

YLVIS' THE FOX – FROM MUSIC VIDEO TO PICTUREBOOK –TRANSFORMED INTO TINSEL OR GOLD?

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Abstract: The article deals with the picture book *What Does the Fox Say*, based on the music video “The Fox” by Ylvis (2013). The question is what the relationship between the two products is. When a hit video is celebrated and followed by a picture book with what appears to be more or less the same content, can one assume that the book is a mere spinoff product without much significance? This article seeks to answer this question by performing a reading of the picture book, using three different approaches. The first one uses the historical context to investigate the provenance of the products and to describe relevant parts of the cultural landscape of spinoff phenomena. The second approach uses theory about intertextuality to attempt a description of the two products and discuss a connection. The third approach uses picture book theory to ascertain whether the iconotext of the picture book is indeed interesting and not merely mirroring the video. The findings confirm that the origins of the picture book are indeed shrouded in mist. More importantly, using theory on intertextuality as a tool proves useful to unveil some relations between the products, but involves some principal issues regarding the comparison of products from different art forms. However, a close reading of the picture book using picture book theory, reveals a versatile and innovative iconotext which deserves scrutiny by readers young and old, and debunks suggestions that the picture book is in any way inferior.

Keywords: music video, picturebook, iconotext, intertextuality, spinoff

1. Introduction

This text approaches two artistic expressions that represent a joint project and much of the same content, but that exist in different media and genres: A music video, “The Fox” (Ylvis, 2013), and its picturebook counterpart *What Does the Fox Say* (2013), illustrated by Svein Nyhus. Whereas the video gained considerable attention in its time (Karlsson, 2016), the picturebook’s fate is a less obvious success story.

The authority on children's literature history in Norway, *Norsk barnelitteraturhistorie* [Norwegian child literature history] (Birkeland and Mjør, 2018), presents Nyhus at length, with analyses of his contributions to different picturebooks. *What Does the Fox Say*, however, is only mentioned as a sales success. It is remarkable that Birkeland and Mjør do not comment on the style or the content of this book, considering how it represents a project unlike any others from the hands of Nyhus, and seeing as he is one of the most revered picture book creators in Norway and beyond. But in this case only the sales figures are deemed worth mentioning, not the aesthetic effort.

The present analysis aims to use an investigation into the video and the picturebook in order to answer this question: Is it reasonable to argue that the picturebook is a mere spin-off product of the video, and is it possible to argue for the opposite? I look for arguments in three places: 1) In historical context, 2) in theory on intertextuality and 3) in picturebook theory, with emphasis on the local iconotext.

The motivation for this study is the wish to make sense of a chaotic situation. On one hand there is the product, the picturebook, which is part of a rather conventional literary institution, involving an established creator and distributed through the normal channels of the literary cycle of children's literature. On the other hand this book exists in symbiosis with a video. They are both part of the multimodal World of netizens of the *web.2*, a generation who consume and contribute, independently of the establishment. These netizens use social media, play online games and watch videos, but they use the digital surroundings to inform their practices and mental focus. And they also read books. It all starts early. It is an ambition of this text to discuss the role of a paper product in this context and to discuss the function it may have.

The assumption is that a simple and hurried spin-off product will not make a great impression on anyone, be it first line consumers or scrutinizing scholars. Likewise, an innovative quality product will have the potential to make its mark. But what if a confusion arises, placing a quality product in a low status category? To investigate this, it is necessary with a wide scope. In this text it includes the global perspective, where the origins and reception of the book play a part. It also includes the local perspective, where a close reading of the book delivers arguments. In addition, reflection is required regarding the comparison between two products in different media.

2. The historical context

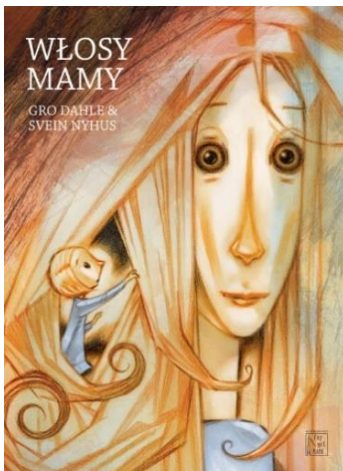
A presentation of the video “The Fox” is a good starting point as we try to understand the issue at hand. The video became a major YouTube hit as soon as it was published. It was the first music video by a Norwegian group to exceed 500 million views and is now listed with more than 1 billion. Music videos with this kind of success experience digital transformations of different kinds: Memes, mashups, cover versions, parodies and more, all part of the process called “going viral.” The success of “The Fox” may not be a total coincidence. Karlsson (2016) points out how “The Fox” is similar to another major Youtube hit, Psy’s “Gangnam style” (2012). Both videos were launched on a platform that already had some popularity, both were follow-ups of other videos, both are so-called novelty products, both contain outsider characters and show people of all generations, and both are ambivalent regarding the target audience. They both feature animals, which appeals to many viewers, and there is a catch phrase and an iconic dance in both. Furthermore, both are based on local contexts that may appear exotic to international netizens; the spruce forest of “The Fox” relates to Norway, the country of outdoor living (“friluftsliv”). The modern Asian city of “Gangnam Style” relates to South Korea, the competitive culture with social tensions. Thus there is a logic behind the choice of staging of the videos, yielding an effect on a broader international audience. The early launch and reception of the video “The Fox” comprises a diverse landscape. The video itself constitutes a crossover product, addressing people of different ages, and distinct elements represent the perspective of children, of teenagers and of young adults, as well as the old. This is a feature that is also apparent in the video “Gangnam Style” by Psy (2012), and it may be part of the explanation why some videos do go viral (Karlsson 2016).

The picturebook *What does the fox say* (2013) was published alongside the video. Both appear to profit from the internet community and internet behaviour, while at the same time conforming to traditional small children’s picture books. The present reading takes a look at the historical context, the intertextuality and the local iconotext of the picturebook and can complement some less nuanced reviews of the book, and by including a glance at its immediate digital multimodal hypotext we can discover more of the potential that we find in this playground of expressions. The launch of the video “The Fox” and the picturebook *What does the Fox Say* in 2013 appears to be a planned multiproduct launch. The video was part of the popular TV programme *Tonight With Ylvis* (TVNorge 2011-2016), in a series of videos that were also published on Youtube (“Tonight with Ylvis episode 1: ‘Song of the

day' and 'The jury'"). These videos had already gained some popularity, but presumably it was anyone's guess which one would really go viral, there was no particular campaign to promote any of them in particular.

The video was launched in September of 2013, while the book was published in December. According to Ylvis, it is not a spin-off product, because it was conceived at a moment where "The Fox" had not yet gone viral ("Hva sier reven?"). This means that Nyhus had a month or two to create the book. This is a short time, even as a full time engagement, and it could mean one of two things: Either that the book was made much earlier, or that it was made rather quickly. In the latter case, it is natural to assume that the video is the primary product and the book a by-product.

Some facts may indicate that the book and the video were a joint effort aiming at some commercial breakthrough. Both products involved top performers in each genre. The producers of the video is one example. "Stargate" is a video production company with clients like Rihanna. "Stargate's" Mikkel S. Eriksen (41) and Tor Erik Hermansen (41) owed Ylvis a favour, and that is how a video like "The Fox" was made possible on a limited budget ("What the Fox? Everything you need to know about Ylvis and then some.."). This ensured that the eccentric humour of the song got a commercial wrapping that could resound with a wider audience.



Likewise, the work with the picturebook that was published the same year was assigned to an accomplished artist with high renown in his field. Svein Nyhus is a three times winner of the children's book award of the Norwegian Department of Culture and a six times nominee for the international ALMA award. His picturebooks about children in challenging life situations, together with Gro Dahle, have been translated into many languages. They combine artistic ambition with a therapeutical function

and are part of a lifelong project of giving challenged children a voice and enabling adults to empathize ("Let's Talk Illustrators #109: Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus"). The child's perspective is also noticeable in the books Nyhus has made alone. The involvement in a purely commercial publication like *What Does the Fox Say* seems like a hazardous venture for an artist with such a legacy.

What Does the Fox Say was an international bestseller as soon as it was published, topping the picturebook bestseller list of papers like *The New York Times* (“Children’s Picture Books”), and reportedly selling more than 300 000 copies (“The Fox (What Does the Fox Say?)”). This success came with a price. Tim Newcomb in *Time magazine* (2013) comments on the numbers with the words “ka-ching.” He calls the book a “literary extension” of the “crazily popular” music video, and he also speculates about the initial negotiations between Ylvis and Nyhus in the hiring process, concluding that Nyhus only said yes to do the picturebook job when he got wind of the millions of views of the Youtube video.

This context coincides with some features the picturebook, where Nyhus makes some relevant aesthetic choices. First and foremost he conserves the words of the video unabridged, which does not seem ambitious. On the one hand this choice is a constraint that could be an interesting challenge for an artist. However, in the book we find few traces of a conscious or ambitious connection between verbal text and pictures in the book. The text is repetitive and is dominated by the onomatopoeical utterances from the video. There are few or no intratextual verbal text features (Beckett, 2014) and the letters are integrated into the iconotext in a rather rudimentary way. The rigid rendering of the verbal elements appears to be a static element, isolating the video text from the iconotext of the picturebook. This is an imposed or self-imposed choice, in line with texts of song books, with illustrations surrounding it, or integrated into the text. In this case the picturebook appears to be a pendant to the video, where the adult who reads to the child is invited to simply recite the words from the video, for example singing the lines. Youtube responsive videos demonstrate how small children have no problems enjoying singing along with the video as they watch it (“My Girl Sings - What Does the Fox Say – Ylvis”). The book can scaffold a similar way of experiencing the content.

The colour palette of the book is also interesting in a historic perspective. What does it signal? Far from the saturated and bright primary colours of mainstream commercial products for children, like Lego blocks or Peppa Pig aesthetics, Nyhus chooses colours that give a dim impression, with earth tones mixed into them. It could be a way to distance the expression from certain purely commercial franchises. I interpret it as a design choice to evoke some favourable sentiments in the adult readers. The colour palette is not part of the playful process with multimodal elements. The spreads are dominated by a tainted layer with a sepia effect, also on empty spaces in the spreads. The effect is that the book seems aged and gives a retro style impression. This is

not unknown in products for children. The nostalgia surrounding childhood provides a market for old school toys and retro style products. We find this aesthetics in the products from *Blafre* (Inspirasjon forlag), which build their marketing on retro vibes. Their thermo bottle matches the colours from *What Does the Fox say*. The motive shows nature (clouds) and culture (farm) with references to local traditional landscapes, where the Massey-Ferguson tractor and the red building with the bridge and the pointed roof are typical of Norway. The clothes company *Moods of Norway* and the popular Norwegian children's TV series "Gråtass" contain the same elements. Alluding to them in a picturebook for children is a shortcut to the heart of Norwegian families, and apparently also resounds with an international audience.

These initial observations point in the direction of a spin-off product borrowing its value from the video, combined with nostalgia



signals that can boost sales. According to dictionary.com a spinoff product is "any product that is an adaption, outgrowth, or development of another similar product", a secondary product in a "somewhat unrelated area" ("Spin-off").

However, there exist arguments for the opposite view. The strongest is perhaps the presence of an actual picturebook in the

video. In the dance scene the dancers surround an old man who reads a picturebook for a child, singing the very same phrases that we find in the Nyhus picturebook. This is a source of confusion when it comes to fictional layers (Karlsson, 2016). It also challenges the genesis of the physical book and the time of its creation. The book in the video is a different book, judging from the cover that is displayed. So the picturebook *What does the fox say* can not be found as a prop in the video. The relationship is more complex than that. The picturebook has a life in its own merit, and it also exists in a tactile version for people with reduced sight or other special needs – or others who just want a tactile experience. This is one step further in understanding the book with a an autonomous existence, independent of the video. When the products in these ways pose the question of what is the primary and

what is the secondary product, we are no longer talking about a regular spin-off phenomenon.

3. Intertextuality as a problem and possibility

If the book is a text that has its own aesthetical value and system, what then is the relationship between the video and the picturebook? Genette (1997) starts out describing the palimpsest (an old manuscript with several layers of written and erased text) as a metaphor for relationships between old texts (hypotexts) and new texts (hypertexts) that build on the old ones. In the case of *What does The Fox say* it is unclear which is which. However, it is worthwhile to look into the world of intertextuality in order to sort out some possible relationships.

Related texts are transformations of each other. We have transformations when one artistic expression is transformed into another. Genette (1997) lists a plethora of possibilities, like transstylization, when the high style text is reborn in a low style version. Another example is transmotation, when the original hypotext reemerges in a version where the point of the story is changed, for example from moralism to pure entertainment. We can also think about the diegetic transposition, where the plot of a story is set in a different time and place, like *West Side Story* (1961), the musical version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Could such transformations apply to our two products?

In the case of the video and the picturebook we have two different media. To compare them is problematic. Is the image of a fox in a picturebook necessarily related to a fox in a video? The video contains stylized foxes in the shape of dancers and fursuits, but also a realistic fox, and not least an anthropomorphic fox with fox hide and a human voice, standing up and singing. The many different fox shapes in the picturebook have features from all of these fox-like apparitions from the video. We interpret drawings on paper in a different way than we interpret video pictures and animations. Drawings are fixed expressions that need active interpretation and contextualization. Moving pictures in a video require a different kind of co-creative activity. With picturebooks we can talk about the reductive nature of encapsulation (Duncan, 1999): The picturebook spread freezes a moment in time and selects a limited number of elements and emphases. When the level of abstraction required for interpretations increases, the chances of finding reasonable points of comparison wane. The picturebook is a more open and diverging expression than the video in our case.

Genette describes intersemiotic relations in chapter 79 of *Palimpsests* (1997) by warning that different art forms have elements

that are not comparable. Meaning, language, repetition, mood; they all have different ontological status in works of painting, music or literature. When we compare two multimodal expressions, the job becomes exceedingly complex. Perhaps the closest we can come to a valid comparison is by resorting to Genette's concept of diegesis, in this case the fictitious world that the story unfolds in. In my view, the book and the video both retain some basic features that picturebook readers and video viewers will perceive as similar:

1. The fox and the trees. In both products there are plenty of these.
2. The party guests and the animals. In both products there are plenty.
3. The party apparel: glasses, masks, confetti, food, furniture. In both products there are plenty of these.
4. Humorous elements. In both products there are plenty of these.
5. The lyrics, identical in both products.

The diegetic world is the sum of the verbal, non-verbal, paraverbal, communicative, cognitive, and semiotic parameters of an aesthetic expression (Drößiger, p. 282). Before looking further at the details of the picturebook, it is good to come to terms with a preliminary conclusion: The intertextual relationship between the two products must represent some type of copresence of texts (Genette, 1982, p. 2). The picturebook quotes the video by rendering the text in its entirety. The similarities between the other visual elements could be a type of allusion. The third type of copresence of texts is plagiarism, according to Genette, but in this case the imitation is no secret, regardless of what we perceive as the original.

Both the video and the picturebook are based on a certain kind of hypotext: children's books about animals. In an English-speaking context, Dr. Seuss' *Fox in Socks* is a reference, and this makes sense: The tongue-twisters of Dr. Seuss highlight poetic language, as does also *What Does the Fox Say?* in its own way. Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970) is also well known, and both these books present the fox as an interesting animal. So do the many folk tales about the fox: It is a smart, enigmatic and elusive animal. *What Does the Fox Say?* indeed focuses on the charisma of the fox. Its self-assured posture and its frequent appearance in the limelight of a stage in the book leaves no doubt as to who the main character is. We find a similar attitude at the end of the video, but this is an element that the book cultivates to a higher degree.

Diegesis presupposes a fictitious world where there exists a plot, but there is not much of a plot in the video. It is more like a collection of tableaux that act as a background for one single question, a so called

sylliloque, where the main character talks to himself. The video revolves around this. The picturebook, on the other hand, has the fox as its main character. The narrator in the frame story is now invisible. Maybe it is fair to say that the book has a slightly more developed plot, with the constant marching from left to right, with occasional stops for a performance by the fox or another animal. A picturebook is a type of media with room for small side themes, created by secondary characters, but it also has linear characteristics and a tradition for causality. We turn the page and prepare to be surprised or to have some confirmation. A video, in particular a music video, invites to a more simultaneous reading, and new angles and scene shifts don't necessarily mean that we travel on a timeline. In conclusion, also the plot and our expectations in that regard, represent some incongruency that is unsurmountable. The art forms are just different.

The concept of transmediation is often applied to discussions about books and movie versions, and it is also applicable to discussion about a picturebook and a video. However, the question at hand is not how much content is retained in one medium and lost in another. The question concerns the status of the picturebook. Its inherent qualities are just as important as the transmediation perspective. This text uses intertextuality as the comparative tool. It is a well established field with some tradition, while transmediation is a field in rapid development. Peña and James deliver a comprehensive synopsis of the plethora of different definitions of this concept, suggesting that it might represent a theoretical detour from a quite practical research question. However, Peña and James cite Horn (2007), where the introduction advocates "attention toward the "technological-medial *a priori*" of culture; that is, toward the function and functioning of media over and against any interrogation of their "nature."" This functional focus is an invitation to a final comment on the epitextual context of the picturebook.

In a digital world, intertextuality is taken one step further. Karlsson (2016) refers to the so-called web.2 of the new digital cosmopolitans. The Web.2 is a world where the mash-ups, comments, parodies, pastiches, commentaries, paraphrases and "covers" exist as parasites on viral phenomena, but also contribute with creativity and influence. The example where a kindergarten enacts a music video about the fox, using the original sound, is interesting. Nyhus could have picked it up and referred to it in his picturebook. I have not managed to find any conclusive evidence for such influence. Nyhus seems to operate isolated from the web.2 aspect of the video. Nevertheless, his picturebook can be viewed as one in a long row of multimodal comments on the video, and probably one of the most elaborate ones. Parodies on Youtube are

often parodies in the original sense of the word, as a song sung alongside another, and not necessarily with a mocking intent. Nyhus' pictures resound alongside the pictures of the video, and they offer a lot of creativity and add new qualities. This brings us back to the question of the status of the book as a spin-off product or an independent picturebook in its own right. The last line of argumentation will address its qualities as a picturebook.

4. The complex iconotext

The question of the status of the picturebook will be addressed here also by conducting a close reading. A complex and challenging expression can be used as an argument that the picturebook is not a spin-off of the video, but an autonomous artistic product. We will look at the paratext, the motive, the verbal elements, the style and the rest of the iconotext.

The *paratext* of a picturebook includes the peritexts that are part of the physical book, like the covers, the end papers and the title page. Let's look closer at the title. The video has a short title: "The Fox." This is for internet visibility and impact, and it makes online searches more effective. The title is partly dictated by the dynamics of the medium. It is also short and enigmatic and caters to a diverse target group, really anyone with an interest for this animal.

The title of the picturebook can be interpreted as a quote from the video refrain. "What does the fox say?" is the catchphrase, and it is the closest we come to a refrain. It is common to name songs either by first line in verse or refrain. However, Bob Dylan chose the repeating phrase in the refrain in "Blowin' in the wind" as his name for the famous song. The pop group *Survivor* uses the last words in the verse in "Eye of the Tiger" (used in the *Rocky* movies). "The Fox" (the video) is similar: The catch phrase forms a bridge between the verse and the refrain. In "The Fox" the space allocated for the refrain is filled with fox sounds. Each of these "refrains" is different, with different sounds, but the same musical environment. It is a cognitive challenge to imagine what the refrain could be, if we found out what the fox says. But we can only guess, according to the text. In rhetorics it is a so-called indecorous element when the refrain is reduced to a draft every time it repeats itself. Hunt and Paliewicz describe indecorous elements as at odds with conventions, and a way to make room for suppressed voices. In this case, the playful vocalizations of the refrain certainly give children a voice and an agency in the processing of the video and book. The wording of the catchphrase is still familiar from a long tradition of children's books and songs that ask: What does the dog say and what

does the sheep say. The video and the picturebook connect to that tradition.

Videos with animal sounds are not unique. The pop group A-ha has a song called "Cry wolf" (Scoundrel Days, 1986), using animal sounds in a song for adults. A-ha is the greatest Norwegian commercial success, and a big influence on Norwegian pop musicians, also on Ylvis. When A-ha's most famous song, "Take on me" (Hunting High and Low, 1984) ends on a high note, it is iconic, especially with Morten Harket's characteristic falsetto voice. It is even the name of the last World tour of the pop group ("Aha"). "The Fox" also ends on a high note: "What do you saaay?" This is a musical allusion to A-ha. Based on this, the most interesting part of the paratext of both book and song is the title. It refers to small children's books, but it also has other references. When the book picks up these elements, it is an example of playfulness and intertextual complexity.

The paratext also includes the *epitext*, which is the mention of the book in contexts that are not part of the physical book. The video is a dominating epitext for the picturebook. Not only the original video has this function, the epitext also includes all online comments and references. These are prolific online. Bristol public library has posted a Youtube video where a librarian (presumably) sings the song while showing the picturebook spreads ("What Does the Fox Say? Book and Song"). The youtuber Lihay made a cartoon ("What does the Fox say? [cartoon version]"). There is a *Just Dance* version, where we can learn the dance ("Just Dance 2015 - What Does The Fox Say?"). The bluegrass version with Gwen Sebastian is catchy ("The Fox - Bluegrass Tribute to Ylvis by Gwen Sebastian (what does the fox say)"). Zhenjiang book club presents a loud reading without the music ("What Does the Fox Say (Musical Book Reading)"). A kindergarten presents a "parody", which is more like a reshoot of the video, with child actors ("Ylvis- (The fox Parody) Kid Version"). An ocean of videos revolving around "The Fox" show the impact of a video gone viral, and it is typical of contemporary netizens that they actively engage and create, they are not just passive consumers looking for entertainment (Karlsson, 2016). This world of meaningful activity is also the epitext of the picturebook. It functions as a recommendation—this video and this book is worth looking into—and as online resources that can increase the potential for interesting experiences with the book.

The motive is interesting. Nyhus establishes a big *carnival* in his picturebook, taking the gathering of friends in the posh forest house from the video a step further: All kinds of animals participate in a giant costume party, and they march forward, each one contributing with his own voice. This scene corresponds with Bakhtin's vision of the carnival element in medieval culture, where the whole village or society come together and the World becomes a stage, with all inhabitants as actors. The ideas are developed in *Rabelais and His World* (Bakhtin, 1984): In the times of the carnival the body shapes, with its protrusions and crevices, get increased attention, and crude songs and raw laughter, theatre and literature can resound unhindered by morale. People low and high switch places, bishop seats are seized by choir boys, children spank their parents and animals attend mass. We notice similarities in *What Does the Fox Say?* Some elements are certainly present: crowds of persons and loads of peculiar body shapes, and all the animals taking part. It is also a subversive tendency here: The animals take the place of people in the carnival in the picturebook. The Bakhtinian tendency can also be related to the online community, which acts as a market place for all sorts of crude or refined expressions in connection with "The Fox." Inadvertent or not, Nyhus has set a stage for an inclusive and diverse event, as child readers, adult readers, youtubers and viral audiences

take part in the celebration of the humour and wonder. Epitext matters.

The *verbal* text in the picturebook is identical to that of the video, and the video actually has subtitles, so the correspondence can be tracked in minute detail. It is interesting how verbal text is put in the foreground, both in video and picturebook. Most of the song consists of some type of animal language, where the song and book present all the different sounds, which are really guesswork on fox sounds. But the verses contain some



musings that are also subject to emphasis when the words are

highlighted in different ways. In the picturebook the verbal text has one intraiconic feature: The font is a typewriter font, similar to the MS word font Courier. This is a retro signal and influences the reader reception.

Finally, there is one more reference to verbal text in both video and book that should be mentioned. In one of the spreads we see a person reading a book. This turns into a meta event in the book, in a more direct manner than in the video. Karlsson (2016) interprets this video sequence as the childhood memories of the main character who poses the question in the song. In the picturebook, however, the book is in the hands of a frog in a rocking-chair, far from evoking any sentimentality. When animals read books, it can have a motivational effect on children that feel close to animals. It also conforms with the subversive motive: Humans have left this stage, and the lowest of animals sit on the reader's throne

Turning to the pictures, we notice the nostalgic colour scheme. The shapes have a distinct style. The organic shapes with non-repetitive patterns and shapes are striking. Even when there is a pattern of fox shapes, like on the back cover, each fox has an individual expression, in addition to conforming to a pattern. The geometrical plan for the shapes is evident already on the front cover: Wavy leaves and soft fur alternate with rigid half circle rocks and pointy trees with straight lines and triangle shapes. Throughout the book we notice an obsession with circles in the pictures. They appear everywhere, from bottle tops to white tail dots. There is definitely playfulness of geometry here. On spread number 1 there are at least 22 circles, even in the joints of the dog. On spread 5 there are 38 circles to be found, for the attentive reader. In spread 1 there are four spirals, hidden in shapes like tails or party stationary. In addition to the organic and geometric shapes we find a lot of two-dimensional surfaces. All of the prominent elements of the shapes come together in a style that resembles a defined style, the Art Deco. The spreads have the aesthetics of 1930s posters. The perspectives are skewed, and we see rays in the shape of trees and handheld flashlights, often parallel rays. There are also rays spreading out from one single point, like in spread 5 and 11, and there are sun-shaped spotlight shapes. This is also typical of the art deco style, along with the propensity for free profiles. Nyhus' style could be labelled as a contemporary Art Deco, and he uses it also in other books.

A picturebook analysis includes a look at the *iconotext*, describing how the elements of the book work together. As we have seen, Nyhus creates a world with nostalgia as a stylistic move, and it is populated by characters recognizable from the epitext the video, e.g. the costume party members. However, in the picturebook animals have taken the

place of people. We don't see people dressed as animals, we see animals dressed as foxes. They not only wear carnival masks, they also form a parade, like a circus parade as the circus comes to town. The spread with a spotlight on the real fox in the role of a star rhymes with this.

If we view the video and the picturebook as one product, we notice how the book selects and highlights certain elements. In spread 5 we see a character in a chair shouting out sounds, just like the old man in the video. But the book puts emphasis on the oral activity by repeating and exaggerating. The frog in the chair shouts so much that he bounces in his chair, and the tongue almost falls out. The fox on the recto opens his mouth wide, and the trees in the background are physical manifestations of the voice, like the motion line and emanata (sweat or tear drops) of comic books, the lines that act as meta signals. The picturebook displays congruency (Nikolajeva&Scott, 2006, p. 6) with the video. At the same time we see varying degrees of deviation, as pointed out above. It makes sense to view the two products as one combined product. How else can we find motivation in the book for a reading frog, or explain why animals dress up in carnival masks and ask about the sound of the fox? The book is not completely independent of the video.

However, the reader who accepts the peculiar plot of the book, will find many ways in which the book creates meaning on its own, and I will continue to use terms from Nikolajeva&Scott. There is *congruency* in spread 6, when the text says "blue eyes, pointy nose" and the picture shows the same. But the other spreads show that "pointy" can mean a lot of things, so there is *elaboration*. In spread 1 the text says that the dog says woof, which is a generic statement. But the picture shows a particular Dalmatian dog with red leash and its own personality. This is *specification*. We have *amplification* with all the open mouths in the spreads, emphasizing that animal sounds are in focus. On spread 2 the frog says quack, following the familiar pattern of the small children's book, but the frog has a crown. This could be an example of *complementation*: Animals are individuals and they have their history, just like people. A closer look at the frogs reveals that some of them have things in common with so-called head-footers, figures from paintings by Renaissance painter Hieronymus Bosch. One frog with a pointy party hat has a body resembling a Pokémon ball, the dwelling of the animal-like figures from the popular movies and games. Here different narratives compete, and this may be an example of *alternation*. It continues on spread 3, where an animal that looks like Disney's Donald Duck appears, and on spread 10, where the fox appears in the guise of an Egyptian Anubis figure. *Sylleptic* elements are everywhere, for example in spread 10, where two foxes on the recto are

having a fight, on spread 5, where two mice discuss dance moves, and on spread 12, where a frog rests on the elephant's tail after doing a decoration job.

Humour is everywhere. The spider on spread 10 has a mask that is bigger than the animal itself. The tree stub on spread 9 dances along with the foxes. The animals on spread 3 bring with them their own inflatable animals. It is not every day you see a duck with a rubber duck. The fish in the water bowl uses a straw to drink soda from a box that is already submerged on the bottom of the bowl. The bowtie on spread 9 has eyes, so that it looks like a mask. The moon on spread 4 looks like a fox tail, and the flowers on spread 6 look like fox heads, alluding to the plants with names like fox glove and fox bell. On spread 12, lying between scattered leaves and party apparel, we see a smile on the ground, in the shape of a mask, definitely setting the tone for the atmosphere.

In both cultural references and in the humour it is evident that the intended *audience* is both young and more experienced readers. Spread 12 is one example. A child can recognize the fox tail on the seal head, and perhaps the clumsy figure of the cow with fox ears and tail attached. Also the lamp cord in the shape of a duck is within reach for young eyes, perhaps more so than for adults. But adults will attach more significance to the half eaten apple and tooth brush on the ground, pointing towards more lamentable sides of party life and the day after. On top of the soda cup with a straw we also see what looks suspiciously similar to a used condom. The naïve expression of the cow's face may remind adults of the struggle to fit in, which is part of the social challenge that parties represent for people with or without anxiety for contact, gatherings, crowds and hierarchies.

The references to drinking culture is interesting. In the video we see mostly wine glasses/goblets. The picturebook, on the other hand, lets loose a plethora of drinking experiences for children: straws, the licking of cups, a milk bucket with straws, drinking straight from the water mug, a baby bottle and a vase. The book acts like a wimmelbook, with a row of epiphanies for readers who go looking for details. Adults may find a message in the way Nyhus translates the champagne culture of the video into a party environment suitable for children. The children's perspective is to find inspiration in the mundane, or seeing the exhilarating in the seemingly normal, far removed from the artificial intoxication sought after by adults. The adults, on the other hand, will connect the Anubis figure and the mystical life of the fox and notice trees that are alive and trees that are dead. Insects with wings symbolize the spirit, in death liberated from the body and flying into the hereafter.

Life is short and you only live once. Perhaps both adults and children may notice the walking stick and the key hidden in the pictures – a reference to Martin Handford's popular books about Waldo (Wally). As we read, we see this ambivalence of this remarkable book, without a clearly defined plot or a specified target group, but which most definitely contains an iconotext with inventive, surprising, complex and profound elements.

5. Conclusion

An investigation into three contexts of the picturebook *What does the fox say* confirms that these contexts are relevant and can deliver answers to the question: Is it reasonable to argue that the picturebook is a mere spin-off product of the video, and is it possible to argue for the opposite? The latter part of the question seems less and less appropriate with increasing insight into the book and its context.

1) The origin and reception of the picturebook may indicate that it conforms with purely commercial publications based on the popularity of a primary product. A look into the process behind the picturebook shows that parallel products can be part of high ambitions and a complex series of events and negotiations. Timing may be essential, but it may be unrelated to quality. It seems likely that the sudden rise and fall of the sales numbers of the picturebook is related to the viral video as a promoting factor.

2) A pure spin-off relationship between video and picturebook should yield a good number of congruency between the products. However, it turns out that the intertextual relationship is complex and a matter of discussion. This is due in part to the different media, but the present analysis shows how elements are used in different ways and to different ends in the two products. Using Genette's concept of hyper/hypotextuality as a tool, it is possible to identify many alternatives for a transformation of the texts, from transstylization to transmediation. It seems likely that the distant, yet unmistakeable connection between video and book contributes to its status. The diegetic relationship is perhaps most striking to a traditional reader. However, the digital approaches on social media create an epitextual atmosphere that cannot be removed entirely from the book.

3) Moving on to the analysis of the iconotext of the book, it becomes clear that Nyhus has not only made a simple pendant to the video, but developed the motive and the functions into an autonomous or near autonomous product. A visit into the functions of Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) makes it clear how Nyhus plays with visual elements and iconotext elements, making surprising moves with elaboration,

specification, complementation, alternation and other relationships between picturebook elements. Addressing readers with different experiences, the picturebook displays many qualities incompatible with a low quality spin-off product.

Although we can not know the exact time of conception of the two products, we can point out some ways that the two point to each other, complement each other and amplify each other. A close reading of the book demonstrates how it is a true picturebook, with all the complexity of a skilled work of art with an ambition of its own. Musicians and visual artists seem to inspire each other in this case, and the result offers many interesting experiences for readers who see past the commercial surroundings.

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Illustration:

Roger Broders exhibition poster - *Cote d'Azur - Le Soleil toute l'année - France - Travel - Tourism* – print,
<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1353522684/roger-broders-exhibition-poster-cote>

YLVIS' THE FOX – FRA MUSIKKVIDEO TIL BILDEBOK: FORVANDLET TIL GLITTER ELLER GULL?

Artikkelen tar for seg bildeboken «Hva sier reven» av Svein Nyhus, som utkom i 2013, samme år som videoen «The Fox» ble et youtubefenomen. Spørsmålet er om bildeboken er en mindre interessant pendant til videoen, eller om den er et autonomt og kunstnerisk høyverdig produkt. En lesning som inkluderer et blikk på historisk kontekst, på intertekstualitet og på ikonotekst avdekker noen komplekse sammenhenger, men konkluderer med at bildeboken ikke står tilbake for Nyhus' øvrige produksjon med tanke på kvalitet, humor, oppfinnsomhet og utnyttelse av bildebokmediet.

Nøkkelord: musikkvideo, bildebok, ikonotekst, intertekstualitet, *spin-off*