(From) A to B (and back)

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Parataxis / *n. Gram.* the placing of clauses etc. one after another, without words to indicate coordination or subordination, e.g. *Tell me, how are you?*
Hypotaxis / *n. Gram.* the subordination of one clause to another.[1]

Parataxis is a type of syntax in which there is a juxtaposition of syntactic units without the use of a conjunction.[2] Its counterpart in the syntactic realm is hypotaxis, a form where one clause is subordinated to another. Hypotaxis is often used to establish a narrative sequence or the progression of an argument. In the former connections are left open, in the latter they are more determined.

The small images on these pages feature instances of what could be called 'distributed works'. These are singular images of modelled spaces and objects generated using a computer. Each also incorporates a real photograph mapped onto a computer model of a photograph, pinned or taped to the walls or lying on the objects in these spaces. The photographs are the only things that have a causal, indexical relation to the outside world. Here they are enlarged and reproduced so that they are proportionally many times the size of the works in which they feature. Everything else has been constructed from memory or, very occasionally, with the help of observations or measurements of actual objects. I imagine a distributed work comprising a network of objects, forms or elements. This could take many forms, for instance, a series of physically separate objects or a singular representation of diverse things. Working across a number of elements, the gaps between things can act as a speculative space for imagining connections, generating reveries or drawing blanks. Narrative connections can be implied yet remain open-ended. The work can exist in a realm of association.

The image opposite is from volume six of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, published in 1762.[3] The four lines represent the narrator's progress through the first four volumes of his tale, which are intended to be an account of the natural sequence of events of his life but which are generally interrupted by frequent digressions, disjunctions and shifts in time, represented in this case by deviations from a straight line. On the following page of the novel, Sterne includes another line that represents the events recounted in volume five where Shandy has apparently been 'very good' in his narration and lists his various digressions on the drawing with appropriate letters of the alphabet.[4] Shandy remarks that his wish is to go on in an orderly manner but the book unsurprisingly continues as previously, structured around numerous digressions where terms such as before, during and after begin to lose their sense.

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[1] *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (eds. Judy Pearsall & Bill Trumble), Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 1996, p1056 and p698.
[2] A popular example would be Julius Caesar's utterance at the Battle of Zela (47 BC), "veni, vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered).
[3] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, London: T. Becket & P. A. Dehondt, 1762, Volume VI, Chapter XL, p152. (Image © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. Shelfmark C70aa28)
[4] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, New York: The Modern Library 2004 (1966), p378. "By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A, where I took a trip to *Navarre*,—and the indented curve B, which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady *Baussiere* and her page,—I have not taken the least risk of a digression, till *John de la Casse's* devils led me the round you see marked D.—for as for *c c c c c* they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared with what men have done,—or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D—they vanish into nothing." (p378)

"The forms of art are explainable by the laws of art; they are not justified by their realism."[5]

In the early 20th century, the Russian Formalist group of literary critics (including Osip Brik and Viktor Shklovsky) developed a distinction between what they referred to as *fabula* and *syuzhet*. The fabula or story is made up of events featured in a narrative while the syuzhet or plot orders how those events are related. The reader does not have access to the story but experiences or constructs the story through the way it is plotted. As such, the story provides material for the plot that forms it. As Shklovsky puts it, "[the] story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation."[6]

Later in the century, the structuralist writer, Tzvetan Todorov, draws on a similar distinction although his terms are identified as *histoire* and *récit*.[7] Todorov also distinguishes between description and narrative stating that although the former can act as an element within a narrative it is not, in itself, narrative. On the contrary, narrative involves the fragmentation of chronological or *event-time* into elements that can be composed in *duration-time*. In the ordering of successive events, narrative transformations occur between the beginning and end that render the sequence irreversible. Shklovsky was a keen reader of Sterne and while he does not seem to contend that the novel be understood or read in different temporal directions, he is at pains to point out that it is structured through various temporal cuts or disjunctions where an effect can precede its cause. For him it is preferable to understand plot as distinct from story and to emphasise that the plot is what a reader encounters. For this reason, *Tristram Shandy*, far from being atypical, "is the most typical novel in world literature."[8]

"An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a "vision" of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it."[9]

Such thinking calls into question the effect that the form has on one's understanding. If a feature of artistic production has to be admitted, perhaps uncertainty would fit the bill and this uncertainty is mirrored in the mind of a viewer or reader or participant.[10] The work may set the conditions but it cannot legislate for how it is to be read or sensed or understood. Writing about what he called defamiliarization, Shklovsky expressed the view that a technique that inverts the normalised or habituated could unsettle or disrupt perception. Drawing a distinction between prosaic and poetic uses of language, he maintained that art should make one notice how it is made; it should interrupt the

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[5] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Sterne's Tristram Shandy: Stylistic Commentary' (1921), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. & eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 1965, p57.
[6] Ibid. p57.
[7] Tzvetan Todorov 'The Two Principles of Narrative', *Genres in Discourse*, Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press 1995 (1978), pp27-38.
[8] Shklovsky, op.cit. p57.
[9] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' (1917), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, p18.
[10] The tension between poetic uncertainty and prosaic closure obviously features in all kinds of artistic production but is keenly expressed in John Keats' letter to his brothers of 21st December 1817 where he writes about what he calls "negative capability"; "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats: Based on the Texts of Hyder Edward Rollins*, ed. Grant F. Scott, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002 (1958), p60.

automatism of perception. "[Art] exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*."[11]

Encountering uncertainty or defamiliarization is a distinct possibility when it comes to making images. The space in which an image operates is not linear; it is not necessarily to be understood in an orderly manner. An image is a wholeness that can be read or approached from an infinite number of angles. Pictures are surfaces over which the eye wanders as it pleases. According to the philosopher, Vilém Flusser, different means of representing the world have their own logic and engender different ways of thinking about the world. The wholeness embodied by the image for him was characteristic of a symbolic, magical consciousness radically altered through the development of writing, circa 3500 BC. In contrast to the image's open surface, the text requires direction along a path in order for a reader to receive a specific message. "Linear codes demand a synchronization of their diachronicity. They demand progressive reception."[12]

Obviously texts take many forms but perhaps the function of writing is to disambiguate wherever possible. In contrast to an image, a text serves to add clarity and to determine what is being communicated with more or less certainty. Or at least if an ambiguous, interpretive logic is at play then this is clearly apparent in the format and means of address. An image on the other hand has other dimensions that can be explored. While it is less effective at determining a narrative direction or argument, its intrinsic openness means that it can be read, perceived or interpreted in myriad ways.

Reading is an acquired skill. Looking feels more natural, perhaps less trammelled by conventions but it is also a skill that is acquired. In order for sense to be easily communicated, a sequence of words cannot necessarily be disordered. But this is not the only way in which the world is encountered or figured. Language can order thought but thoughts also occupy other, multiple realms: associative, analogical, serendipitous etc. Just as the laws of physics do not confine movement to a single direction along a temporal axis but allow for reversals where an effect can be traced back to its cause, narrative sequence privileges movement along an axis where transformations render movement in the opposite direction less likely.[13] The 'virtual' spaces (textual, visual, telemetric, photographic, perspectival etc.) inhabited through technology are both an analogue for the spaces inhabited on an everyday basis and simultaneously part of that everyday experience. As *Tristram Shandy* shows, people have long been adept at multi-directional mental 'travel' but this process is also expressed in forms that are realised or concretised externally and that can be easily shared and modified.

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[11] Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', p12.
[12] Vilém Flusser, 'The Codified World' (1978), *Writings*, ed. Andreas Ströhl; tr. Erik Eisel, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp35-41.
[13] Of course, there are numerous exceptions in the arena of avant-garde, experimental or independent film such as Manuel de Landa's *Raw Nerves*, 1980, but less so in commercial cinema although Christopher Nolan's *Memento*, 2000, is a good example.