

Augmented Abyss: Biographical Parataxis;
Emotions in Disarray: Of the Pictorial Fable

Fernández-Pello, Carlos (2012) in *Inéditos 2012*. Ed.Casa Encendida.
Obra Social Caja Madrid, Madrid; curatorial text; exhibition catalogue.

A. It is 1974 and David Hildebrand Wilson is taking a stroll in the countryside. After walking for a while he notices a small mountain stream and decides to set up his 16mm camera. He probably mounts the tripods on wheels or rails and then points the zoom lens at the stream until all he can see in the viewfinder is a small portion of water and a wire fence. For the next 13 minutes¹ he films *Stasis*, slowly zooming out until the surface of the water becomes a river and the river is just another feature of a wider landscape. A few days later, back in the darkroom, David painstakingly cuts out the portion of water and wire fence corresponding to the initial frame from every single shot and then methodically enlarges the images until they fit the standard screen area. The result is an eight-minute film in which the image of the water slowly and imperceptibly dissolves into texture grain.

B. Rosario, Argentina, 1959. Eduardo J. Prieto describes parataxis as “the most primitive way of organising expressive materials”. It seems that in its very early stages of development, language is not a plastic medium for the speaker but a resistant one: organising the syntagms requires great effort on the part of the speaker, and syntactic fluidity is therefore the product of arduous labour. The relations in the paratactic arrangement that stem from meaning, can only be assimilated through a process of thorough reflection on what has just been said. Prieto adds that this ordering of the text reveals a state of language in which every element that the writer tries to organise remains largely autonomous and self-contained; that it is easy to see how joining nuclei of meaning, that were originally independent, creates problems of reciprocal association and coordination.²

3. To borrow Professor Prieto’s definition, the expressive material of this text could be paragraphs; blocks of biographical memory, primitively organised imaginary lexemes, or temporal snippets with no greater meaning or contribution to knowledge than their specific arrangement on the page. They are images of other texts, fragments sometimes reproduced almost literally, allowing for change in the same way one does when repeating hearsay; recounting unrelated cases in the same order and hierarchy as they occurred in my experience writing about them. I am not trying to insinuate that this operation—in other words, this montage—is a trivial one. Quite the contrary: I am aware that it engenders resistance to its comprehension; a disarray between what is said and what is meant, yet

¹ Page 47 of Laurence WESCHLER’s book *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder* mentions 13 minutes, while the website www.alternativeprojections.com of the Los Angeles Filmforum (which recently organised a programme entitled *Experimental Film in Los Angeles 1945-1980* featuring Wilson’s movie *Stasis*) gives a run time of 8 minutes. The run time mentioned in the book has been maintained for reasons of strict emotional and simbolical empathy with the number 13.

² In this paragraph, virtually every word in the original Spanish is lifted from the sections on pages 11, 12 and 16 of Eduardo J. PRIETO’s book *Parataxis e hipotaxis* (1959) Rosario, Argentina, Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Facultad de Filosofía Letras y Ciencias de la Educación, Instituto de Lenguas Clásicas. Specifically, it has been lifted from the copy that the linguistics teacher of the National University of Tucuman, Ms. Klara Sterbik, donated to an unknown library.

also a chaotic coherence with how it is being said and how it is felt.

D. In 2002 Jacques Rancière imagines a flat surface from the study in his apartment. He describes it as a surface of dissociation and de-figuration rather than the historical evidence of a technique or method that has finally been conquered. For Rancière, words no longer prescribe what images should be, as a history or doctrine: rather, words are images themselves, redistributing the figures in the picture, activating that surface of exchange, that surface of forms and signs which constitutes the true medium of painting—a medium that is not identified with pertaining to a material process but to a method of knowledge. Earlier that day, Jacques has written on his word processor that the bond between painting and the third dimension is a bond between painting and the poetic power of words and fables.

E. Venn diagrams were first described in 1880 by their inventor, the logician and philosopher John Venn, in an article entitled “On the Diagrammatic and Mechanical Representations of Propositions and Reasonings”. In this article, Venn drew a set of curved or circular areas on a plane to show all the possible logical relations between a finite collection of sets. The most fascinating Venn diagram is the so-called Borromean knot, whose logical principle is the same as that of a plait: if any of the three curves are cut, the other two will be released.³

6. In 1836 two British publishers, Chapman and Hall, are issuing a collection of comic strips by the illustrator Robert Seymour on the misadventures of an East London gentleman’s club in the country. After contacting several authors to no avail, they finally retain the services of a young man named Dickens, whom they ask to compose brief phrases and remarks to accompany the illustrations, in keeping with the genre’s tradition. Charles rarely sticks to the strips provided and gradually imposes his own narrative for Seymour to illustrate afterwards. By shifting the focus of the drawings to the story, the young author turns a popular fiction genre of the day, essentially based on satirical illustrations, into a new kind of novel about London life. The last of the 20 instalments that made up *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* is published a year and a half later, and all of them will subsequently be compiled as the first novel of Charles Dickens.⁴

G. The opposite is true of Richard J. Anobile, who in late 1973 is preparing the first of the books in his *Film Classics Library*, “the most accurate and complete reproductions of movies in book form”, around James Whale’s 1931 *Frankenstein*. Every volume of the collection is designed as a photonovel, with over 1,000 stills from the given film arranged sequentially and accompanied by the dialogues from the original soundtrack. After watching the *Frankenstein* movie several times on the Moviola, the publisher is perplexed

³ In his paper, John Venn talks about “Eulerian circles” (in reference to Leonhard Euler’s diagrams). There are representations of a triangular Borromean knot on Norse pictures from the 7th century or earlier, and it is also the coat-of-arms of the Borromeos, an Italian family. However, it was thanks to Venn’s article that the knot came to be widely used in the study of logic and mathematics. The term “Venn diagram” first appeared in Clarence Irving Lewis’s book *A Survey of Symbolic Logic* (1918) and the name has survived to this day. For this same reason, certain authors “honour” Venn as one of the figures in the history of mathematics who has received the greatest recognition for the smallest contribution.

⁴ Wilbur L. CROSS (1920). “Pickwick Papers.” *Encyclopedia Americana*.

as to why Universal Studios decided to hire the stage director James Whale to direct the film. In his introduction to the volume Anobile describes Whale's directing as "primitive at best" and notes that the film is effectively shot as a stage play. The actors' overgesturing, combined with the static quality and lack of close-ups, leads him to conclude that Whale failed to exploit cinema's potential as a plastic medium. The only scene he rates positively is precisely the one censored by the studios, in which the monster and the little girl play at tossing daisies into a pond, and after running out of flowers, and comparing her beauty to that of daisies, he will pick her up and throw her into the water, accidentally drowning and killing the little girl—and thus igniting his own prosecution by the people.

8. The insignificant is understood here as that which goes unnoticed or is useless in the structural configuration of the place and space where it is found, but which nevertheless has the ability to open internal windows of experience—of falling outside the picture only to end up deeper inside it. The idea of bond is approached as a syntactic and sensitive sign that creates composite names, the sort of montage that produces new knowledge, that provokes friction and exchange between an aesthetic experience and the concepts, facts and rules of the epistemological game. Hyphens are forms which have no place in the tradition of humanities and scientific knowledge—they are as unimportant as the long, uncut fingernails that protected Deleuze's delicate sense of touch—but that art employs to create a possible framework of rigorously absurd discourse. A hyphen embodies multiplicity without the need to render it intelligible; it undoes the subordinations of language, it differentiates and reunites, it is the coitus, the insignificant rubbing between two equal and distant meanings.

9. Which is why, 42 years after the world knew about his diagrams, John Venn and his son, John Archibald Venn, published the first volume of *Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, from the Earliest Times to 1900*, dating right back to when the institution was founded. The names of the parents, descendants and spouses of approximately 130,000 members are all noted in minute detail.⁵ Nine years later, in 1909 and with no link to the story whatsoever, Venn and his son patented a machine for bowling cricket balls. It seems that the machine, one of the very first mechanical robots, was so good that when the Australian team visited the University of Cambridge that same year it managed to clean bowl the best aussie batsman for at least four times.

J. In the end, a chain of flowers can serve to decorate the great hall of a freemasonry lodge on the day of its anniversary.⁶ It is also the title of an untraceable book, mentioned in every document published by the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City, California. It can also be a fundamental element of Polynesian tradition that is easily transformed into a tacky Hawaiian cliché. Or even be the title of a song by The Cure. The 20th axiom of the magician and occult author Éliphas Lévi, that talks about human

⁵ John Venn lived to see the publication of the second volume in 1923. The tenth and final volume, published in 1953, took up most of the life of his son John Archibald Venn, who died in 1958.

⁶ Albert GALLATIN MACKKEY & Harry LEROY HAYWOOD, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Volume 1, Kessinger Publishing, Chicago, 2003 (p. 189).

willpower, states that a chain of iron is less difficult to break than a chain of flowers.⁷

K. But a chain of flowers is also a chain of nothing; a form of discussing that exhibition which defies all discussion; of resisting the word's power of illustration and return it to the equality that reigns in the wild; to equate the works in a catalogue with the works in a gallery, without subordinating any reflection or theoretical canon. A chain of flowers can be a tongue twister that reminds us that words are also forms almost before they are ideas and concepts: forms of the tongue and mouth, of the lips and throat, but also of the eyes and ears, of memory and fingertips, of hands and gesture. Works of art are not necessarily objects in a gallery, not even concepts in the mind, but formless formations, performances, that twist what we know and remind us of the contingent nature of experience. They give us the beauty of being on the verge of the incomprehensible; of confusing figure and background, past and future; of repeating a never-ending story time and time again. Every flower is that useless precious detail, that imperceptible anecdote in the abyss.

Nine Journeys: One Life Preserver.

In-room Repetitions: Of Illegible Babble

Barely a year and a half has passed since Karlos Gil decided to take a stroll in the vicinity of nowhere. After taking a catnap he awoke beside an odd triangular structure, picked up his camera and snapped a photo. He then wandered towards a strange concrete temple with a strange vehicle inside. Over the next three days he photographed *The Neverending Story*, mechanically taking snapshots of everything that occurred in a familiar world turned bizarre. He doggedly pressed on, moving through a monochromatic stage set where older men had synthetic voices and Bolex cameras didn't exist; a set where the monuments of the past were futuristic machines and a strange city reminded us of a town in Castile. On returning home, Karlos recorded the photographs he took one by one on a 16 mm reel that we will never see, and digitised each celluloid frame until he had created a five-and-a-half-minute film. The result was the beginning of an endless journey between reality and fiction.

In the summer of 2010, Rosa Lleó and Zaida Trallero opened the show *Everything Is Out There* in Room B at La Casa Encendida. Among other works, the exhibition featured *Tarahi II* by the Cypriot artist Haris Epaminonda. While setting up the show, Rosa and Zaida decided to take a break and wander over to the opposite room to see what their colleague and fellow curator Edu Hurtado was preparing. There they found the artist Carlos Fernández-Pello organising tokens on a table. For reasons unknown even to himself, Carlos never made it into the area where Epaminonda's video was on display, and two years later the same work was exhibited in the same location.

⁷ Éliphas LÉVI, *Transcendental Magic*, Weiser Books, York Beach, USA, 2001 (p. 208).

From Edward N. Lorenz's butterfly effect⁸ to Frigyes Karinthy's six degrees of separation,⁹ the idea that everything in the cosmos is connected by miniscule links is not new, nor is it the primary focus of this exhibition. Neither is Gustavo Bueno's reinterpretation of the Greek notion of *symploke*,¹⁰ which states that things struggle with each other and intertwine only when they share certain properties, when they belong to the same category. *Flores; Abismo; Parataxis* [Flowers; Abyss; Parataxis] posits that the meaning of things stems from an affective insignificance, from an abyss into which language and image plummet in parallel, whose common denominator is always the experiences of the subject that rescues, interweaves or disfigures them. But it is also a mechanism of pictorial knowledge, of categories within categories which, in the process of connecting everything to everything, paradoxically become stranger and break up into new sets of difference. In this respect, the selected works strive to distinguish the similar and confuse the disparate, to shrink and expand a pictorial tradition that would have no connection to the illusion of space if not for the fact that words are also things. Parataxis is a literary technique that favours the coordinated use of short phrases. A life preserver is a contraction floating in the vast expanse of the sea.

In mid-2011, Johan Eldrot and Erik Larsson chewed Miroslav Holub's *The Dimension of the Present Moment* to a pulp. In the human consciousness, the present moment lasts approximately three seconds.

The work *Manifest Destiny* by Persijn Broersen and Margrit Lukács was included in an exhibition that revolved around the critical forms of reality which accompany science fiction. Initially conceived as a great mother ship, the gallery was divided into different compartments that doubled as discursive zones. In that respect, the works did not have a neutral place for offering a discourse; rather, they were chosen based on their ability to blend in with the surroundings as part of a control panel or radio communications station, as maps in a war room or glittering backdrops on a ship's bridge.

At one point José Díaz turned to his computer, opened his browser and typed in the URL of a website for watching movies in streaming format. He then used the CAPTCHA system,¹¹ designed to help the server distinguish José from a machine, and compiled a list

⁸ In chaos theory, the butterfly effect is the sensitive dependence on initial conditions, where a small change at one place in a nonlinear system can result in large differences to a later state. The name of the effect, coined by Edward Lorenz, is derived from the theoretical example of a hurricane's formation being contingent on whether or not a distant butterfly had flapped its wings several weeks before. [Retrieved in May 2012] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect

⁹ This is the hypothesis that anyone on Earth can be connected to any other person on the planet through a chain with no more than five intermediaries (linking the two in just six steps). Also known as the "small world" theory. It was first proposed in 1929 by the Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy in a short story entitled "Chains". [Retrieved in May 2012] http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seis_grados_de_separaci%C3%B3n

¹⁰ *Symploke*: The interweaving of things that make up a situation (ephemeral or stable), a system, a totality or various totalities, where the important thing is not just the moment of connection (which always includes a moment of conflict) but also the moment of disconnection or partial mutual independence between terms, sequences, etc., involved in the *symploke*. The interpretation of certain Platonic texts (*Sophist* 251e-253e) as the formulation of a universal principle of *symploke* (which contrasts with both holistic monism—"everything is connected to everything"—and radical pluralism—"nothing is connected, at least internally, to anything") is what leads us to regard Plato as the founder of the critical philosophical method (as opposed to the holistic or pluralistic metaphysical method of "academic philosophy"). [Retrieved in May 2012] <http://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df054.htm>

¹¹ CAPTCHA is an acronym that stands for Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans

of grammatical contractions that he later used as titles for his paintings.

The film *Casino Royale* was released in 2006. Based on the eponymous 1953 novel by Ian Fleming, the new version only made one significant change to the plot: the baccarat game¹² in the original was replaced by a game of Texas Hold'em poker. Three years later, in writing about his work Josué Rauscher noted that “grandmothers knit an infinite variety of cotton snowflakes to protect hardwood surfaces from moisture stains”.

On the occasion of his exhibition *The Random Series*, Miguel Ángel Tornero presented his photographs together with a text entitled “Babble That High Demand”, written by Professor Enkelkreuz. The text is only available to readers as automatic translations by Babel Fish¹³ into Spanish, English and German; however, readers do not know which version is the original, so what they see are three distorted images of an original source that has been lost or never actually existed.

Seduced by the ingenious ruses of the imaginary collection of paintings described in *A Gallery Portrait*, in 1982 Isabelle Vernay-Lévêque painted Heinrich Kürz's picture as a fictitious commission. She tried to create something as close as possible to the description provided in the book, although her version differs from Perec's in two inevitable aspects: the limited number of successive “pictures within pictures”, and the inclusion of a mirror in which the painter is reflected. Perec himself, on seeing the painting, confirmed the infinite number of symbolic and structural relationships that she had intuited in the rest of his work. He would die early after that.

When David Company asks John Stezaker about how his passion for film stills influences his work, Stezaker replies that he considers his work to be the exact opposite of the cinematographic montage process, as it does not attempt to create legibility or narrative coherence. He adds that it would be naive to think that his juxtapositions do not have a semantic dimension; that they do however incorporate a the self-reflective grammar of montage.¹⁴

Apart. Grossman, Lev. “Computer Literacy Tests: Are You Human?” *Time*, 5 June 2008. [Retrieved in 2008]

¹² Baccarat is a casino card game that is rarely played today, which might be described as a simplified version of blackjack.

¹³ Babel Fish is an automatic translation service offered by Yahoo!

¹⁴ COMPANY, David, *John Stezaker: Film Still: Collages since 1979*. Ridinghouse, London (p.24).