

Ferrari, Monica

Education and things. Pedagogical ideologies and didactic materials in two European courts (15th-17th centuries)

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF)
Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
Schloßstr. 29, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Die Materialität der Erziehung: Kulturelle und soziale Aspekte pädagogischer Objekte

Herausgegeben von

Karin Priem, Gudrun M. König und Rita Casale

BELTZ

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Monica Ferrari

Education and Things

*Pedagogical Ideologies and Didactic Materials in Two European Courts
(15th-17th Centuries)*

The question of didactic programs based on objects (and on specific gestures or strategies related to them) spans the entire history of education,¹ but further research is needed about the use of tools and things in particular environments (Julia, 1996). In recent years sociosemiotic analysis has highlighted the importance of practices for the social use of things and the role of different social actors (Semprini, 2002). “Cultural” historical studies, moreover, underline the significance of particular “things,” myths and symbols for the shaping of individuals’ and social groups’ identity (Pazzaglia & De Giorgi, 2005; Chanet, 2005). In several of these studies, the complexity of the “*pratiques culturelles*” (Chartier, 1985; Roggero, 1999) and the material aspects of culture are connected with the issue of literacy and learning problems for the upper and lower classes. The multiple “cultural levels” existing in every society are thereby underlined. For instance, the “*culture scolaire*” (Chervel, 1998) produces “objects” for children and adults; in schools, a particular *outillage* surrounds them in specific times and places; things are also known to have the power of shaping our habits and attitudes.² Nowadays new technologies are introducing new objects, as well as new uses of things, and are changing social communication, ritual interactions, and attitudes (Caronia & Caron, 2010).

The social sciences in turn emphasize, from various points of view (including a pedagogical perspective), the use of objects and didactic things in specific environments (Ferrari, 2010a). In this essay I will focus on some educational ideas and practices based on things (objects, books, materials) used for the education of princes and lords in European courts, paying particular attention to the Sforza family in Milan in the 15th century and the Bourbon family in France in the 17th century. More specifically, I will discuss the relationships between teaching materials (books which are written *ad hoc*) and practices based on them.

1 On these themes, see Ferrari (2011a) and Ferrari (2011c). In this essay I will take up and summarize some issues that I have already studied and analyzed in these two publications.

2 On the construction of habits and the “*costume educativo*,” see Becchi, 1983.

This distinct approach to the educational past is interesting for several reasons. First of all, the education of the elites has been re-examined in the second half of the 20th century from a variety of perspectives.³ Increasing attention has been paid to different sources and problems: the educational practices, the social attitudes, and the entourage of “princes in the making.” Moreover, the numerous sources about the princes’ education allow us to study pedagogical strategies and to analyze the role of the environment in the individuation process, with the focus on a particular individual. The young prince in European societies from the 15th to 17th centuries seems to be very interesting from a pedagogical point of view. He had to be educated, but he was also considered to be different and unique. His future was the future of the entire community; for him, in different courts and times, books, texts, and didactic tools were created, which deserve proper reflection in historical research.

The aim of this analysis is to study the explicit and hidden aspects of didactic communication, which formed the basis of the different “texts” that a young prince had to decode and may have used. Moreover, these “texts” also contained images of different objects, and the book was a thing that the young prince could hold in his hands. In the following sections, I will analyze didactic objects for princes in two different historical periods and contexts, which, however, share some similarities.

According to the definition given by Cesare Segre (1985), a “text” shall be understood as a form of communication based on a particular code. We know that there are often several “texts” in the same book. Take, for example, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and its notes, which were written *manu propria* by Ludovico Maria Sforza, “il Moro” (1452-1508) – son of Francesco I Sforza (1401-1466), Duke of Milan, and Bianca Maria Visconti (1424/25-1468) – and copied down by him according to Filelfo’s⁴ dictation at the age of fifteen. Or consider, for instance, the *Bellum Grammaticale* and its paintings created for Gaston d’Orléans (1608-1660), brother of the King of France, Louis XIII (1601-1643). Both the handwritten reproduction of the teacher’s talk by the student (a process through which the spoken word took on a material-textual form) and the iconic “text” were of major importance in these educational frameworks; we find the two “texts” (literary and iconic) in the same sophisticated didactic object: a book created for the education of a young prince – and also to celebrate the power of his family.

I will first look at Italy in the 15th century and, in particular, the Sforza court (from 1450 to the end of the century). Francesco I Sforza obtained power with some difficulties, while his sons had problems in ruling the duchy and eventually lost it in the last decade of the 15th century. They were the lords of a powerful and large state, but they were also a young dynasty that had to legitimate its power. Two centuries later the Bourbon family faced a similar situation in France. These two different political scenes were home to young princes often destined to lose their parents at a very young age.

3 For bibliographies with a focus on Italy and France, see Ferrari, 1996; Ferrari, 2000; Cogitore & Goyet, 2001; Halévi, 2002; Luciani & Volpilhac-Augier, 2003; Meyer, 2004; Carile, 2004; Becchi & Ferrari, 2009; Ferrari, 2009a, 2010b, 2010c.

4 Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481) was a famous scholar, teacher, and humanist (see Garin, 1949).

For example, Gian Galeazzo Sforza (1469-1494), son of Galeazzo Maria (1444-1476), Duke of Milan, was seven when his father was killed; Louis XIII became King of France when he was nine (his father was killed, too), and his son Louis XIV (1638-1715) became King of France when he was five. For this reason, the princes needed an *institutio* that would help them to grow up very quickly. The setting up of a new scene of power was based on iconic items and, often, on the identification with the good examples of the past or present. In two different centuries and contexts, these practices became political and didactic strategies useful to train a *princeps* who would be able to rule himself and others, underlining the *dignitas* of his role. The magnificence of the painted images in different iconographic programs and texts were used as a mnemonic trick in some didactic works and always reminded the princes, their entourage and all the people who were looking at them, of the central political roles within aristocratic societies.

1. Educational Materials and Projects for Italian Princes in the 15th Century

In 15th-century Italy, a lot of attention was paid to the education of “new” princes and lords. Didactic tools and strategies were centered around an *ouillage ad hoc* and related to pedagogical projects, which usually were not focused on the young learners, but on educational ideas concerning the creation of a particular political individual, able to rule others in a specific context.

The 15th century in Italy is characterized by works which gave new form to the education of the princes and lords who were destined to rule over others (Garin, 1949, 1968). In his work *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adulescentiae*, the famous humanist Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444) discussed the education of a boy who was destined to assume an important role in society. For this particular kind of child Vergerio suggested to use great examples from the past as well as the history of his family. In the first half of the century, the scholar and teacher Vittorino Rambaldoni from Feltre (Vittorino da Feltre, 1378-1447) worked in Mantua, educating future princes, princesses and teachers. In the course of the 15th century, correspondence became more and more important in political and educational thinking. In his letters to a politically very important student (Leonello d’Este), the humanist Guarino Guarini from Verona (Guarino da Verona, 1374-1460) defined the ideal characteristics of a ruler. Francesco Filelfo reflected on the importance of the teacher’s task in his correspondence with Matteo da Trevi, tutor of Gian Galeazzo. The values of *humanae litterae* for a gentlewoman were underlined by Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), in his book *De studiis et litteris liber*. Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464), who became Pope Pius II, also paid attention to a prince’s educational training in his *Tractatulus de educatione liberorum*. The humanist Bartolomeo Sacchi (the “Platina,” 1421-1481) dedicated a work entitled *De principe* to Federico Gonzaga (1441-1484), son of the Marquis of Mantua, Ludovico Gonzaga (1414-1478). According to Sacchi, an ideal court had to be full of masters and scholars. For all the authors just mentioned the central problem was the construction of a real

elite, educated according to the principles of the *studia humanitatis* which would make men and women free. For Vittorino da Feltre, Guarino Guarini, and Francesco Filelfo, *humanitas* was, in fact, one of the essential characteristics of those who have to rule others, with mercy, temperance, clemency, wisdom, *liberalitas* and fortitude.

According to humanists, it was necessary to focus on knowledge and learning and not only on weapons when it comes to the education of a lord (who must learn how to rule a town): power does not come only from rank but also from wisdom, culture, and practice, which, as Erasmus of Rotterdam (1469-1536) will say some years later, make men different from animals. The ambitious educational program of Italian humanism was rooted in some courts where there was a real need to legitimate the power of a family and the social structure in an uncertain and unstable political situation. Francesco I Sforza, for example, *homo novus*, began to rule Milan in 1450, also thanks to his marriage to Bianca Maria Visconti, daughter of Filippo Maria Visconti, Lord of Milan. The dynasty faced various problems after the death of Francesco I Sforza:⁵ Galeazzo Maria, his heir, was killed in 1476 and then replaced by a very young son who was overpowered by his uncle.

Reading the Sforza family letters, which are now stored, among other places, in the State Archives in Milan, the State Archives in Mantua, and the National Library of France in Paris, one can easily find news of political plots and threats which endangered the life of lords and which usually led to tragic events. The young princes and princesses shared these experiences, but their training path was defined for their ideal future even though they may not always reach it (Ferrari, 1997, 2001, 2008): Dorothea Gonzaga (1449-1467), daughter of Ludovico Gonzaga, bride-to-be of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, was repudiated because of her presumed hump, whereas Galeazzo Maria was killed at a young age because his peers considered him a tyrant, and Massimiliano, son of Ludovico Maria Sforza, also never ruled Milan (Simonetta, 2004). However, an educational program was organized for these princes and princesses, which can be considered “spectacular,” focused on a pedagogical system which should prepare them for the mechanisms of power. Books and didactic tools were prepared *ad hoc*; the Latin grammars, the psalteries composed by the masters were combined with texts written down by the children or copied *manu propria* from the classics. A lot of letters testify to the exchange of information among parents, teachers, doctors, and “governatori”; in this period, family portraits, which we can still see nowadays on the walls of palaces or on altar pieces, became more and more important (Giordano, 1995). The spectacular life of the lord revolved around court festivities, hunting parties, banquets, triumphs, marriages, parades, and processions into town: at all these events the prince is overlooking this scenery of symbolic power and is making his own world meaningful.

In the following, the focus will be first on a series of works specifically devised for the education of Ludovico Maria Sforza and his son, Massimiliano, which reveal the

5 Even Francesco Sforza had to face some plots, for example by Sforza Secondo, who was confined by his father in the Rocchetta of Porta Romana; see Ferrari, 2000, 2006. On Galeazzo Maria Sforza, see Lubkin, 1994; Simonetta, 2004.

subtle exchange of gazes that characterize the life of the *princeps* who looked at others but was also always observed by someone else. Those who were destined to rule were never alone. There was always somebody who was looking at them, and their life was organized for this gaze in a sort of panoptical device. Miniaturists and painters painted the scenes of the “school books” in which the *princeps* became a model for himself. Architects such as Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) or Antonio Averlino (the Filarete, ca. 1400-1469) defined the ideal town in important dialogic treatises, and some princes, a few years later, would try to actually build these kinds of cities (for example Vespasiano Gonzaga, 1531-1591, ruler of the small “ideal city” of Sabbioneta). The prince was educated (in a non-formal way) through the scenery that surrounded him, including people, rules, and lifestyles as well as tangible things. These things (pictures, decorations, coats of arms, dresses, jewelry) were put in specific places, so they became didactic tools, which reinforced the message for the young prince (and for everyone else).

Next, I will analyze a text written by and for the Moro in the years when Bartolomeo Sacchi, the Platina, was writing his *De principe* and Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) was painting the *Camera Picta*⁶ in Mantua. It comprises the notes to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* dictated by Francesco Filelfo to Ludovico Maria Sforza in 1467 when he was fifteen and living in Cremona Castle.⁷ Cremona Castle was a very special place: the rooms were full of paintings, and it was surrounded by big gardens, as the Moro reported in several letters to his mother (Ferrari, 2003). At the castle and in town (which was redesigned by the Sforza family; see Chittolini, 2008), Ludovico Maria Sforza walked in the streets, playing the role of lieutenant of his brother Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the new *pater familias* after the death of his father, Francesco Sforza, in 1466. Ludovico copied down *manu propria* the notes of his teacher Francesco Filelfo, one of the most important Italian humanists of that time, to *Rhetorica nova*, which is considered a model for its focus on the difficult topic of mnemonics, a fundamental skill for practicing the so-called *ars bene dicendi* (rhetoric).

The relationship between the literary text and the iconic text (miniatures which frame the words copied by the student) underlines the problem of the relationship between two “texts” coexisting in the illustrated book of the 15th century. Heir to the illuminated manuscript and code, the “school book” for the Prince of Milan presents the problem of the autonomy of two texts, which seem to be parallel in structure, organization, and content. In a book that deals with different modes of visualized speech, Giovanni Pozzi reflects on some complex “texts” that combined words and images (Pozzi, 1993). These didactic books used a combination of images and words to capture the attention of the reader; in addition, the book was an important precious object; sometimes

6 For the *Camera Picta* (the famous Spouses’ Chamber) painted by Andrea Mantegna in the castle of San Giorgio, the ducal palace of Mantua, see Signorini, 1985; Lucco, 2006; Trevisani, 2006. The room contains the portraits of different members of the Gonzaga family; moreover, the entire *Camera Picta* is a family portrait.

7 The comment to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, copied down *manu propria* by Ludovico il Moro, is now stored in the Royal Library in Turin (ms. Varia 75); see Firpo, 1967; Ferrari, 2000.

the images and the words told two different stories. As Pozzi points out, it is difficult to understand the meaning of these two different autonomous “texts” and the relationships between them (Pozzi, 1993, p. 461).

In the 15th century, it was considered useful to create “imprese,” *emblemata*, symbols and icons, which constituted encyclopedias of symbolic images (Pozzi, 1993, pp. 102-103; Gombrich, 1972), in order to elaborate iconographic didactic programs underlying important pedagogical and political values, as can be seen, for example, in the famous *Camera Picta* in Mantua. It also has to be mentioned that the prince, in order to become a good *orator*, needed a repertoire of pictures which helped him to memorize. For this reason, the notes to the *Rhetorica nova* contained an illustrated history of great figures from the past: profiles of forefathers and parents (who represented the history of the dynasty) as well as important historical rulers such as Cyrus, Xerxes, Themistocles, Romulus, and Scipio (who deserve to be remembered and emulated).

The connection between the literary text and the iconic text is particularly evident in the *Liber Jesus* and in the *Grammatica del Donato* created for Massimiliano, son of Ludovico Maria Sforza.⁸ The second leaf of the *Liber Jesus*, on the recto, flatters the never-ending glory of the lord who is able to combine warfare and humanist scholarship. The first leaf, on the verso, presents Massimiliano on a white horse, carrying weapons. Born in 1493, Massimiliano actually was three to five years old when he was described as a perfect young boy in these books. This fact supports the evidence of a new attention to a culture *for* childhood, not *of* childhood. When it became necessary to educate a future lord to establish (and manage) new forms of power in the towns, it was also necessary to plan for him a new training path, starting with the classics.

During the 15th century the political situation in Italy was unstable; “new” families and “new men” (*homines novi*), like Francesco I Sforza, obtained power for the first time. Meanwhile, the courts became a sort of cultural and political laboratory. However, princes and princesses were considered for what they should become and not for what they were in their childhood; these children sometimes were portrayed older than they were and, in any case, as future rulers, as models for themselves. Massimiliano was painted in the court, surrounded by his family (pages, nurses and young girls who sang for him – cfr. *Liber Jesus*, verso of the 7th leaf and recto of the 8th leaf) or outside the castle’s walls, together with the “governatore” and other *familiaries*. The *Grammatica del Donato*, moreover, not only explains the conjugation of verbs, which had to be learned by heart, but the book was illustrated with pictures that portrayed the prince during convivial moments and as an *exemplum* for himself. Massimiliano is shown walking in Milan, in the room where he studied, playing with his friends or during a feast in an ideal garden. Walking the road to perfection and the path toward symbolic abstraction, he was then represented during a triumphal procession and between a vicious and a virtuous woman, choosing virtue. The book opens with a portrait of Massimiliano and

8 For an anastatic edition of the texts now stored in the Trivulziana Library in Milan, see Bologna, 1980. For a pedagogical analysis, see Ferrari, 2000. The *Liber Jesus* (codex 2163 of the Trivulziana Library in Milan) and the *Grammatica del Donato* (codex 2167 of the Trivulziana Library in Milan) were composed in the last decade of the 15th century.

closes with a portrait of his father (Ludovico Maria Sforza). The educational program, therefore, suggested to the son to mould himself in his father's image.

2. An Iconic Latin Grammar for Gaston d'Orléans

Civic humanism, in some courts and with some "texts" written *ad hoc*, aimed at training the prince through things and the environment. Noble values and good morals must be internalized not by blows and strokes (which were considered inappropriate for princes and free men) but by mnemonic techniques, good examples of teachers, heroes of the past and parents.

At the beginning of the 16th century, Erasmus of Rotterdam suggested in his *Institutio principis christiani* to depict some essential values in the pictures, which surrounded the future prince in his everyday environment. These pictures should be found in rings, paintings, and the coats of arms: in this way the prince could always see them, even when he was busy with other activities. Erasmus suggested to use a double "text," literary and iconic, to train the *princeps*: in this way the palace and the environment where he lived became a book which could teach him. This book was complemented by the teacher's words. But words were not enough: the "lesson of things" was necessary as well – as will be stated clearly by Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius, 1592-1670) who was convinced of the importance of practical experience in a step-by-step training path combined with the mnemonic techniques extensively used in the 17th century.

The 17th century was the "Golden Age" of France, when the court and the state put on a spectacular display of their power (Marin, 1981; Apostolidès, 1981). In this period, when the "new" royal dynasty needed to be legitimated, the mechanisms of power became a theatrical scenery which was based on different didactic paths imagined and realized for the princes and for France, the French people, in general. The life of Louis XIII (who became king when he was nine years old) has been studied extensively on the basis of the *Journal* by Jean Héroard (ca. 1550-1628), his personal physician (*premier médecin*).⁹ One should also take into consideration the big number of *Institutiones principis*, which were written for him and for his son, Louis XIV, who became king when he was five years old, after his father's death.

To highlight the educational role of an environment which can teach through things and tools built *ad hoc*, I will try to analyze, among the various tools created to educate the French Bourbons in the 17th century, the "War between the King of the Nouns and the King of the Verbs" made for Gaston d'Orléans (Ferrari, 1996). It consists of a series of paintings with captions (hand-drawn and hand-painted for the king's young brother, even though the printing system at that time had already been invented). The model used for the "War between the King of the Nouns and the King of the Verbs" who fight for

9 For an analysis of the didactic value of the *Journal* of the doctor of the French Dauphin, see Ariès, 1960. See also Balzarini, Ferrari Alfano, Grandini, Micotti Gazzotti & Hamilton Smith, 1991; Madeleine Foisil has edited a two-volume critical edition of the *Journal* of Héroard, published in 1989 (see also Foisil, 1996).

supremacy in the Speech World is a grammar by Andrea Guarna, an Italian scholar who published his work, a *Bellum grammaticale* (*Grammaticae opus novum, mira quadam arte et compendiosa excussum*), in Cremona in 1511 (Puliga & Hautala, 2011).

As for the education of the Bourbons, I have selected the *Grammaire en figures allégoriques empruntées à l'art militaire*, which is now at the National Library in Paris (ms. fr. 151) for further analysis. This series of eleven paintings created probably in 1616 (as can be inferred from the French translation of the text¹⁰) is related to a didactic model typical of the 15th century and of the Italian courts, especially in the court of the Sforza family in Milan. Today, the National Library of France in Paris houses some Italian illustrated books and precious codices, which were brought to France (by Louis XII, King of France, 1462-1515) at the end of the 15th century. We can assume that these codices provided both practical advice and new didactic methods. There are some parallels between the paintings used to educate the brother of the French king (which show battle scenes and a “town” of liberal arts and sciences) and the grammar treatise by the 16th-century Italian scholar, Andrea Guarna. As suggested by Pozzi (1993, p. 13), it is necessary, however, to analyze the system of *loci communes*; it is important to understand the differences and analogies between different texts. (A good example is the “town of knowledge” of the 17th-century grammar, where medicine – which heals the body – and theology – which heals the soul – are at the same level, *ex aequo*, changing the traditional *arbor scientiarum*.)

The prince had to reflect upon the ideal city, whereby he would learn the use of weapons and humanistic scholarship, military tactics and grammar. He had to remember related images and ideas: the *Grammaire* for Gaston d'Orléans was an extraordinary mnemonic tool. It has been constructed at a particular moment in time. Frances Yates (1966) underlines the importance of the art of memory in the 17th century: the emblems (and the books related to them) were excellent mnemonic tools. The emblems offered, in fact, a sensible (and emotional) experience which stimulated a series of mental skills such as, for example, imagination. Words, things and pictures were connected; they show a complex educational path. Other books full of emblematic (and perhaps mnemotechnical) images were composed for the French princes when they were young. The “homme de lettres” Marin Le Roy de Gomberville (ca. 1600-1674) authored *La doctrine des mœurs* (1646; for a new edition, see Le Roy de Gomberville, 2010) which was meant for Louis XIV. In this book each picture was complemented by a title, a French text in verses which explained the picture on the same page and, on the previous page, a long explanation in French and a quotation taken from the Latin classics which inspired it. This is how moral values were taught to the young princes: moral values were connected to the art of writing verses in French and translating Latin verses. Symbolic pictures, moreover, are used and explained to remember the words and, perhaps, to set up new virtual educational environments.

10 *Histoire memorable de la guerre civile d'entre les deux Rois des Noms et des Verbs [...]* Traduite du latin de messire André de Salerne patricien de la ville de Cremona par P.R.P. (1616). Paris: chez I. Libert.

In the 17th century, every environmental detail was used to train the royal heirs of the French Bourbon family (almost realizing the ideas of the humanist architect Filarete, who wanted an architect prince and wanted him taught the elements of drawing from a young age). That was the case with Louis XIII and the Duke of Bourgogne (1682-1712), grandson of Louis XIV, who were shown architectural treatises, precious illustrated books, and drawings made by famous artists when they were children, as was widely testified by their contemporaries (Ferrari, 1996; Lecoq, 2003; Ferrari, 2007). Their lives were full of ballet, plays, *entrées* in town (which were listed in the booklets recording the events), horse-riding lessons and prestigious victories (illustrated in the books written *ad hoc*); geographical maps, exercises and notebooks thus could become new books for future princes.¹¹

3. For a Research Project on an “Education by Things”

In the first book of *Émile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) wrote:

Cette éducation nous vient de la nature, ou des hommes, ou des choses. Le développement interne de nos facultés et de nos organes est l'éducation de la nature; l'usage qu'on nous apprend à faire de ce développement est l'éducation des hommes; et l'acquis de nôtre propre expérience sur les objets qui nous affectent est l'éducation des choses. (Rousseau, 1762/1969, p. 247)

Rousseau underlines the meaning of “things” and the relationship between nature, human action, and things in educational paths. His words help us to reflect upon a series of objects built *ad hoc* for the education of the elites in the past centuries. We therefore start to study the *objets* which become *choses*¹² in order to understand the combination of the ideal educational offering of literary texts¹³ with the teachers' strategies, with the practices, with the tutors' set of tools. We know very well that the informal aspects of everyday life were (and are) also important in a training path.¹⁴ It is necessary to study these objects – how they were used, who used them, and why –, not only in the context of princes and kings. In the case of princes and kings, too, many questions remain unanswered, even though there is new research about the development of educational

11 That is the case of the translation of Cesar's work made by Louis XIV and published in 1651.

12 On the objects which become “things,” see, e.g., for a discussion from a philosophical point of view, Bodei, 2009. See also from a pedagogical perspective, Escolano Benito, 2005; Dávila & Naya, 2005; Escolano Benito, 2007; Ferrari, 2009b; Zuccoli, 2010; Ferrari, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c.

13 Imagined and described in the educational treatises, and testified by letters, *mémoires*, and educational diaries.

14 On these issues, with reference to French princes and elites in the 17th and 18th centuries, see, e.g., Balzarini et al., 1991; Ferrari, 1996; Julia, 2006. On didactic iconological practices, see Farné, 2002.

programs in a particular environment.¹⁵ These programs are not only made up of libraries *ad usum delphini* (which must be better studied¹⁶), but also of a series of objects and practices in the use of things related to personal attitudes.

Walking in the gardens of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Louis XIII could see the mechanisms of the fountains and was meeting the architects who designed them. The court's doctor, Jean Héroard, showed him illustrated and erudite books; painters taught him to draw. Lessons by the best dancing teachers prepared him for the ballets; a famous treatise (1623) by his horse-riding teacher Antoine de Pluvinel (1552-1620) shows a young Louis XIII who learned how to ride a horse and, at the same time, became a model of perfect horse-riding. But Louis XIII also met stablemen and humble servants in his everyday life; these people also shaped his environment with their gestures and their presence.

Among the servants, we have to stress the importance of the nurse who played a very important role in the life of young princes at the European courts: she was portrayed with Massimiliano Sforza in the *Liber Jesus*, and Louis XIII wanted his nurse around as late as sixteen (so that she could tell him fairytales). There were also other children – brothers, sisters or simply pages – who were part of the princes' entourage, who played with them and sometimes were portrayed with them, as in the case of the pages who surround Massimiliano. And there were the important members of the family as well as historical figures who, in person or through their portraits, accompanied the young princes while they were walking in the galleries of the palaces or sat in church. They looked at the children to be looked at by them in the illustrated books and in the paintings, they were portrayed in the coats of arms. Rousseau seems to tell us that the objects which have a specific purpose, which are marked by direct experience,¹⁷ can define an educational training based also on natural skills among many others; in his view, three paths (nature, things, and people) mark the individuation processes through which every person grows up and becomes himself.

The object becomes a “thing” with a specific meaning in a complex training path. In the case of the princes, a lot of attention was paid to the scene, the environment, the setting. In this environment things acquire a new meaning focused on the prince “in the making”, underlining the values of his *milieu* and his position in the social hierarchy. This hierarchy is defined by relationships between words and things (Foucault, 1966). Is the art of the speech, literary or iconic, and its various connections still the complex code that can make the difference and identify the social status? What is the role of the thing's lessons in our world? What do we know about the material culture of educational environments?

15 In the last few years, these issues have become more and more important; for a bibliography, see Ferrari, 2010a.

16 This point has been made by several researchers, see, e.g., Volpilhac-Auger, 2000; Furno, 2005; Bierlaire, 2009; Cagnolati, 2009.

17 These are the roots of a reflection about the “things' lesson” (“leçon des choses”) which has been defined as “experiential” and which will become very important from a methodological point of view in the 19th century; see Ferrari & Morandi, 2008; Ferrari, Morandi, Platé, 2011.

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Anschrift der Autorin

Prof. Dr. Monica Ferrari, Università di Pavia, Dipartimento di Studi umanistici,
Piazza Botta 6, 27100 Pavia, Italien
E-Mail: monica.ferrari@unipv.it