, landscapes) as if they were mazes, transfiguring them (Figure 2). In his illustrations space is transformed in many ways, introducing incongruous elements, interlacing real space and perceived space, real places and places revisited by memory, creating endless hybridizations and metamorphoses. Real and imaginary intertwine to tell the characters' experience of the places. In these drawings the forms of the representation are used with great freedom and inventiveness: Sís resorts from time to time to orthogonal, parallel, perspective projections and also to non-projective representations, such as diagrams and graphs. These different ways of representing space are then

Fig. 1 Fig. 1 Peter Sís, *Tibet Through the Red Box* (1998, pp. 26, 36). The Potala Palace in the center of Lahsa (on the left) and a maze-like garden (on the right).



Fig. 2 Fig. 2 Peter Sís, *Tibet Through the Red Box* (1998, pp. 22-23). Mazes-like landscape.



often combined, hybridized too, giving rise to imaginative and fascinating, but also unusual and enigmatic, creations.

Telling biographies far away in time or stories that take place in distant lands, Sís invites his young readers into the labyrinths of space, time, and the meanders of personal and collective memory. Perhaps also for this reason in his books there is a profusion of images to help the reader find his way around geography, history, events of an epoch or of a character, such as aerial views, cartographies, schemes, family trees, geographical and cognitive maps (Figures 3, 4).

As we have seen, the characters of Peter Sís have in common the experience of the trip as an objective biographical event (Darwin's voyages of exploration, Saint Exupéry's flights, trips among the stars of Galileo, just to name a few). However, the journey can also be understood as a metaphor for the search for one's own destiny, as an affirmation of one's own idea and as an exercise of personal freedom. This recurring theme, as has been said, is clearly linked to the personal story of the author. In the long interview reported in Host's essay (1996), Sís says he used the drawing to travel since childhood: "if there were places I couldn't go, I could at least draw them" (p. 47). Moreover, the journey for him is not only a crossing of space, but also an exploration of thought. In the work dedicated to Galileo, for example, Sís tells of a man who goes even further than the great explorers just by means of his thoughts and goes as far as an unknown world that is entirely the fruit of his brain (Host 1996, p. 52).

THE LABYRINTHS OF PETER SÍS PICTURE BOOKS TO TRAVEL THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

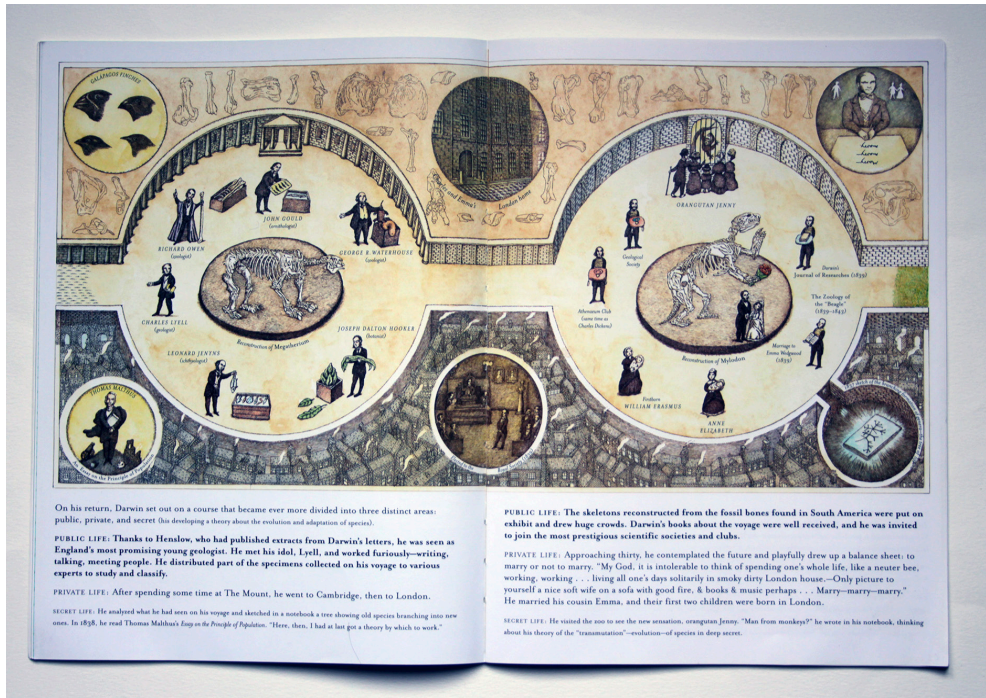


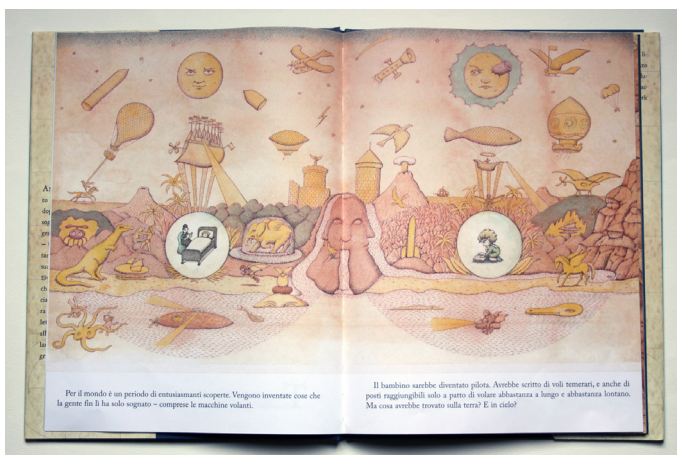
Fig. 3 Previous page: Peter Sís, *The Tree of Life: Charles Darwin* (2003, pp.28-29). Double page spreads explaining the public, private and secret life of Darwin.

Fig. 4 Peter Sís, *The Pilot and the Little Prince* (2014, pp. 10-11). Cognitive map explaining Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's childhood.



The strong emotional bond that links the protagonists of the stories to the places leads the reader to identify with and immerse himself in these representations of faraway territories, mysterious cities, fabulous landscapes and fascinating architecture (Figure 5). In order to orient himself in this complex imagery, the reader has at his disposal not only the thread of the story but also the numerous references to History and real places that are described and portrayed with great precision. The illustrations of Sís –as Host (1996) suggested– are texts to be decrypted, whose vocabulary is made of characters, buildings, bricks and stones (p. 36). Reading his books

Fig. 5 Peter Sís, *The Pilot and the Little Prince* (2014, pp. 8-9). Landscape. “For the world is a time of exciting discoveries”.



therefore means continuously getting lost and finding oneself, in time and space, sure enough his imagery contains a maze of labyrinths in which to get lost, but at the same time also a repertoire of maps to find your way back. Besides we must not forget that a labyrinth is essentially a challenge, a game and that after all, all labyrinths are of a playful or initiatory nature (Ugo, 1991, p. 152).

PRAGUE AND OTHER MAZE-LIKE CITIES

The book where the theme of the labyrinth appears more explicitly is *The Three Golden Keys* (1994). Significantly, it is a work strongly linked to the personal story of Sís and to the memory of his childhood and family. Indeed the book comprises the story of travelling on three different levels: it consists, in fact, in a stroll through the author's hometown, a journey through Bohemia and its legends, and in an interior voyage backwards in time in search of one's own roots (Meunier, 2015, p. 143). It tells the story of a man (obviously the author) who returns to his hometown that looks at first desolate and empty. He has to find three golden keys to open his childhood home, once the door of memory is opened, the city will return to life.

In the first part of the story the city, seen from above, appears strangely silent and its streets are deserted. As Host (1996) noted, Prague hides, is mysterious, and unlike the other cities in the world watched by tourists, it is she who seems to be watching the reader. The French writer describes the town as follows: "*c'est encore un indescriptible entrelacement de toits et de façades –désordre visible–, et bientôt, les échappées d'un labyrinthe –ordre secret que l'on devine*" ("it's still an indescribable intertwining of roofs and facades –visible disorder– and soon, the escapes from a labyrinth –secret order that we can guess", p. 24). Prague does not offer itself fully, you have to conquer its keys that can only be found by venturing through un-

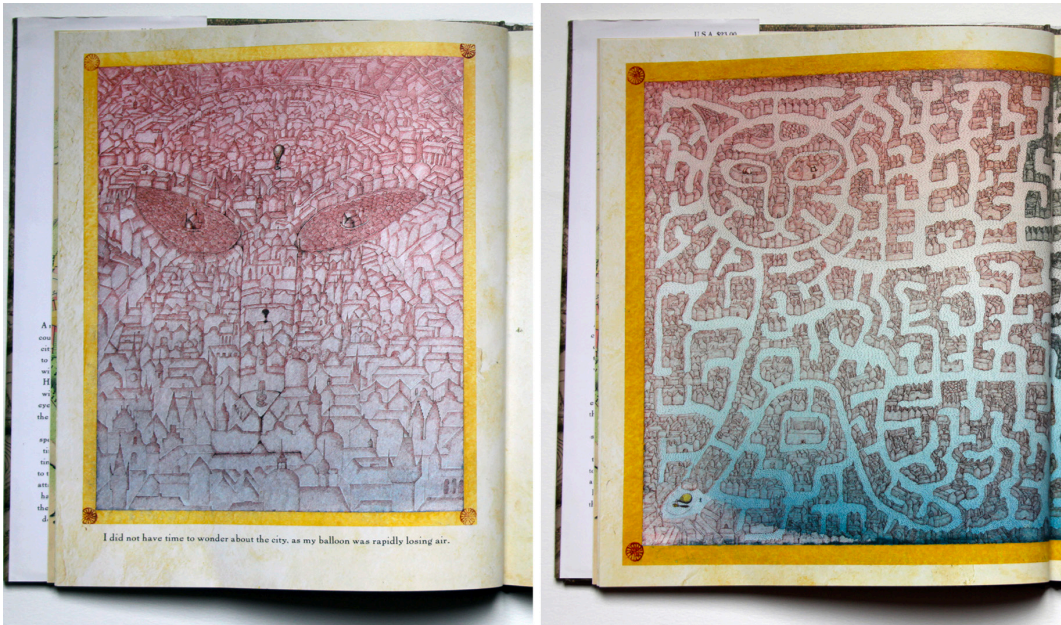


Fig. 6 Peter Sís, *The Three Golden Keys* (1994, pp. 14, 16-17) Pictures showing desolate Prague.

known streets and squares and immersing yourself in its past full of legends and mysteries. In the third map of the city that appears in the book, the streets form an inextricable maze and the narrator is invaded by the anguish of no longer recognizing or remembering places (Figure 6). In the tangle of streets and squares takes shape a cat that will turn out to be the guide that will accompany the protagonist in the journey through the city and through his childhood memory. In the following pages, the city gradually becomes comprehensible and recognizable again, the labyrinth melts away, the dreamlike city transfigured by the anguish of the protagonist gives way to the real city (Figure 7). This path of the protagonist through the labyrinths of the city and memory is clearly a path of initiation, marked by trials, as it happens in legends, but also in the existential path of each one. It is no coincidence that the author dedicates the text to his daughter, born in another country, with the intention of giving her back a piece of her story (Sís, 1994, p. 10).



Fig. 7 Peter Sís, *The Three Golden Keys* (1994, pp. 14-17). The protagonist walking in the streets of his childhood.

In *The Wall*: growing up behind the iron curtain, the book that recounts the author's youth, Sís (2007) again transfigures his city, transforming it into a maze. In the picture that describes the entrance of Soviet tanks into Prague in 1968, the city is represented as a circular labyrinth invaded by small red rectangles that penetrate into its heart,

infesting every street, every square like a virus (Figure 8). The bewilderment of the protagonist is suggested by a formless human figure holding his own screaming portrait, in an explicit game of cross-references with Munch's famous painting. Once again, the expression of a state of mind linked to a particular experience of a place and the way this place is portrayed are closely connected.

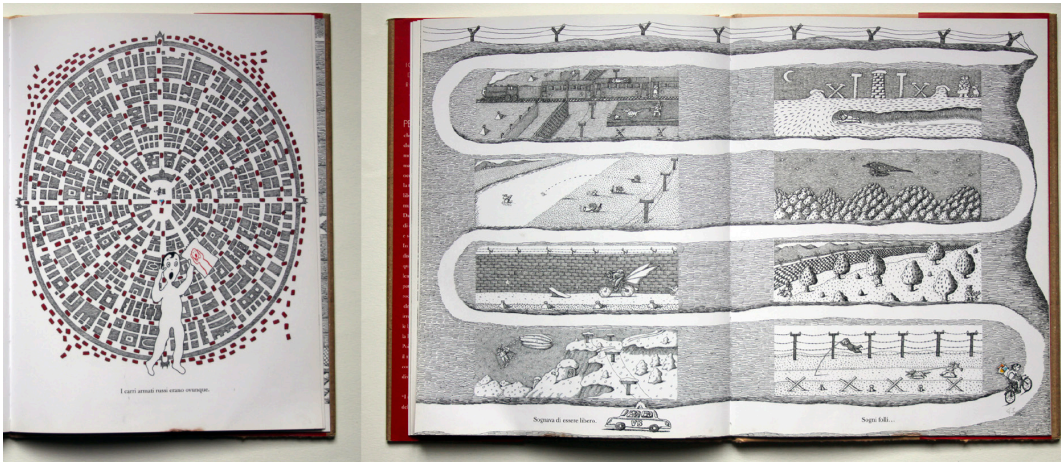


Fig. 8 On the left: Peter Sís *The Wall: Growing up Behind the Iron Curtain* (1997, p. 29). "Russian tanks were everywhere". On the right: Peter Sís *The Wall: Growing up Behind the Iron Curtain* (1997, pp. 44-45). "He dreamed of being free. Crazy dreams..."

At least on another occasion Prague is iconised in a labyrinth and once again in an autobiographical tale centred on the relationship between places and affections. In *Tibet Through the Red Box*, the book's endpapers show the silhouettes of two faces looking at each other and separated by the sea or a river. Latham (2000) observed that "the eyes in each face appear to be an aerial view of the city—two different cities— that seen from above have a maze-like quality" (p. 184). Following the author, the cities are Prague and a city in which the father lived for a time (Beijing or perhaps Lahsa), besides the two faces represent Sís and his father gazing each other through the time and the maze and the river suggest the journeys. And again, Lahsa appears in the form of a labyrinth in another picture, with the Potala Palace in the center, magnificent, imposing and unreachable: "my father reached Potala to find it surrounded by a sea of military tents.

He had no idea how to get in. Then he notices a cut here, a cut there, in a shrub, the grass, a leaf, a tent. The cuts showed him a path through the camp” (Sís, 1998, p. 51. Figure 1). And so, with difficulty, the father manages to reach the palace and later crossing its thousand magical rooms he realizes that “it was all here, recorded on these walls, the past and the present. In that short moment, I think my father became who he is today” (Sís, 1998, p. xx. Figure 9).

Fig. 9 Peter Sís, *Tibet Through the Red Box* (1998, pp.40, 51). Mandalas.



METAMORPHOSIS

In the images of Sís often the landscape, the cities, the buildings take on anthropomorphic or zoomorphic features (Figure 6).

For instance, in *The Pilot and the Little Prince* Saint-Exupéry is stuck in New York that seems oppressive and alien to him, the elongated ‘body’ of the Manhattan Island surprisingly turns into a crocodile. In the drawing along the edges of the island the skyline of the buildings overturned on the floor suggests the scales and sharp teeth of the animal, moreover the bridges connecting it to the mainland become its stumpy paws (Figure 10).



Fig. 10 Peter Sís, *The Pilot and the Little Prince* (2014, pp. 36-37). New York map.

Besides in *The Three Golden Keys* mysterious faces and animals constantly peep out and observe the reader from the palaces, trees, streets, facades and from the very plan of the city of Prague. As Latham (2000) observed, “several illustrations show Sís walking through the city, with his memories illustrated as ghostly drawings overlaid on the more realistic pictures of the streets of Prague” (p. 186. Figure 7). According to Host (1996) these evanescent figures represent the time, the past (of the city and the protagonist), they are shadows that come from legends, from our memories and our imagination and you should not be afraid of them if you want to find the key to the labyrinth (p. 24).

In other cases, the metamorphosis takes place in the landscape, especially when the author chooses to use a bird's eye view to represent it. The territory then transfigures itself as when we observe the earth from above and we seem to catch a glimpse of human or animal forms in the landscape's features (Figure 11). In *The Pilot and the Little Prince* the coasts of Africa overflowed by Saint-Exupéry with his airplane take the

shape of a human being. "In this way Sís emphasizes the importance of knowing the geographical layout in those early years of aviation, when maps were scarce and often imprecise. Here, we see an entirely unreal vision of the landscape, a kind of labyrinth that turns the protagonist into an explorer" (Cantavella, 2017a, p. 49).

The examples of metamorphosis of real spaces contained in the books of Sís are actually numerous and allow the real and the imaginary to intertwine with countless solutions to tell the experience of space lived by the characters.

Fig. 11 Peter Sís, *The Pilot and the Little Prince* (2014, pp. 18-19). Metamorphosed landscape.



ICONIC LABYRINTHS, PATHS AND PARADOXES

References to the traditional or archetypal iconography of the labyrinth as a complex geometric representation imbued with symbolic meanings and linked to spiritual and initiatory paths, are frequent in the illustrations of Sís (Figure 1).

A recurring reference is the mandala (Collapudi, 2010), a spatial metaphor which proposes a centripetal and concentric organization and becomes for Sís one of the many cartographic forms of its repertoire (Meunier, 2015, p. 35. Figure 9).

Moreover, often the author follows a cartographic logic organizing the contents in the space of the double spreads, as if the pages themselves were maps, or mazes. According to Cantavella (2017a), these pages offer the synthesis of several disparate elements and articulate them in the space of a unique representation (Figures 3, 4). “His pages are full of clues and points of reference that we must learn to read in order to understand the whole, for collecting information and oversaturating images with detail and juxtaposition of texts from different sources are features of Sís’s style” (Cantavella, 2017a, p. 51). The reader is thus induced to search in the intricate page concrete reference points to know where he is and find the paths to follow. The distribution of the text on the page is also a challenge for the reader. The graphic use of the words in Sís was studied by Latham (2000) who highlighted that the artist places sentences in such a way as to form shapes so that he merges text and pictures to achieve synergy. The scholar stated that “Sís’s artistic technique emphasizes the concept of vision as it relates not only to the visionaries depicted within the books, but also to readers/observers who are implicitly encouraged to develop their own ability to ‘read’ the pictures and ‘see’ the words” (p. 179).

In Sís’s works also appear the most particular forms of labyrinth, those that are at the limits of the very definition of this archetypal structure. For instance, he uses the paths and typically the path puzzles for children, that are de facto unicursal maze that connect two points, an initial and a terminal one connected by a single path (Ugo, 1991, p. 153. Figure 8). Besides, in the family of labyrinths, at the opposite end of the type of the path, there is the desert, where you can go anywhere and nowhere. In *The Pilot and the Little Prince* the Saint-Exupéry’s plane crashes in the North Africa desert during a flight to Saigon. In the picture the sense of

bewilderment caused by a landscape without boundaries is accentuated by the lack of light, because the protagonist finds himself immersed the darkness of the night. Also, darkness, as a condition that prevents you from finding points of reference, is undoubtedly a sort of labyrinth.

MAPS TO GET LOST AND FIND YOURSELF

As already mentioned, Sís introduces his young readers into the labyrinths of space, time, history of ideas and explorations. His characters have in common a destiny of freedom and self-affirmation that the context in which they live does not allow them to realize. In all stories the journey is the solution to find the key to the existential, cultural, political or geographical 'labyrinth' in which they are locked. The infinite variety of maps that appear in the texts, certainly also responds to this need to tell the geographical, historical and cultural contexts in which the characters move, but at the same time the maps allow young readers to travel together with the protagonists. Then, as Host (1996) summarized, in their minds "*s'illumine une carte du monde comme un rêve d'évasion*" ("a world map like a dream of escape lights up", p. 36).

A lot has been written about cartography in illustrated books for children and in particular in Sís's (Cantavella, 2017a, 2017b, Meunier, 2015, 2017, Pavlik and Bird, 2017). Among the possible ways of representing territories, landscapes, and cities, maps are the most distant from the visual experience and most require abstraction and interpretation skills. Even if they are highly symbolic devices, nevertheless, they frequently appear in children's book, thus introducing young readers to cartographic language and contributing to the development of their spatial reading and prefiguration skills (Meunier, 2016, pp. 35-72). Cantavella (2017a) highlighted the relationship between Sís's discourse on identity and the particular use of maps in his illustrations. The scholar also pointed out how maps are used

Fig. 12 Following page:
Above: Peter Sís, *Starry Messenger*
(1996, pp. 20-21). Map of Europe at
Galileo's time.
Below: Peter Sís, *Follow the Dream: The
Story of Christopher Columbus*. (1991,
pp. 18-19). Map of the known world at
Columbus's time.



as tools for the spatial organization of content and as a way to structure the page. “The maps –she observed– represent a call to adventure and provide spaces for symbolic reading. They are configured as a kind of palimpsest that establishes intertextual relations with elements drawn from collective memory, from history, from the culture of the time being explored, along with the most private mythology of Sís himself” (Cantavella, 2017a, p. 53).

As a matter of fact, far from being objective and neutral descriptions of the physical world, maps reflect historical, political and social aspects, as Sís’s maps clearly demonstrate. In his books one witnesses the revival of the symbolic dimension and pictorial and fable-telling language of historical cartography, mainly of medieval and modern maps. Therefore, they testify cartography’s diverse historical and cultural expressions, as well as its varied geometric forms. In fact, Sís’s maps often show a contamination of various methods of spatial representation. They unite topographical precision and evocative skill, zenithal projections and three-dimensional representations, pictorial depictions and technical drawings, the conciseness of schemes and the descriptive ability of landscape drawing. Cantavella (2017a) underlined that “maps are, for Sís, an important way to organise information in space (non-linearly) and to locate the reader at a midway point between the real and the imaginary” (p. 41). The profusion of maps in his biographical books, which the scholar defines ‘odes to space’, proves that the exploration of identity is closely connected with that of the spaces in which such identity has constructed itself; from this perspective, Sís carries out a ‘spatialisation of identity’.

CONCLUSIONS

Sís’s works are not easy to read, they speak the language of art, ancient cartography and ancient books and the importance of the historical dimension of his work is reflected, on

a graphic level, in a multitude of visual references. We could state that this articulated set of references in the texts and in the pictures constitutes in itself a very intricate labyrinth for a young reader. However, by exposing children to this set of cultural and visual stimuli, the author offers them a very rich heritage. Sís accompanies the reader on extraordinary journeys and does so through a surprising repertoire of complex images that draw on the visual culture of the eras to which it refers. In fact, as we have seen, many of Sís's illustrations seem to be imbued with the mentality of the time the story is set in. Therefore, to delve into his stories is like entering a labyrinth that crosses space and time. The author 'navigates' in the history of painting, cartography, naturalistic and landscape drawing, then breaks the visual rules to which we are accustomed, bending them to his story, to the state of mind of the characters, to the emotions that the places arouse in them. This way Sís's books also become a means to introduce young readers to topological structures, projective forms and the codes of cartographic language, a means to develop their spatial and reading and prefiguration skills. Through his personal way of describing space and relating it with time, the author actually connects his young readers with the codified forms of representation, thus enabling them to become familiar with them, and teaches them how to read them. The reader is exposed to complex representations and taken to unknown territories, however, thanks to the particular stylistic style of the author by which you are captivated, they soon become familiar. Sís's graphic language in fact even if imbued with visual references from the past is extremely personal and up with the times.

The artist always provides, somehow, the solution of its labyrinths or more possible solutions. They are not designed to make the reader lose his way or imprison him, but rather to make him travel, to take him off the usual routes. Besides they are designed to accompany inside the personal story of a character, inside his experience and his emotional life, inside his era, to live an engaging

and exciting experience that cannot be fully understood, just as it is not possible to comprehend in a complete, immediate and purely rational way a man's life or the spirit of an era or even a place.

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The works by Peter Sís that are referred to in the present work do not present page numbers. The convention that numbers pages starting from the cover was therefore adopted.

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