



14. Stepping into the world of houses. Children's picturebooks on architecture

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Abstract Today's editorial output of nonfiction picturebooks about the features of houses has become rather diversified. The works range from creative proposals for infants right up to ingenious picturebooks illustrating house-building techniques or historical developments of architecture. These picturebooks often use hybridized narrative forms. This chapter aims to outline the characteristics of contemporary non-fiction picturebooks about architecture, with a view to proposing a taxonomy for classifying the main narrative solutions.

Keywords houses, architecture, taxonomy, hybridization

INTRODUCTION

The house is an inescapable *topos* of children's literature. In its multiple variations (shelter, nest, hut, house, castle, urban cluster and so on), it gives shape to various forms of human habitation and embodies one of the most beloved and sacred places in human existence, a space in which to mull over one's condition, build relationships with others and outline the perimeters of our existence in the world (Downey, 2013).

However, the representation of the house in children's literature was significantly redefined by urban, social and cultural transformations after the Second World War. There are many reasons for that. Firstly, after the Second World War, many European countries carried out monumental urban reconstruction plans to provide their citizens or war-time refugees with a new home considering the thousands of homes destroyed during the air raids. In other cases, the urban reconstruction plan was put into action in response to mass exodus phenomena that drove the rural

population to seek a better life in the city or in other European countries. Thirdly, familial, social, and cultural transformations played a fairly important role, from the mid-Sixties onwards establishing new forms of housing that could intercept and respond to changes in lifestyles. Finally, children experienced a completely different use of open-air and closed spaces in their life. The public, socialising space of the streets, courtyards, riverbanks, fields, and forests would be encountered in a decreasingly way compared to the past and the private, individualising space of domestic environments would acquire more and more importance and would become a new challenging educational space. This transformation of the use of the home led to a modification in the representation of the traditional housing models in children's literature.

20th century architecture obviously contributed to embracing this newly centralized role of the home. The futuristic experimentation of some of the most famous 20th century architects managed to predict the needs, trends, and desires of a rapidly transforming society (for example, planning less clearly-divided, larger and lighter, brighter environments, designed to be spaces for socialisation; a move towards greater contact between man and nature; use of innovative materials and a focus on environmental impact). Their works helped forge the image of modern urban society. Noteworthy residential projects included the Prairie-style houses by Frank Lloyd Wright (1901–1910), Casa Batllò by Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (1904–1906), Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier (1931), the Glass House by Philip Johnson (1949), or the Gehry Residence by Frank Gehry (1978).

It is not that strange, then, if children's literature – in the particular narrative form of the picturebook – was deeply affected by these changes, changes that have been the subject of numerous studies by various European researchers (Campagnaro, 2019; Goga, 2019; Hayward & Schmiedeknecht, 2019; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2019; Meunier, 2019; Narančić Kovač, 2019; Ramos, 2019; Zago, Callegari & Campagnaro, 2019). These were, however, studies that only and exclusively considered fiction picturebooks. Studies of nonfiction picturebooks dedicated to the house and, more generally, to architecture are rather rare¹ and in several cases are penalized by a methodology that is not always strict, more linked to the description of the content of the picturebooks than to their interpretation.

1 An example of this can be found in an Italian study which examined a selection of more than 150 picturebooks as “a support for the educational process concerning heritage and whose specific system of representation is architectural design” (Luigini, 2019, p. 162). The picturebooks studied were classified according to the following categories: stories set within invented architecture; stories containing authorial architecture; travel books; non-fiction books; books published by architects; architecture monographs.

The aim of this chapter is to fill this scientific void, outlining the characteristics and innovations – in terms of content and iconographic representations – of non-fiction picturebooks dealing with houses and architecture since the second half of the 20th century, with a view to proposing a taxonomy for the classification of some narrative solutions.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will briefly introduce the role of the house and architecture in nonfiction picturebooks, describing three historical case studies that may help to explain why nonfiction picturebooks about houses and architecture are worthwhile study objects. In the second part, I will introduce a selection of nonfiction and hybrid nonfiction picturebooks on this topic that have developed, organized, or interpreted this subject through some architectural features. The goal is to organize this material according to a taxonomic system, which may possibly lead to further research questions and open new research paths.

HOUSE, ARCHITECTURE AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: THREE CASE HISTORIES

Fictional homes are considered by various children's literature scholars (Dewan, 2004; Reimer, 2008; Krogstad, 2016) as spaces of personal characterization and psychological, cultural, and socio-historical evolution. The house is intended primarily as a physical place where the family comes together, and where the protagonists' primary needs are generally met. Houses and architecture in children's stories are also relevant because they reveal the quality of human relations within their walls and outside the family circle.

There are two aspects that must nonetheless be considered in the relationship between children's literature and architecture. The first aspect concerns the relationship that some architects and interior designers established with books they read as children. In certain interviews, they stated that those books had a real impact on their imagination as children and even conditioned the way they view architectural spaces as adults. One might refer, for example, to statements made by American designers like Ellie Cullman² about *Eloise* (1955) by Kay Thompson and Hilary Knight or Sheila Bridges³ about the picturebook *The Snowy Day*

2 "I grew up in a modest home in Brooklyn and Hilary Knight's *Eloise* illustrations opened a new world for me. I was totally transfixed by the interior of the Plaza Hotel" (Cullman, as cited in Hong, 2018, no page).

3 "I can't help but notice Keats' stunning use of color, pattern, and collage. For instance, in *The Snowy Day*, there's that peony pink bathtub on the shimmering tiled floor. Gorgeous!" (Bridges, as cited in Hong, 2018, no page).

(1962) by Ezra Jack Keats. The second aspect concerns the ability of the visual metaphors of literature to contribute to the construction of an aesthetic approach and the creation of architectural visions in children and adults. Some studies (Ebrahimi, Akbari & Haghjoue, 2016) demonstrated how children's literature can, for example, provide architects with ideas and inspiration to learn "through the observation of rules governing the structure of a literary work, through the study of the writer's style to express the essence of the overall plan" (p. 1159). Children's literature can turn out to be a strategic ally for architects because it is able to coax out "design ideas to create an appropriate architectural space for a children's audience" (p. 1155) and can even inspire their architectural work because "in the structure and atmosphere of poetry and fiction for children, there are qualities that can be reproduced in architecture" (p. 1161).

If, as we have highlighted in the introduction, there are plenty of studies of representation of the home in fiction picturebooks, very little research, however, has been conducted on homes and architecture in nonfiction.

This is in sharp contrast not only to the interest these books may potentially arouse in their growing young readership, but it is also in contrast to the rich offer of the publishing market. Whether kids have an interest in architecture or simply marvel at engineering, nonfiction picturebooks feature something for them. This typology of books supports children's understanding of architecture and the places where they live, play, sleep, eat, and interact with other people. Children often ask how houses are built and how buildings and cities are planned, and these picturebooks help answer their questions both verbally and visually, entertaining and educating them in the process.

Innovative picturebooks about the shapes and structural features of houses or the diffusion of our architectural heritage were already around in the 1970s and 1980s. Many examples of nonfiction picturebooks were published in those two decades, but only some of them really shaped the genre. This is because their authors introduced new approaches in the picturebook-making process. I would like to discuss three examples because they introduced some innovative elements which enrich the analyse of my taxonomic categories such as the role of skilful pictures to explain and promote urban and architectural differences (*Book of Cities*), the importance of technical and paratextual components such as sketches, graphic layouts, and table of contents (*Castle*), and the use of architectural hybrid narratives (*Anno's Journey*).

The *Book of Cities* is a nonfiction picturebook written in 1975 by the Italian author and illustrator Piero Ventura. Ventura's picturebook is divided into four chapters (living in the city, travelling around the city, working in the city, and

having fun in the city), and depicts everyday life and social scenes across eighteen different cities. Ventura takes us on an entertaining cultural trip around the world: different kind of houses and buildings (small houses, block of flats, a house boat, cathedrals, Buddhist monasteries), different ways of getting round the city (like cars, buses, underground and overground trains), various places of work (shopping malls, Middle Eastern bazaars). The incredibly detailed illustrations of the *Book of Cities* show how differently people live, work, travel, and have fun in the major cities around the world.

Castle (1977) by David Macaulay, was awarded the Caldecott Honor in 1978. This picturebook provides a detailed illustrated description of the fictional Aberwyvern castle, built between 1283 and 1288. Like many of Macaulay's other works about buildings and architecture, the book gives a written description of how the castle was constructed, accompanied by pen and ink drawings. The book describes in great detail the workers involved in building a medieval castle and the traditional tools they would have used. Although the castle is fictional, it is based on a real historical context. Macaulay sets the construction of Aberwyvern castle in North West Wales between 1283 and 1288, during the reign of King Edward I of England. It was a period in which a number of castles were built to support Edward's conquest of Wales. The layout and architecture of Aberwyvern castle bears close resemblance with the Welsh castles that Macaulay visited as a young boy.

The third picturebook is *Anno's Journey* (1977) by Mitsumasa Anno. Anno's works are famous for their carefully drawn, meticulous details and bird's-eye view composition. *Anno's Journey* follows the protagonist, Anno, as he travels through the streets and countryside of Northern Europe (Denmark, England, Germany, and France). But rather than merely telling Anno's story, this wordless picturebook contains the stories of each hamlet, farmyard, circus, church, and town square visited by Anno in visually rich and often surprising details (Fig. 14.1). The basic purpose of these picturebooks is to inform, instruct and hopefully enlighten the readers. But, as we know, sometimes that is not enough with children. An effective nonfiction picturebook should animate and bring its subject to life. It should "create a vivid and believable world that the reader will enter willingly and leave only with reluctance" (Freedman, 1992, p. 3). This is the case of these three picturebooks. Their authors were particularly successful in reinventing traditional informational picturebook-making and launching new artistic styles and media combinations in architectural picturebooks. Piero Ventura placed great emphasis on visual accuracy in order to stimulate the reader "to use multiple modes (words and images) simultaneously to gain meaning, rather than prioritizing one mode over the other" (Shimek, 2018, p. 519). Macaulay's illustrations combine superb



Figure 14.1 *Anno's Journey* (1977), by Mitsumasa Anno, Collins.

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design with extremely precise information about building technology. Anno's illustrations contain hidden jokes and puzzles that are intended to amuse readers and lead them into imaginative conclusions about more complex concepts connected with time and space. These three picturebooks underline the importance of using synergistic modes in nonfiction picturebooks, and of emphasizing the blending of visual and textual information and peritextual features.

NONFICTION PICTUREBOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE: A TAXONOMIC PROPOSAL

A special section of the Bologna Children's Book Fair Award 2018 dedicated to picturebooks on art, architecture & design confirmed that some nonfiction picturebooks on this topic have special key traits. They display an original interweaving of visual and verbal codes and an engaging visual information system. Words usually describe the goals and functions of architecture; pictures reproduce the building elements (sections, inner parts, etc.) or recreate the different phases of the building process thanks to an outstanding design. The dynamics of architectural technology are explained through drawings, layouts, building schemes, and cross-sections using a very appealing typographic format. They often include infographics, non-linear reading, designed fonts, biographical notes about architects'

lives or they outline the connections between the creation of a building and different social constraints or needs connected with political facts or cultural trends.

Some picturebooks offer readers a far more complex learning experience. They are full of graphically designed features that not only make the book visually appealing to young readers but also require them to jump back and forth between the verbal and the visual codes to deeply explore them. It is assumed that

reading a picturebook is not merely a matter of engaging with the structure and subject matter in the pictures and the text. To the child and the experienced reader alike, the picturebook is a normative space that signals implied readership, explicit and implicit ideology, and historical and cultural contexts. (op de Beek, 2018, p. 20)

Reading nonfiction picturebooks on architecture is quite demanding because readers are invited to reflect and draw conclusions on how architecture is able to respond to social problems and give effective answers towards future challenges, like for instance creating supportive communities, promoting cultural diversity and developing environmental sustainability.

The contemporary publishing landscape of nonfictional picturebooks on architecture is extremely rich and diversified, and it is not easy to summarize their characteristics and new aspects in terms of contents and iconographic representations (Fig. 14.2).



Figure 14.2 Overview of some contemporary nonfictional picturebooks on architecture.

This is the reason why I would like to describe and organize this huge variety according to a taxonomic system. This basic classification should help to document the richness and potential of this research field, then interpret it and open a debate for further analysis.

I built my taxonomical model according to Nikola von Merveldt's (2018) study on informational picturebook features, Jörg Meibauer's (2015) taxonomy of picturebooks and Christine Pappas' (2006) reflections on the information book genre and above all on the "atypical, hybrid texts that include informational-book language along with linguistic features found in stories or poetic language patterns" (p. 243). It is the result of an analysis of a corpus of 20 selected picturebooks on houses and architecture in different languages (Italian, English, French, German, and Polish), for different ages (see Table 14.1), and published between 2008 to 2020. The selection of the picturebooks adhered to three criteria. The first criterion is one of inclusion in that only the topic of the house is considered: picturebooks about house typology, house-building processes, biographies of architects who explored the concept of house living and the quality of relationships inside a house, and so forth. There are two picturebooks that explore not only houses, but also other architectural forms, like ancient buildings (the Parthenon and Notre Dame, among others) or contemporary ones (such as Sydney Opera House and The Louvre Pyramid), but they still remain closely focused on houses, on their historical development or on their interior design. I included only picturebooks which have been published very recently (the oldest ones were published in 2008 but most of them were printed in the last five years) and are still available on the market. The second criterion is related to the quality of the graphic and typographic layout and visual, aesthetic and architectural accuracy. For this reason, the selection includes picturebooks that won prizes, were included in honors lists or received positive reviews. The last criterion refers to the idea that nonfiction picturebooks on architecture "do not just document or illustrate facts" but should "visually organize and interpret them" (von Merveldt, 2018, p. 232).

For my taxonomical proposal, I have organized the corpus of these 20 picturebooks into two main categories: nonfiction and hybrid (Table 14.2).

Within the family of nonfiction picturebooks, according to Meibauer's taxonomy, I have included three other families: early concept books, simple descriptive picturebooks, and complex descriptive picturebooks.

Early concept books are books, usually board books, that show pictures of everyday objects. They might possibly include a word which refers to the object shown in the picture. The main purpose of these works is to help readers to become familiar with the environment of the house and some architectural references.

Table 14.1 The corpus of 20 selected picturebooks on houses and architecture

Authors	Title	Publishing, House Year	Category	Subcategory	Subsection
M. Slack	<i>House: First Words Board Books</i>	Chronicle Books, 2018	NON-FICTION	Early concept book	-
F. Horstschäfer, J. Vogt	<i>Haus [House]</i>	Gerstenberg, 2015	NON-FICTION	Simple descriptive picturebooks	-
J. Merberg, Aki	<i>Baby's First Eames</i>	Downtown Bookworks, 2018	NON-FICTION	Simple descriptive picturebooks	-
M.I. Sanchez Vegara, A. Amar	<i>Zaha Hadid</i>	Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2019	NON-FICTION	Simple descriptive picturebooks	-
P. Dillon, S. Biesty	<i>The Story of Buildings: World Architecture from the Pyramids to the Sydney Opera House</i>	Walker Books, 2014	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Historical
M. Pesce, M. Tonello	<i>Case nel mondo [Houses in the World]</i>	Electakids, 2018	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Geographical/Cultural
A. Machowiak, D. Mizieliński	<i>D.O.M.E.K. Doskonałe Okazy Małych i Efektownych Konstrukcji [H.O.U.S.E.: Homes That Are Outrageous, Unbelievable, Spectacular, and Extraordinary]</i>	Wydawnictwo Dwie Siostry, 2008	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Geographical/Cultural
D. Cornille	<i>Toutes les maisons sont dans la nature [Who built that? Modern Houses]</i>	Hélium/Actes Sud, 2012	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Technical
B. Beck	<i>The Future Architect's Handbook</i>	Schiffer, 2014	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Technical
S. Martin, E. Kimpimaki	<i>Architect Academy: Are You Ready for the Challenge?</i>	The Ivy Press, 2016	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Technical
C. Lazzari	<i>Come casa mia. Viaggio nel mondo dell'architettura [Like my house. A Journey Through Architecture]</i>	Editoriale Scienza, 2016	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Technical

Authors	Title	Publishing, House Year	Category	Subcategory	Subsection
J. Winter	<i>The World Is Not a Rectangle: A Portrait of Architect Zaha Hadid</i>	Beach Lane Books, 2017	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Biographical
Á. León	<i>Lina. Avventure di un'architetta [Lina. The adventures of an architect]</i>	Topipittori, 2019	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Biographical
P. Geis	<i>Frank Lloyd Wright: Meet the Architect!</i>	Princeton Architectural Press, 2019	NON-FICTION	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Biographical
A. Demois, V. Godeau	<i>Cache-cache Ville [Hide and Seek City]</i>	Editions du Seuil, 2018	HYBRID	Simple descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in factual context
F. Viva	<i>Young Frank Architect</i>	MOMA Museum of Modern Art, 2013	HYBRID	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements
M. Meredith, H. Sample	<i>Case in vendita [Houses for sale]</i>	Canadian Centre for Architecture/Corraini, 2019	HYBRID	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements
J. D'aam	<i>The Dutch Look at a House/ Gli olandesi vedono una casa</i>	Corraini 2020	HYBRID	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements
S. Guernaccia	<i>I tre porcellini [The Three Little Pigs]</i>	Corraini, 2008	HYBRID	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in fictional context with factual elements
M. Bellei	<i>Mille case per mille storie [A thousand houses for a thousand stories]</i>	Fatatrac, 2018	HYBRID	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in fictional context with factual elements

Table 14.2 A taxonomic proposal for classifying the main narrative solutions in nonfiction picturebooks on architecture

Nonfiction Picturebooks			Hybrid Picturebooks			
Early concept book	Simple descriptive picturebooks	Complex descriptive picturebooks	Simple descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Complex descriptive/narrative picturebooks	Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements	
Pictures & labels (isolated words or phrases)	Pictures & simple information (single-sentence or sets of sentences that are ordered or somehow organized around actions, environments or people)	<p>Historical</p> <p>WHEN</p> <p>The most relevant paratextual framing:</p> <p>TIMELINES, HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT LAYOUT</p>	<p>Geographical/Cultural</p> <p>WHERE</p> <p>The most relevant paratextual framing:</p> <p>MAPS, PORTRAITS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES</p>	<p>Technical</p> <p>WHAT</p> <p>The most relevant paratextual framing:</p> <p>GRAPHIC LAYOUTS, TABLE OF CONTENTS, SUMMARY, NARRATIVE OR NON-NARRATIVE DIALOGUE BUBBLES</p>	<p>Biographical</p> <p>WHO</p> <p>The most relevant paratextual framing:</p> <p>AUTHOR'S NOTES, PHOTOS OR DRAWINGS, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES</p>	<p>Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements</p> <p>(single-sentence or sets of sentences)</p> <p>(factual elements like those from the Complex descriptive picturebooks category)</p>

House (2018) is a kit with 5 miniature board books for toddlers (see Table 14.1 for picturebook examples mentioned in the following paragraphs). Each book features different rooms, including furniture and objects, in the house: the living room, bathroom, kitchen, bedroom and garage.

Simple descriptive picturebooks are nonfiction picturebooks which include a series of picture-text combinations. Pictures do not contain many details and written texts are not very long, “a minimal text consists of at least two sentences or utterances” (Meibauer, 2015, p. 67). These picturebooks are quite useful in offering pre-readers more detailed information about the typology of house (a tall or short house), its environment (a house in the city, an igloo), its function, a few architectural features or in providing an encounter with well-known modern houses like in the picturebook *Baby's First Eames* (Merberg & Aki, 2018) or renowned architects like *Zaha Hadid* (Sánchez Vegara & Amar, 2019).

Complex descriptive picturebooks are informational picturebooks that contain a complex and challenging interweaving of visual and verbal codes and a high degree of scientific and aesthetic accuracy. Contrary to Meibauer's taxonomical model, I have integrated complex descriptive picturebooks with four new different subsections which are more strictly connected to the paratextual framing like author's notes, prefaces, bibliographies, maps, timelines, table of contents, index, text boxes, and appendices (von Merveldt, 2018, p. 241)

The first subsection is the ‘historical’ one which focuses on the historical development of important residential buildings of the past and contemporary architecture around the world. Stunning examples of building cross-sections and cutaways organized according to historical development are included in *The story of buildings* (Dillon & Biesty, 2014).

The ‘geographical/cultural’ subsection refers to nonfiction picturebooks that contain outstanding depictions of houses and buildings, but again the organizational structure is developed according to geographical or cultural priority. These picturebooks usually convey ideas about the richness, cultural diversity and heterogeneous functions of houses around the world. A very good example is the picturebook *H.O.U.S.E. Homes that are outrageous, unbelievable, spectacular and extraordinary* (2012). It presents 35 houses from around the world. Small icons are included in every doublespread with a new house to explain where and when the house was built, what materials were used in its construction and what functions it can serve. The structure of this book is less linear than that of a typical informational picturebook. There are a lot of side stories, comic-style dialogues, icons, and doublespreads with aliens or monsters very loosely related to the house theme. The reader can skip the main text and just read the side notes and curiosities scribbled in the margins.

In the ‘technical’ subsection, the focus is on the house itself, and its building elements and building process; the subsection includes ingenious picturebooks illustrating house-building techniques and structural details like in *The Future Architect’s Handbook* (2014) or in *Come casa mia. Viaggio nel mondo dell’architettura* (2016), cultural changes, creative process, aesthetic ideas and social values behind a building. In many cases, the quality of the graphic and typographic layout is outstanding, like in *Toutes les maisons sont dans la nature* (2012). This picturebook introduces young readers to the conventions and revolutions of architectural history. Cornille’s illustrations are controlled and precise like architectural plans and lead readers to explore the most relevant houses by the greatest architects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each chapter starts with a traced snapshot of the architect, putting faces to the names of Le Corbusier, Charles and Ray Eames, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, and Shigeru Ban, to name but a few. The explanations of the innovation within the creative process of these architects are entirely left to the thoughtful executed drawings by Cornille in super-fine coloured felt pens.

Finally, the last subsection is the ‘biographical’ one. These picturebooks portray the lives of a few famous architects. In some cases, biographical notes and sketches of their architectural masterpieces can be elaborated in very unusual and innovative ways as in the picturebook *The World Is Not a Rectangle: A Portrait of Architect Zaha Hadid* (2017). The book follows Hadid’s life from her childhood in Iraq to her success as a top architect in London. The author recreates the architect’s ability to synthesize nature’s curves into her buildings in her sinuous illustrations with flowing text.

The second category “hybrid picturebooks” was not present in Meibauer’s model. As the scholar Pappas accurately pointed out (2006), the hybrid nonfiction picturebook is a very rich and complex typology where intertextuality is extremely relevant.

Hybrid texts enact intertextuality; that is, there are communicative occasions where there is the juxtaposing of texts from other genres, where elements from different genres are incorporated or embedded within texts [...]. This intertextuality is a social construction [...], stemming from the particular purposes of the authors to “mix” genres or create new texts, in this case, different atypical information books. (Pappas, 2006, p. 240)

For the purpose of this study, I will limit my analysis to two categories: simple descriptive/narrative picturebooks and complex descriptive/narrative picture books.

The first category includes picturebooks which present simple descriptive/narratives referring to “Fictional narrative(s) set in factual context”. Pictures are quite evocative and often use visual metaphors. Texts are quite short. For this reason, it is not so easy to create picturebooks of this kind. A valid example can be found in the picturebook *Cache-cache Ville* (2018). The two graphic artists develop a fictional and challenging city landscape which allows readers to travel in an urban, graphic, and poetic environment through a magical magnifying glass. They will see through walls, and peep into houses discovering the exciting interiors and weird everyday lives of the inhabitants of this fictional urban landscape.

The “complex descriptive/narratives” family of the hybrid category includes very innovative and challenging picturebooks. While reading these fictional stories, readers are informed and instructed about contemporary architecture and architects, house design, building components (materials, structures, roofs, floors, rooms, doors, windows), design objects and more besides. In the case of “Fictional narrative in factual context with factual elements”, these fictional narratives are able to reproduce a lively and convincing realistic world relating to architecture. In *Case in vendita* (2019), published in collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the two authors transform a fictional narrative into a factual double reading itinerary. On the one hand, readers discover a series of houses designed by big names in architecture and the peculiarities of each of them through outstanding drawings printed in five colours, with a black fore-edge and a bright headband. On the other hand, they experience how long and complicated searching for a home can be, above all if you must match unrealistic expectations with striking architectural choices (Fig. 14.3). Throughout its creation, the authors treated this picturebook like an architectural project, “a metaphor for the architectural discipline and its constant search for architecture” (Meredith & Sample, 2019, p. 129). By contrast, in the “Fictional narrative in fictional context with factual elements” subcategory, picturebooks offer readers the opportunity to enjoy fictional narratives, at the same time exploring important historical residential buildings and contemporary architecture around the world as in *The Three Little Pigs* (2009). The author sets this classical fairy tale among the houses of three great architects of the 20th century: Frank Gehry, Philip Johnson, and Frank Lloyd Wright. The endpapers are also full of the well-known design objects which appear in the story. Readers are encouraged to find and recognize them by leafing through the book. The sharp contrast between the fictional tale of old and the current nature of these architectural features helps create a superbly engaging experience for young readers.

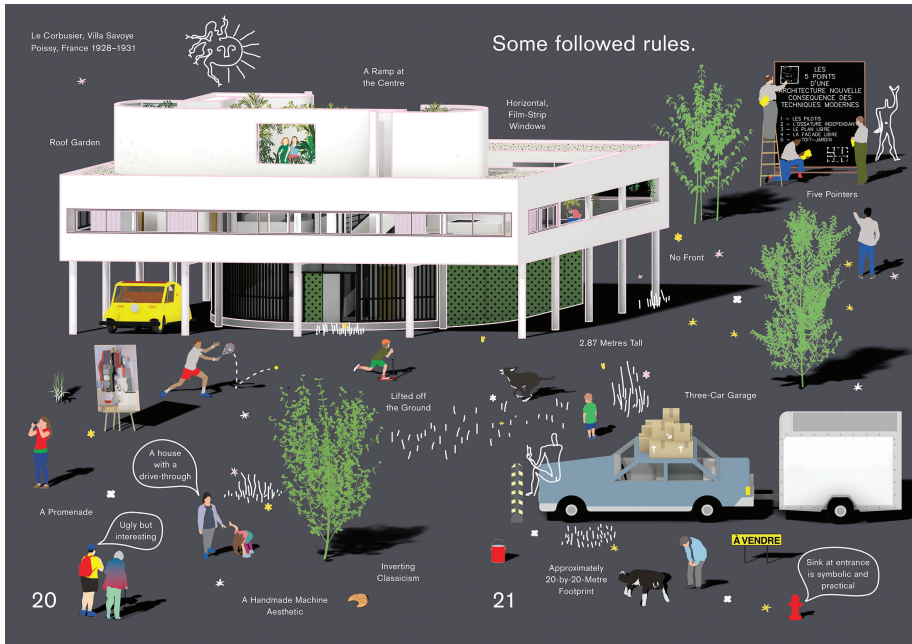


Figure 14.3 *Case in vendita* (2019), by Michael Meredith and Hilary Sample, Canadian Centre for Architecture/Corraini. Reproduced with permission.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

My analysis outlines the characteristics of contemporary nonfiction picturebooks about architecture and proposes a taxonomy for classifying the main narrative solutions. The selected corpus of 20 contemporary picturebooks, which proves to be impressive for the quality and the variety of its artistic styles, its scientific accuracy, and its ability to offer stunning visual conceptualizations that help young readers to step into the world of houses, demonstrates that nonfiction picturebooks about architecture serve important functions such as introducing young readers to the functions of spaces in our history, the knowledge of famous buildings and the stories of great architects who managed to improve the quality of life or work through architecture. They contain historical and political facts, they reveal the secrets of the creative process, they develop aesthetic literacy and they let readers become familiar with the technical side of architecture through both verbal and visual languages.

Although categorization can become a tough task to accomplish in these picturebooks because historical facts, personal memories, and technical details are sometimes mixed in a thrilling way, the five taxonomical categories which have been investigated (see Table 14.2) confirm that this methodology is a highly promising field in nonfiction research.

This classification can be further enriched with other subcategories and in the same cases “there are many intermediate and overlapping categories” (Meibauer, 2015, p. 52). Nevertheless, it could be applied, for instance, to investigate historical, geographical, cultural, and urban differences and transformations among picturebooks over the past century which register a marked reduction in representing public spaces, streets, squares, riverbanks, and woods.

In 2018, architecture and design critic, Alexandra Lange, wrote the book *The design of childhood. How the material world shapes independent kids*. This book investigates the importance of constructing spaces that make people, and children in particular, feel both welcome and independent. The book has five chapters: blocks, houses, schools, playgrounds, and the city. Each single chapter is a space where children interact with design. In many parts of her book, Lange celebrates children's literature and, more specifically, books about houses and spaces as the tools that taught her most of what she needed to know.

This testimony once again confirms, if necessary, the importance of providing nonfiction picturebooks about architecture in childhood. These picturebooks can be considered to be metaphorical seeds that, from a very early age, will potentially contribute to the growth of responsible and culturally aware citizens, who will be able to transform their habitat into a better place for themselves and for others.

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