

Reading Pictures

Visual Analysis

Why we see what we do, and why we feel as we do, when we look at pictures.

(Doonan, 1993, p.73)



Gorilla by Anthony Browne

Every mark displayed in a picture is a potential carrier of meaning, beginning with the chosen material or medium and how the mark is made.

(Doonan, 1993, p.12)

The medium itself can say so much and induce an experience in the beholder.

(Doonan, 1993, p.12)

Although much imagery is “reproduced by a mechanical printing process, the print still records the technique used in the original and something of the effects of the chosen materials, even if the actual materiality is lost to our direct apprehension.”

(Doonan, 1993, p.12)

Every mark, every modification of texture, the manner in which the pen or brush originally met the surface of the paper – delicately or boldly, incisively or sensuously – is telling.

(Doonan, 1993, p.12)



Michel Rosen's Sad Book



Without understanding terms such as visual metaphor, even children can interpret visual symbols, sometimes with extraordinary confidence and insight.



The Tunnel by Anthony Browne

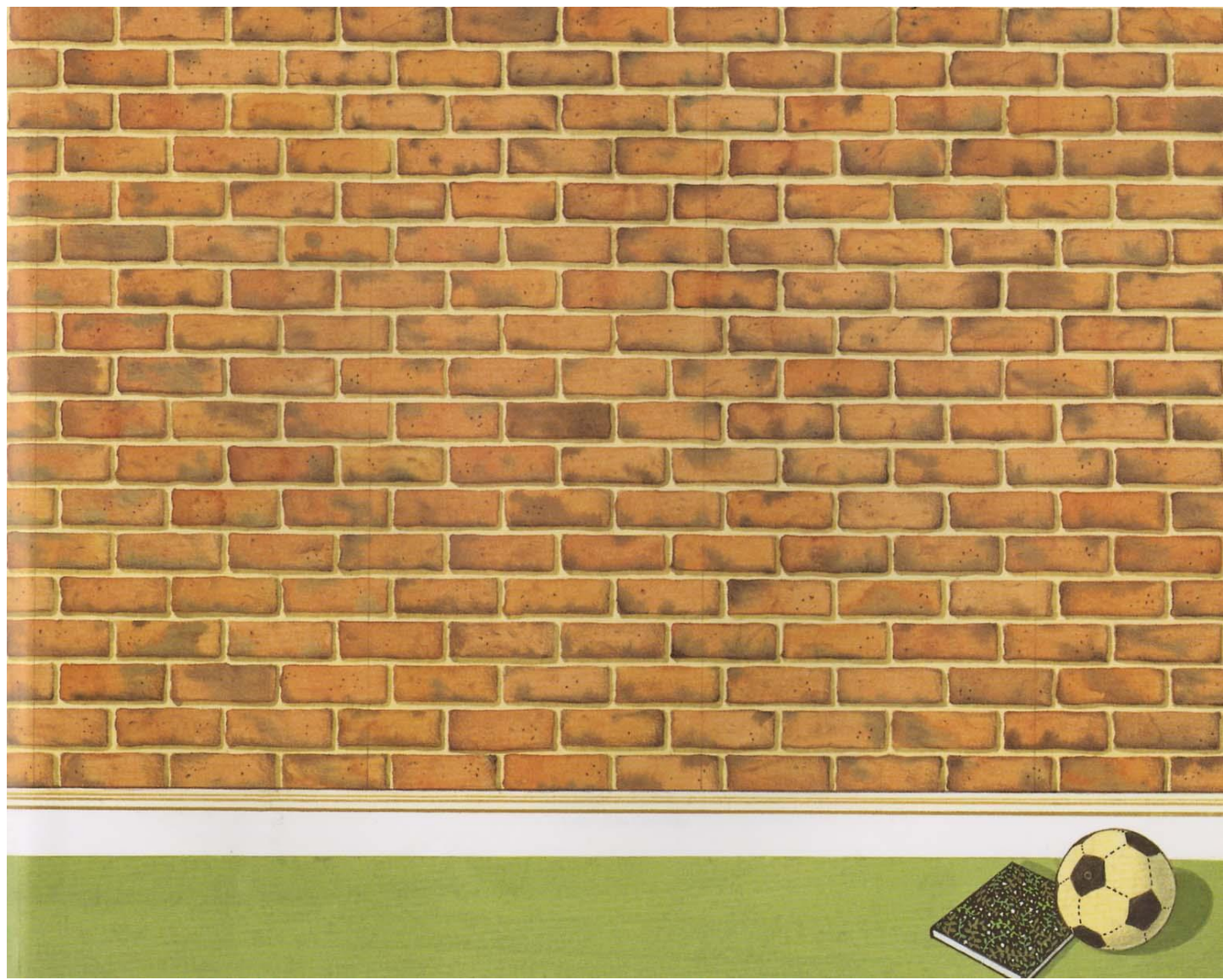
Although the mother is mentioned in the verbal text she never appears in the pictorial text, apart from this illustration (fig.8) where we see her pointing arm thrusting into the picture. This is a visual synecdoche where her arm (the part) represents the whole (the mother).

In the same illustration there is a literal pictorial representation of a verbal metaphor as the little girl walks in her brother's shadow. The verbal metaphor does not appear in the text and is quite subtly conveyed in the illustration and may only be seen and decoded on further readings of the book. It conveys the power and superiority of the brother.



In this illustration they end up together in a vacant lot. The piece of lead piping on the ground between the brother and sister is a metaphor for the hostility between them, a hard line of demarcation that keeps their worlds apart.

“the essence of a metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003, p.5)



The symbolic significance of the fact that the ball (representing the older brother) and the book (which represents the sister) are positioned together, represents a new harmony in their relationship.

These objects are metonymic. Visual metonymy works differently from verbal metonymy: no names are given to objects, only the connection between them remains, for example the boy who was playing with the ball and the girl who was reading the book. Thus, the image denotes a retrospective focus of the story. The reader seeing the book and the ball can visualise the story about the children.

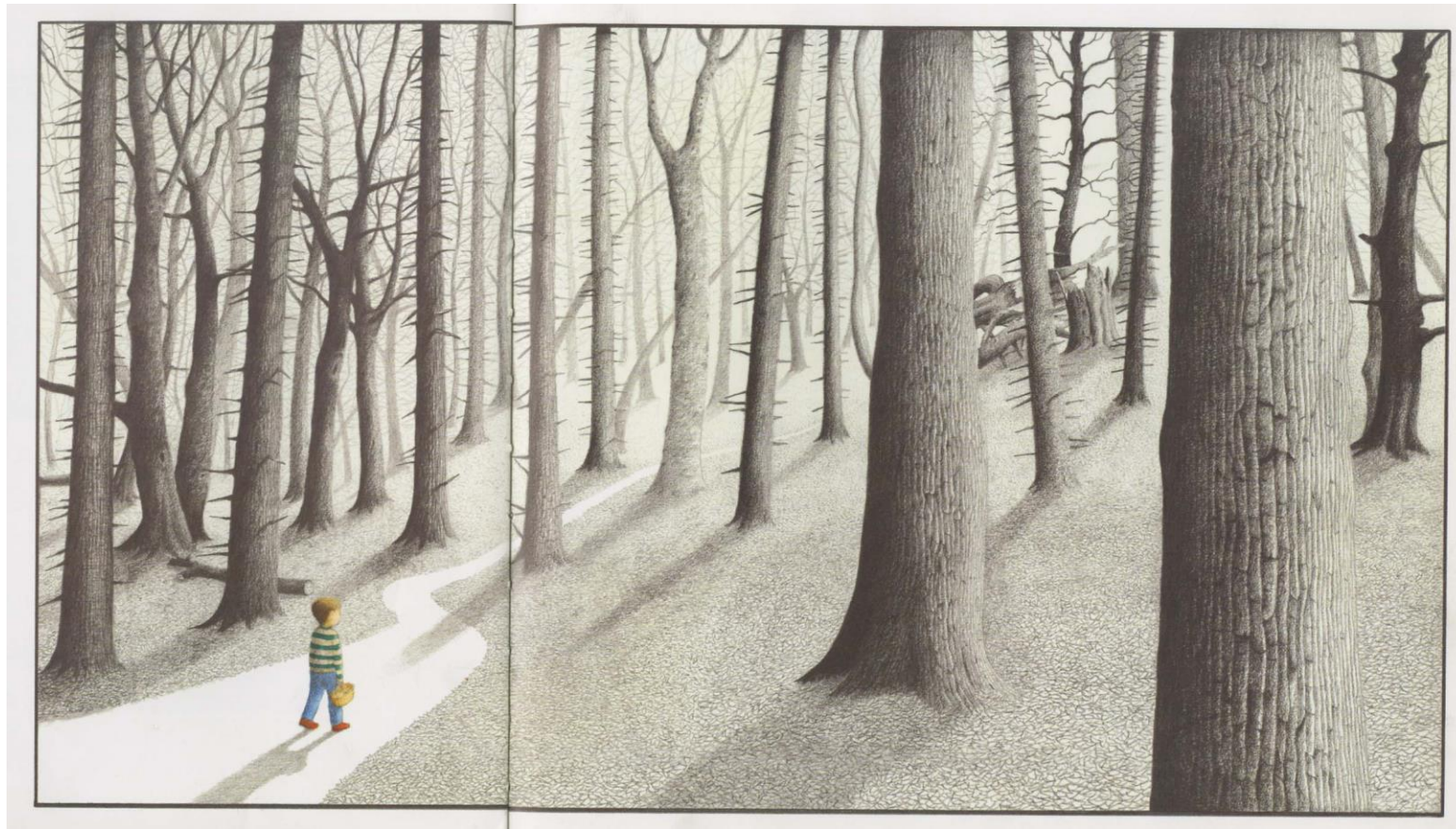
Into the Forest by Anthony Browne

Anthony Browne's picture book, *Into the Forest*, takes the reader on a deeply metaphorical journey through a fairy-tale forest to Grandma's house. Here the extended metaphor of the scary forest represents a little boy's anxiety.

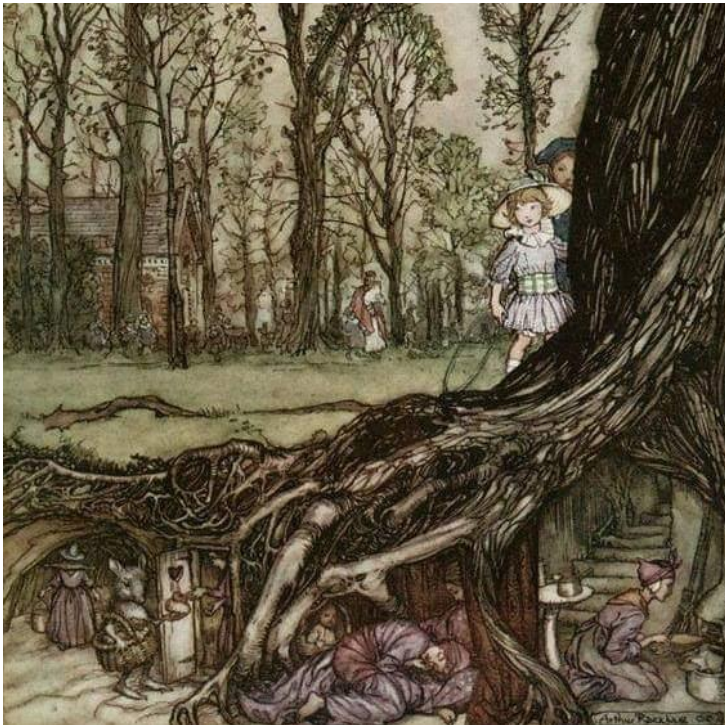
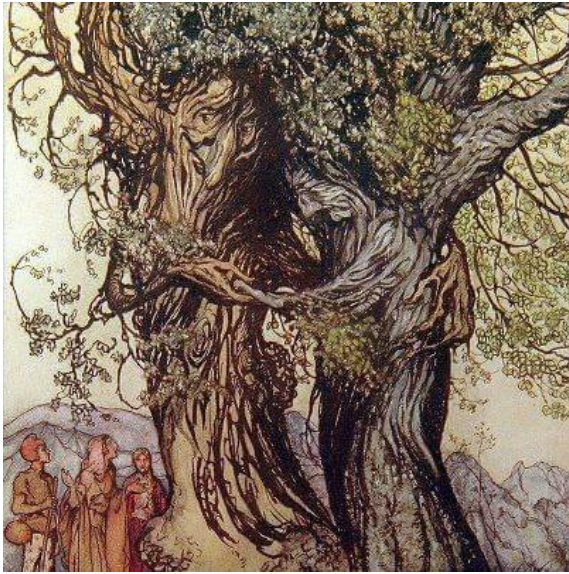


The story begins with a little boy in his bed woken by a lightening storm outside his window.

The accompanying text reads, “One night I was woken up by a terrible sound.” The lightening is evident in the illustration and the words lead the reader to assume that the terrible noise is the thunder. However, there is some ambivalence here. The next morning he finds his father has left home. Could the terrible noise have been his parent’s arguing and the slamming of the door? In which case is the lightening a metaphor for the argument? A one-legged toy soldier in the opening panel hints at a military absence, although the reason for the father’s disappearance is never stated. It could, of course, refer to a wounded little soldier who has stormed off after an argument.

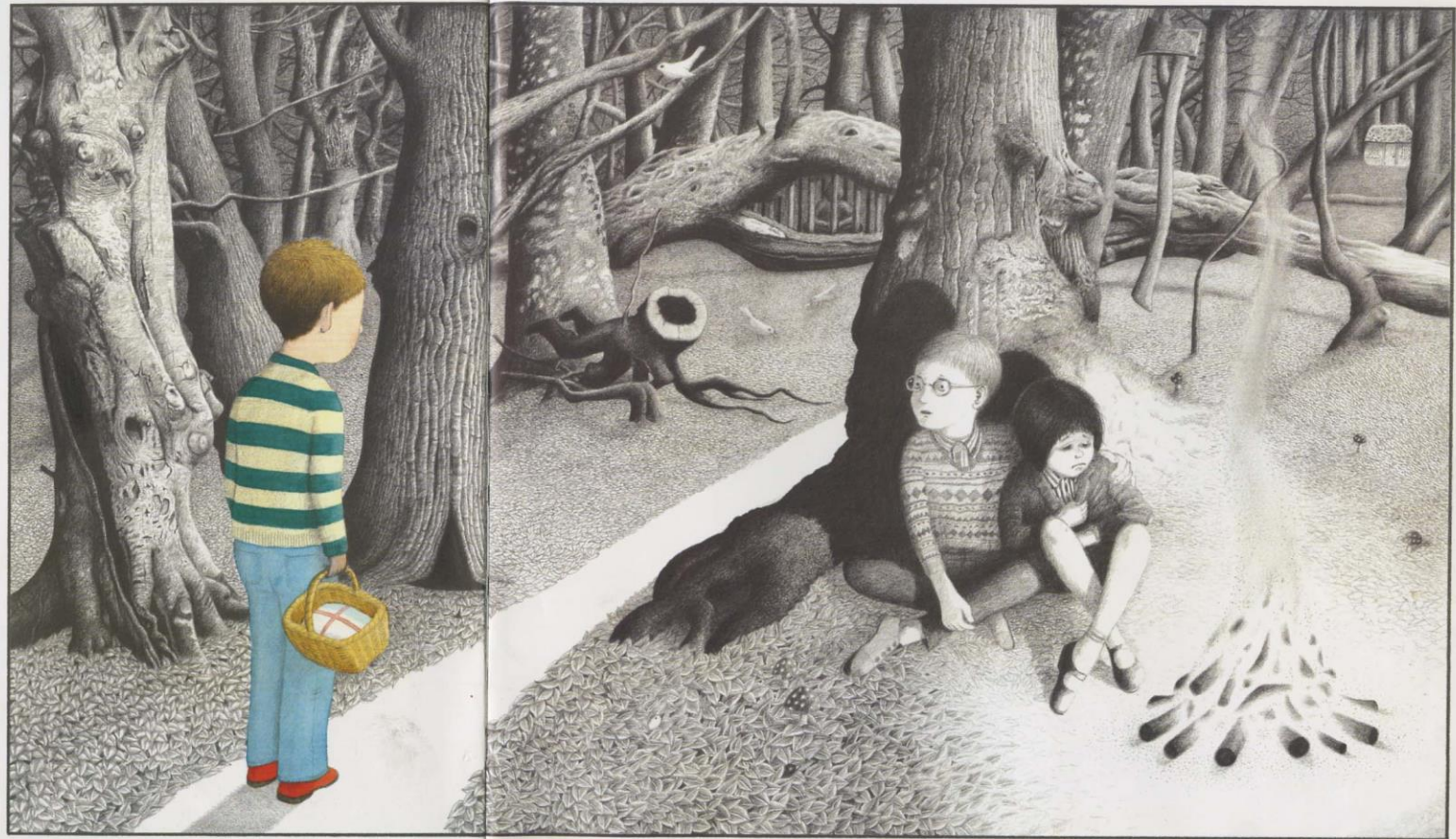


As the story moves from the concrete to the symbolic and he ventures deeper into the forest and deeper into his anxiety and imagination, the images become monochrome, the only area of colour is the boy himself. The trees are drawn in graphite pencil with pointed spikey branches and as he ventures further into the black-and-white forest the twisted trees become frightening faces and gnarled, knotted hands and limbs reminiscent of Arthur Rackham's magical and foreboding forests.



Browne's *Into the Forest* has echoes of Arthur Rackham's (1867–1939) *Magical and foreboding forests*.

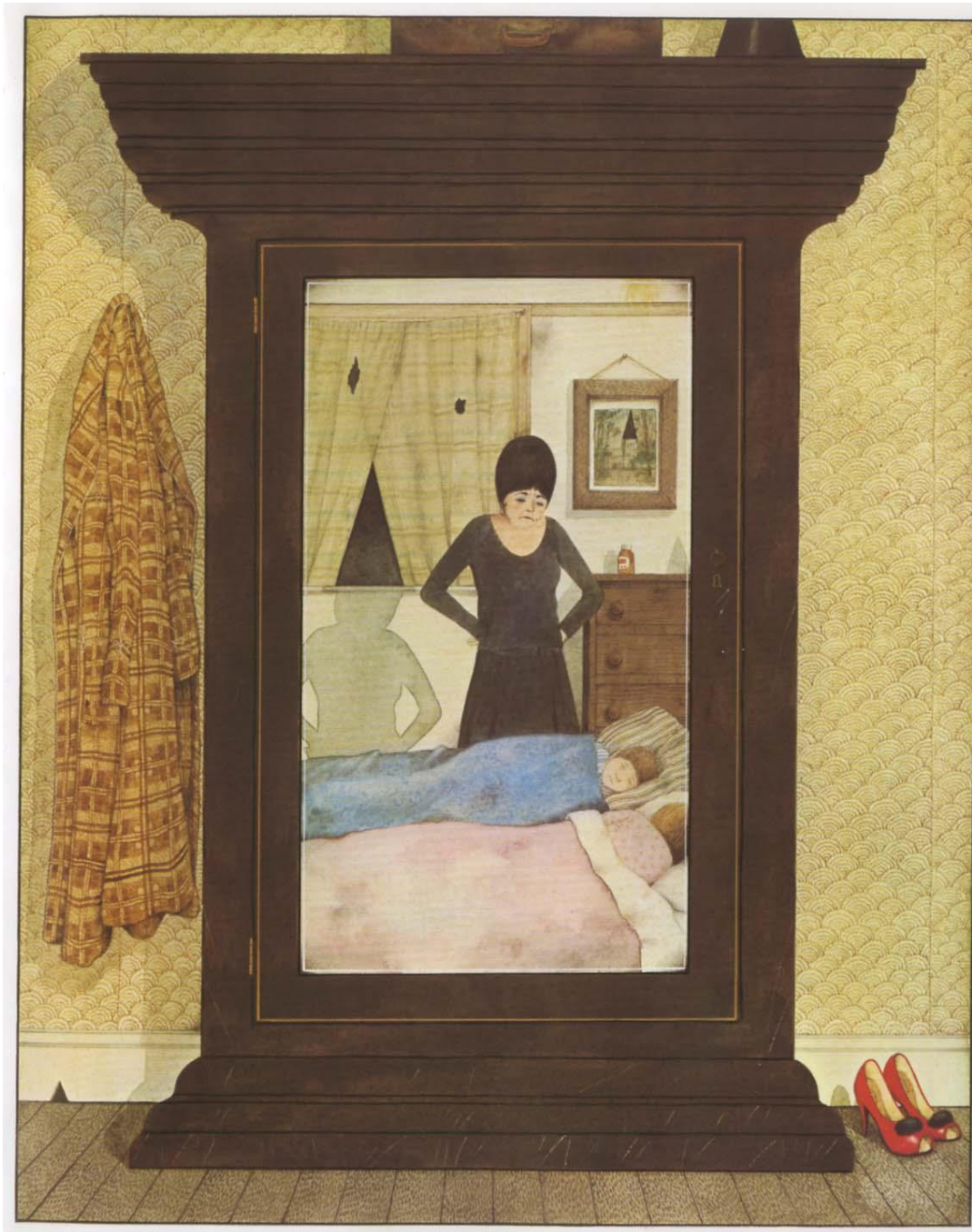




On his way, he meets a boy selling a cow, a hungry yellow-haired girl, and two lost children. In this illustration (fig.13) Hansel and Gretel are a metaphor of parental abandonment, reinforcing his anxiety. Prior knowledge of the fairy tale intertexts helps decode the pictures and provide meaning.



The pumpkin from *Cinderella*, Sleeping Beauty's spinning wheel, Rapunzel's tower and Jack's beanstalk, for example, appear as visual metonyms hidden within the landscape of the forest.



Anthony Browne's modern retelling of *Hansel and Gretel*.

Here is further evidence of the use of visual synecdoche as the stepmother prepares to wake the children. The picture features several black triangular motifs; the gap in the curtain, the roof in the framed picture on the wall, the mouse's hole in the skirting board, a shadow cast by something on top of the chest of drawers and what looks like the bottom of a hat on top of the wardrobe bleeding out of the illustration frame. These black triangles are obviously references to a witch's hat, a part of a whole: a witch. In the same illustration there is a visual metaphor where two objects combine to making new meaning; as the stepmother casts a shadow across the wall the gap in the curtains makes it look as if she is wearing a pointed hat, making the reader think of her as a wicked witch.



Anita Kunz (title unknown)

This subcategory of visual metaphor, involving some violation of physical reality is a common convention in conceptual illustration, particularly in the editorial field.

This violation of reality attracts the attention of the reader of the newspaper or magazine, and intrigues. The intent being that this will stop the turning of the page as the reader, with interest piqued, wants to find out what the article is about; firstly, through the verbal anchoring of the headline and then, hopefully, actually reading the article. The metaphorical dimension of the image will also result in an emotional response.

Unfortunately, this image has to be analysed out of context as no information is available. The hands morphing out of the face to cover the mouth of the woman portrayed suggests some sort of gagging of women or females not having a voice. If the context was political, it could add further meaning. This demonstrates how important context is when trying to comprehend a metaphor, and the verbal anchorage, as in editorial illustration both the headline and illustration work together to make meaning. Anita Kunz's work appears on the covers of many American magazines, such as *The New Yorker* and *Time* magazine.