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on image, imagery
and imagination

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EDITED BY
Daniele Villa, Franca Zuccoli

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EDITORIAL

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This issue 06 of *IMG journal* addresses the crucial question of how images –in their eclectic modes of implementation and presentation– can function as facilitators of learning and of the construction or expression of knowledge. The use of images in learning and occupational settings, which has always been sensitive to change, has evolved over time and continues to evolve in step with human development. Even if we confine our analysis to the domain of teaching and learning –with a view to drawing out the breadth of application of images from day care to kindergarten through primary/secondary school and university training courses– we still encounter a great diversity of perspectives and programs composing a truly complex trajectory that is difficult to define and catalogue. >

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One possible means of conducting this analysis, however, is to home in on the images used or created within a given teaching-learning path, investigating how they were identified and presented, what was done with them, how they were modified, and what role they played in the teaching-learning process, whether formal (school-university) or informal (where who is teaching whom remains an open question). Another analytical approach is to examine the type of image selected for use, even simply in terms of analogue versus digital images (Dallari, 1986; Farné, 2002, 2021).

To come back to the teaching-learning process per se, a key reference work still today, for those with an interest in education, as well as in image, is Comenius' (1592-1670) *Orbis sensualium pictus* (1658), thought to be the first textbook in which pictures were purposely introduced to facilitate pupils' learning. In this wonderful book, whose various European editions featured both Latin and the vernacular of the country of publication, images played a privileged role. To understand the importance that Comenius attributed to images and their material rendering, it should be noted that he put off the publication of another book because he had not been able to find good enough illustrators:

I would have liked to enrich this book with figures that vividly expressed the shape of things, placing beside each the corresponding nomenclature, so that the children's wits would be more readily engaged and their first impres-

sions of things more accurate. However, I gave up this project (although it had already been initiated) due to the lack of good engravers in this place.

(Comenio, 1974, p. 560)

From the very first illustration (the prelude or *invitatio*), the teacher speaks directly to the students, inviting them to follow him along this new pathway through the world of knowledge. “Teacher. *Veni, Puer! disce sapere*. Pupil. *Quid hoc est? sapere*. Teacher. *Omnia quae necessaria, recte intelligere, recte agere, recte eloqui*. Pupil. *Quis me hoc ostendam tibi omnia; nominabo tibi omnia*. [...] *Hic habes vivum et vocale Alphabethum*.” [Teacher: Come, boy! Learn to be wise. Pupil: What is it to be wise? Teacher: To understand all that is necessary, to act rightly, to speak properly. Pupil: Who will teach me this? Teacher. I with God. Pupil: How? Teacher: I will lead you through all things; I will show you everything; I will name all things for you. [...] Here you have the living and vocal alphabet.] (Comenio, 1974, pp. 560-570, our translation from Latin)

The image becomes a key stage along the path towards knowledge, a distinct entity that is not a mere replacement for words, or a possible way to make learning come alive, but rather is the only substitute for the thing itself, because as Comenius as apt to recall:

In schools too they teach words before things
[...] Yet because things are substance and words
are accidental; things the body and words the

ornament; [...], they must be presented together to the human intellect; but first the things, which are the object of both the intellect and the discourse.

(Comenio, 1974, p. 223)

Although in introducing this issue, we thought it important to focus on Comenius, whose contribution still tends to be overlooked, there is a further, additional point that needs to be made. Images may be analysed from two different perspectives: those presented for teaching purposes, which have been pre-chosen by the teacher on account of their clarity and power to exemplify or illustrate a concept, development, or vision of knowledge; and those constructed and created directly by students, researchers, or artists themselves, with a view to exploring unknown territories or pursuing their own personal lines of inquiry.

John Berger has something to say on the dimension of inquiry, and specifically in relation to the act of drawing and the potential that flows from the encounter between our gaze and a given drawing:

I believe that the most intense and open-ended activity of our eyes, of our gaze, occurs in drawing. There is something before us and, with our eyes, we question its manifestation. It is generally believed that the thing looked at is passive and that it is we, in observing it, who are active. In reality, what happens when one truly

draws –and I am certain that anyone who has attempted to draw in a non-mechanical fashion will agree– is that, at a certain point, the thing releases energy, which is there to encounter the energy contained in the gaze of the beholder. Let us imagine for a moment that this energy is a beam: each time the two beams touch, something happens. Sometimes they do not meet, similarly to when one speaks without being heard. This means that the act of looking is in fact an active, non-one-sided, reciprocal encounter. Which naturally corresponds to the mystical-philosophical theories that held sway until the eighteenth century, I would say more or less up to Descartes. In the terms of those theories, appearances were read as messages: messages that were hidden or contained in, or conveyed by appearances, and the visible was in some sense a sign of the invisible.

(Berger, 1980, p. 3)

Berger further investigates this issue in the introduction to his book *On Drawing*:

For the artist, drawing is discovering. And that is not just a slick phrase, it is quite literally true. It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again; or, if he is drawing from memory, that forces him to

dredge his own mind, to discover the content of his own store of past observations.
(Berger, 2005, p. 11)

The various papers in this issue all view image as a form of exploration and knowledge that is complete in itself. The authors selected to contribute were asked to provide a detailed account of their research and projects that reflected how images variously represented for them a space of in-depth inquiry, a tool, an opportunity to exchange ideas.

Even when the research presented here deals with issues related to spatiality, it is possible to find a common thread linking the different stages in the production of knowledge: visual thinking plays a foundational role not only in the translation of knowledge into communicative form but is itself a trigger for generating possible innovative aspects in the relationship between subjects and space.

The formalization of spatialized thinking, whether analytical or design-related, cannot be separated from an ongoing confrontation with the world of the visual, in its possible diverse and extensive declinations. From this point of view, the contributions in this volume also teach us to look more closely at the intimate relationship between our educational actions and the physical spaces that contain them, in a constant interpretative circularity mediated by images.

Drawing comes before, during and after, within this process of knowledge making.

In light of the contents of the issue, it seems appropriate to close this introduction with a short aphorism that Bruno Munari, in his work *Before the Drawing*, placed next to one of his own illustrations: “Seen close up, it is highly complex” (Munari, 1996, p. 26). This caption encapsulates the observation that the world of images is most intricate, indeterminate, and richly multifaceted, offering those who work with the medium the opportunity to enhance their personal development via a constantly evolving relationship with a field that is itself a living form of learning.

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