



Conference: **SEEING BEYOND PICTURES?**
5th September 2017
JOSEP ANTONI TÀSSIES, The Kingdom of Spain

PICTURE BOOK: A WINDOW TO YOUR HEART, A CHALLENGE FOR YOUR MIND

ABC
DEFGHI
JKLMNŇ
OPQRST
UVWXYZ

Good morning. Thanks to each and every one of you to be here today.

A) Feelings

To feel is the matter, to represent emotions: sadness or joy; friendship, love or solitude, or courage.

Today I feel happiness to be here, and also I feel a bit of embarrassment: undoubtedly, here, there are many people who know more than I on children's and young adult's literature. Hence I have carried an old friend of mine, "Ballface", the protagonist of one of my first books, so that he helps me to start this talk.

B) Picture books

"Ballface" was my first own book proposal. I wanted *it* to be an album without words, a "silent book" only made of images, horizontal, changing. I wanted it to be in the way of these old books that were used before, in the time that there were no screens, for children that still could not read.

C) Various (and open) relations with the text in picture books

However, Daniel Goldín, who was then a publisher of the "Fondo de Cultura Económica", asked me to add a text to the images. Therefore, I had to find a respectful text, from their independence, with the drawings that I wanted to do. I asked for it to a writer, a friend of mine, Rosa Anna Corbinos. She knew the intentions of all that illustrations, the same ones that now I present to you with her words.

D) A picture book: "Ballface"

She, the writer, said:

"Hello !! I'm the writer of this book. And this is the book of the adventures of Ballface. Ballface is who is opening the window. And a window is a hole where light and wind come in through.

Suck a finger and blow at it. Where's the wind coming from ?

If you do know, try to blow the page over !

Isn't this nice!? Ballface has gone to walk around the town. Do you like to walk around the town? Ballface lives in a big town and he sometimes gets on any bus -without knowing its number- and gets off wherever he feels like to and discover new corners. And then he thinks to himself: these are new to me but I'm sure neighbours would quarrel here, this is a place where couples would kiss and a lame cat would have kittens. He also likes to wonder what he could find under the ground he's stepping on: a garage, a subway, sewers with rats or the remains of an old civilisation that fell asleep under the tar.

Tell me where you live and turn the page over.

I'm afraid of insects and I don't know why since I'm much bigger than they are. It's like that story of an elephant that's afraid of a mouse. But this is a totally different tale. Lucky enough Ballface is not afraid of them, even more, he enjoys watching them. Or, how can a fly fly so fast?: you see it now, and now you don't. And now he'll very slowly follow that ant with a bread crumb. And Ballface laughs when he finds the ant hole: some come out while others go in with food, carrying pieces of bread that are so big that are almost impossible to carry. And what is surprising...they never bump one into the other !! And, you know what: ? Walking is faster than driving a car. Ballface likes to walk and he can do that in the countryside while he shouts out the names of flowers: Rose ! and one step forwards. Carnation ! a step and a hop. Sunflower !!! and a hip hop !

Shout the name of the flower you like most, hop and turn the page.

Mary, Tim, Tom, Pete, Sarah and Jack are all friends. Mary goes with Tim to buy milk for him not to carry so much. Then Tim invites Tom and Mary to have tea. Sarah and Jack pillow fight on the bed. Sarah and Mary like to invent songs while Jack writes the lyrics and Tom plays the guitar. Tim and Sarah swap clothes and laugh in front of a mirror. Jack gets cross with Tom because he won't lend him his pencils. Sometimes Mary, Tim, Tom, Pete, Sarah and Jack meet and do nothing else but be together. Ballface never knows what's going to happen when he goes to his friends houses: he just knows he's going to meet them. That's why Ballface starts to whistle, combs and perfumes before he goes to see them.

And now that Ballface has just arrived let's turn the page.

There is an endless number of different kinds of noses: flat, potatolike, snotty, freckled or hooked...Ballface has a red shiny clown's nose in his night table. Sometimes he sticks his hand into the drawer and says "I'm going to put my nose on today". Then he leaves home and says hello to the people in the street: they all laugh and say hello to him too. When he can't be seen Ballface takes his nose off and goes back home. And -you know- clown's have their heart on their nose so people can see it.

Try to turn the page with your nose.

Sometimes Ballface feels sad and small. He feels as small as a cell. Then he looks at his arm, where he has his watch, and thinks about HIS cells, all stuck together one another. And he wonders whether he'll be a cell also within an immense organism. Wether a liver or a kidney

cell of a Megagiant living among other Megagiants in a Megacity within a Megacountry in a Megaplanet. And then he thinks he wouldn't like one of his tiny cells to be sad and not work well. And then he imagines the Megagiant thinking about HIS own Ballface cell to be sad either. Then he smiles and starts to feel better.

I don't know if this I just told you happens to Ballface or it happens to me. But I'm sure similar things happen to you too. So let's smile and turn the page.

My Grandfather, who is a very old man, doesn't believe that man has ever been to the moon or can travel in outer space. Nonsense !! he says. But Grandad...look...you can see it on television. But Grandad doesn't even believe what he sees on television: They are all a bunch of lies !! Lies and lies !! Sometimes when I see him speaking to the Newsreader - who never answers by the way- I wonder whether he's right or not. I don't know if Ballface believes that man has been to the Moon. But I do know that when he looks up into the sky the stars swim inside his pupils. This way I can travel into the infinite outer space if I just look into his eyes.

Look into the eyes of a person next to you, tell him or her what you see and don't forget to turn the page.

Turn the page !!

Apples !! Apples !! On Saturday mornings, when there's no school, my neighbour goes to the market with her mother. "Have you got any apples" ? a man asks the seller. "Yes I do" he replies. "Have you got any oranges" ? "Certainly". "Have you got Bananas" ? "I do". "And have you got cherries" ? " Yes I do"...and coconuts...and pineapples... and peaches...". "What else would you like "? The lady that's buying half a kilo of lamb chops tells Ballface that if you want to make a good tomato sauce without the acid taste you only have to add a tad of sugar into it and then cook it slowly.

The lady of the half kilo of lamb chops also tells you to turn the page.

You haven't told me but I think Ballface believes the world is somehow crazy. He loves the world but isn't quite sure where it's heading. From time to time -while walking among a hectic crowd rushing to arrive anywhere on time- Ballface needs to stop a while because he gets this dizzy feeling coming out of his belly. And then he watches the people: there's a man with a dagger face, a woman won't stop sounding a claxon -she's being fined by a policeman- while a girl is just pushing people by without realising. He will whisper to all of them: "Stop the world and let life caress you cheeks!"

And if the world is moving you can turn the page.

And I'll tell you what once happened to me. Well, this also happened to Ballface. I one day went to a party where you could dance and only say two words: cheese and egg. It was a game, an agreement. People would drink cheese or egg. Or drink cheese with egg. They would dance egg or cheese. They were either called Cheese or Egg. I met Ballface at that party and so we became big friends with eggs and cheeses.

Cheese egg.

You've turned all the pages.”

I've come with another very different friend of mine, who is a bit worried searching for something lost.

Please, may you help my friend to find the lost children?

E) A picture book: “The lost child”

It was the night of Epiphany,
the Three Kings were coming
and the child Jesus was lost.

I dreamed I was going to find him
in the bottom of a lake with no water.

I tried to find baby Jesus
among the ruins.
But I got distracted

with
the
stars
that
fell
off
the
sky.

A woman with no face
protected me with her body.

I gave her my hand and we left,
following the people's way
up to where the countryside was closed with walls.

It was raining;
it was cold.

Little Jesus was there,
among the puddles.

And i just was getting him,
when they woke me up.

My

F) Different feelings, different books

With different feelings I made this book -which some of you know- and with which I was honoured the Grand Prix of the International Biennial of Illustrations of Bratislava. This time I added a small text of my own.

We can see two works performed by the same person and with the same technique. "Ballface" and "The lost child". They are two very different books, with twenty years between one and the other and yet they are in the same "chain of style". "Carabola" is a visual walk, a tribute to the joy of living, while "El nen perdut" is a documentary on the hope provided by children when they even play in the most desperate situations such as war.

G) I like / I do not like

Every one of us knows, more or less, when a work likes or dislikes us. We can feel what likes us, and what do not.

H) Shall this book like to children or not?

But, when we are asked if a book will be pleasing to a child, we can not know it without putting it at the child's reach. Here is exactly where I wanted to be: there is no child reader without you. There is no child reader without third parties, usually the parents or tutors of the minor, the educators, who can put the books available to them. There is no child reader without booksellers specialized in children's and young people's literature, or without the librarians that have a fundamental role in the selection of the materials they put within the reach of mothers, parents or teachers, and, in a broader sense, without Institutions that promote books and make them available to children. Of course, books would never arrive to people who take care of the minors, neither to the institutions dedicated to the promotion of reading, if the books did not exist materially. Books need other people to produce them: the publishers, who choose between the material made under comission or on their own initiative by other "third parties": the authors, ussually adults. And authors are directly related to the book, while they do it.

We all are adults working: adults working on a consensual idea of childhood.

i) Prescribers

So we are all prescribers in the way we provide different images to children.

The visual taste of children is in our hands.

There is no child reader without you.

J) Can I argue why I like a picture book?

We said that we can feel if we like some images or not. But up to what extent are we able to argue, with reasons, why we like a picture book or not?

In general, it is still easier today to argue in a detailed manner about the quality or weakness of a verbal text. We can discuss about the verbal stories. We can discuss the literature based on both oral and written tradition, which are linear artifacts. But what elements define the quality or the weakness of some illustrations?

K) Verbal (linear) and graphic (associative) language in the picture book.

In the picture book, we use the interaction of verbal and iconic languages in the object context of the book to produce a unity of meaning.

We use a verbal (linear) and a visual (associative) language in the object context. Or in the case of "silent books" we only use visual language.

When dealing with a more associative language -that of the visual image- than a linear one we get to the unconscious in a more direct way than verbal images do. But in reality we can increasingly structure and consciously analyze these visual messages in a more precise way, using the studies of mass communication developed in the last sixty years which establish a knowledge around visual narratives.

L) A progress on fixing the mechanisms of the associative language of the images.

That associative language, far from being mysterious, is becoming more susceptible to be fixed.

Semantic aspects

In the semantic aspect, we can define paradigms of meaning and sense: we refer to the space of the topic, the common place, which has grown so much with the global iconsphere saturated with mass productions conceived for transnational audiences.

Syntactic aspects

Syntactically, we can structure the visual language of the illustrated book in a more precise manner. Part of what has been used to talk about photography, film or comics, first, for television or video clip after, is also useful to talk about today's illustrated album.

The articulation of images, the creation of characters. The record keeping ("raccord"). The movie plans. The "camera" movements, the evolution of time (flashback and forward, ellipsis, sequences) are conceptually given to the illustrated book language and operate through drawing, the composition of graphic design or through manipulation of format, when we turn pages or even when we open an accordion book.

Rhetorical aspects

Rhetorically, we can gloss over the changing of verbal rhetorical figures into the iconic world.

M) The responsibility of the creator

We are directors of a paper movie. A silent or sound movie. Today's illustration of books should not be contemplated in a simpler way, since there is nothing less available to us. Our limitations may be due to our personal capacity, to our possibilities of a professional dedication, to the imposition of a format, but should not be attributed to ignorance. We can make a short or a monologue, a comic piece or a drama, but with awareness and dignity. We work for children but we are not children so we can not consent to be awkward.

N) Consequences of Incorporating Image Technologies in Illustration (First Revolution)

Increasing skills of the illustrator: emulating and combining all techniques and procedures; incorporating graphic design

On the other hand, over the last three decades, the computer and its programs are incorporated as a main tool in the study of illustration. It is a true revolution that involves a transformation of the illustrator's working method. It greatly simplifies access to means that a few years ago required sophisticated craftsmanship and spectacular mechanical equipment.

And, as consequence:

There is a giant step towards a more democratic production of elaborated images.

More people are dedicated to illustration

The procedures of copy, tracing, collage and retouching win importance against traditional layout and finishing procedures.

Increasing emulation of traditional techniques.

It increases the emulation of traditional techniques.

Manual techniques and procedures are massively abandoned and reevaluated.

But, above all, there is an expansion of the skills that until recently belonged to few people, mainly from graphic designing areas.

The author of the book needs to know, as Ľubomír Krátky (1) pointed out four years ago -at the International symposium BIB 2013-, "how important it is for the illustrator to know the essentials of book design". Or working side by side with a graphic designer: from the moment the work is conceived by considering the composition of the page and typography

purposes to the material aspects of the album, from choosing a format or how to develop the communicative proposal.

O) Consequences Incorporating communication technologies in the illustration (second revolution)

Increasing skills of the illustrator: content analysis, documentation

Creation of a transnational artistic community

Incorporating communication technologies in the illustration also implies fundamental changes.

The change in access to information, with huge amounts available to all, brings the need of a new extension of the skills of the illustrator. It makes easier while preparing and documenting both verbal and visual content. And it makes possible to make a deeper analysis work.

Almost to finish, we come to that interesting point to all of us:

Also as a consequence of the globalization of communications, the access to the world production of illustrations implies the creation of a transnational artistic community.

This open contact makes it easier to observe what was already international in some styles and to see formal similarities between illustrators.

If each illustrator is considered as the link of a chain of formal affinity, we can unite it and achieve a better understanding of the work of each author in their reading context.

If we follow a chain of illustrators united by their proximity in the form of expression we can trace genealogies, identify origins, detect past masters.

If we relate to a series of illustrators who visually resemble each other, if we are able to create a "chain of style" we can reach their common referents. In this way we can travel from transnational tendencies to national schools.

P) Style chains

characters, settings and styles

What we are interested in here is to contribute with what we have called "style chains" as a tool for the analysis of picture books illustrations, and to point out that, in order to describe emotions, besides having the characters and the scenarios, we have the Styles.

Some questions that arise are: What are the limits of a style? The limits of a style are those shown by the author who develops it. Does each style have better applications than others? Yes, each style has better applications than others, and this depends on the dominant communicative context that has embraced each style and on the culture of the image of every host community. Can you judge with the same formal criteria different styles that have their own proper applications? No, you'd better judge each style in relation to its own chain of style.

Q) A scale of iconicity

In order to begin to guide ourselves between styles in a simple way, we can classify them by their illusionistic capacity. We can imagine a progressive scale, from Abstract to Hyperrealism, and place in-between the different grades of all the graphic possibilities of the illustration.

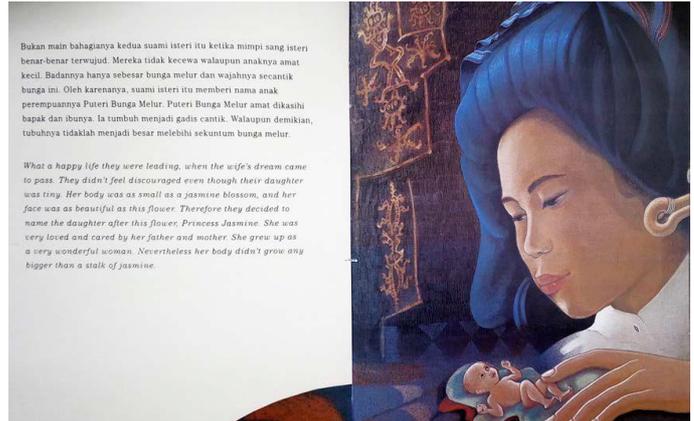
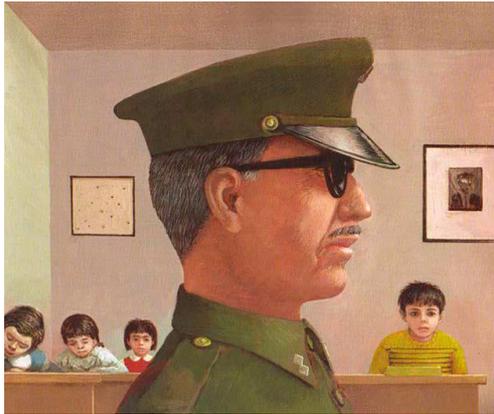
We take as reference the decreasing scale of iconicity by Abraham Moles (2).

From there on, we can begin to detect analogies that will allow us to build a style chain and, thus, to understand the formal expressive resources of each kind of formal expression.

Let's see some of them in order to finish:

[Analogous images of different authors are shown. Samples of style chains]

R) Style chain, sample 1 - [Alfonso Ruano - Hardiyono]



S) Style chain, sample 2 - [Etienne Delessert – Carme Sole Vendrell]



T) Style chain, sample 3 - [John J. Reiss – Leo Lionni]



U) Style chain, sample 4 - [Leo Lionni – Eric Carle]



V) Style chain, sample 5 - [Eric Carle – John J. Reiss]



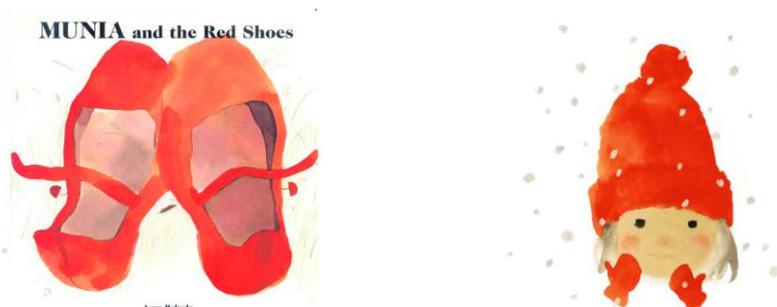
W) Style chain, sample 6 - [John Alcorn – Miroslav Cipar]



X) Style chain, sample 7 - [Bernat Cormand – Iwona Chimielewska]



Y) Style chain, sample 8 - [Asun Balzola – Chihiro Iwasaki]



Z) Children's right to culture

The right of children to access culture is a duty of adult prescribers: to provide children with a culture of quality.

The ability in the interpretation of the different visual codes is a part of that cultural quality.

The appreciation of aesthetic diversity in a global world is another part of that cultural quality.

Are we in a position to assume the duty of educating the taste of infants and young people in a complex, diverse way, further than saying "I like or I don't like"?

Thank you very much for your attention

Tàssies

Bratislava, september 2017

(1)

Krátky, Ľubomír. *Illustration for children's books and graphical design*.

In

Miscellany. International symposium BIB 2013. Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava. Theme: "Identity Today: The National Cultural Identity of Illustration in the Time of Globalization." Editor:

Mgr. Viera Anoškinová. BIBIANA, International House of Art for Children, Bratislava, Slovak republic, 2013

(2)

Moles, Abraham, *L'Image. Communication Fonctionnelle*, Casterman, Paris, 1981

From

Gubern, Román. *La mirada opulenta. Exploración de la iconosfera contemporánea*. Editorial Gustavo Gili, S.A. (Col. GG MassMedia). Barcelona, 1987

©Tàssies, 2017

tassies@periodistes.org
