Floyd Merrell

The Writing of Forking Paths
Borges, Calvino and Postmodern Models of Writing

Dimensions and Fractures.

Classical science made a habit of depicting time as if it were another dimension of space, plotting position on one axis and time on the other one. Things are now seen to be more complex than classical science would like to have them. Indeed, we might even say they are infinitely more complex than the classical model had them.

Let us for a moment consider the familiar billiard ball example of mechanics. Ordinarily we conceive of the ball as simply moving along a Euclidean straight line from point *A* to point *B* where it collides with another ball and ricochets to the right or to the left, all on a two-dimensional plane and occupying a second or so—and all of which corresponds to a natural sort of gut feeling that has been inculcated into us by classical mechanics. This more practical Euclidean way of seeing the ball's behavior accounts for only two of its variables: the Cartesian coordinates on a plane. The ball's path in what goes by the name of "phase space," in contrast, includes six dimensions of space (three position coordinates and three momentum coordinates) plus two spin variables. All eight variables are virtually impossible to visualize, and in large part for that reason billiards is quite difficult to master. For a dramatic illustration of this added complexity, imagine you are in an airplane, and due to a technical failure you go into a tailspin. The plane travels through three-dimensional space, with a certain velocity that varies its position from one moment to another, and it spins in a particular direction and with so many revolutions per minute, which also varies. With this many variables to keep tabs of it is no small wonder that pilots have difficulty coming out of a spin. Things can appear well-nigh chaotic. And they are in most cases virtually chaotic, for they are subject to the conditions of "chaos physics" and "strange attractors" within phase space more than they are to classical mechanics, which plays out its drama within the relatively comfortable confines of

Euclidean space. In another way of putting it, classical physics is arborescent, the "new physics" is *rhizomic* (Deleuze and Guattari); classical physics is linear textuality, the "new physics"—and by extension the postmodern view—is nonlinearity intertextuality, "hypertext" (Landow).

And yet, and yet ... our intuitive side cries out that there's something terribly wrong here. Surely there must be some sort of overriding order to everything, however chaotic it might appear on the surface. And surely this order must have evolved in a quite linearly and orderly fashion, however many fits and jerks and setbacks there might have been along the way. As a matter of fact, Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" (*Labyrinths* 19-29) seems to afford the image of a linear, infinitely bifurcative, yet most likely determinable unwinding of multiple possible worlds. However, this is not the case. Granted, the "forking paths" universe is from a certain view linear and bifurcative, and it is probably deterministic, but it is unpredictable, at least by us finite, fallible beings suspended within it. In a manner of speaking Borges discovered "bifurcation theory" before science did (Weissert 223).[1] In fact, it might appear that in the "Garden" there are four different levels, three of mathematical dynamics and one that is apparently subjective. The first level is that of *pure abstraction* of *mathematical logic*, the story of Tsui Pên and his construction of the infinite, self-reflexive, self-contained book with the same title as that of Borges's story. The second level consists of a *simulation model*, the author's representation of a fictive world as an alternative to what we ordinarily consider to be the "real." The third level is the *topological depiction* of Tsui Pên's book, a story that contains Borges's story that in turn contains the story of the book. And the fourth level entails the subjective, *time-bound grasp of the story* or stories at whichever level. Put the four levels together, and once again we would like to believe that the whole is static, consistent, and deterministic. What is more important, it appears to be quite orderly.

But it isn't. At the first level, logic apparently rules, classical logic that is. The *n*-tuple temporal bifurcating lines making up the book entitled *The Garden of Forking Paths*, which contains our universe, and which is in turn contained within Borges's story by the same name, as a sheer logical abstraction of the first order logic sort, in a sense falls victim to

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[1]According to bifurcation theory, any and all open "far-from-equilibrium" systems (i.e. systems of disorder) reach points where there are two choices. Beyond this critical point the properties of the system can change abruptly, unpredictably, and along "nonlinear" paths. These systems are most effectively accounted for, I believe, by Ilya Prigogine's theory of "dissipative structures" (see Prigogine and Stengers).

the overpowering spirit of Gödel's theorems: it is both *inconsistent* and *incomplete*. That is to say, as a vast self-returning, self-contained, self-sufficient whole, it is *overdetermined*. Its *n*-tuple lines of interconnectivity (intertextuality) give rise to an infinity of possible interpretations that eventually begin looking at themselves, speaking to themselves, addressing themselves to their own inadequacy, of the "'All Cretans are liars,' said the man from Crete" sort. The Cretan makes an utterance regarding the entire class of individuals of which he is a member, thus also becoming a victim of Bertrand Russell's violation of Logical Types and creating a paradox. If any and all texts and their multiple interpretations remain within the system, this is inevitable. In addition, any and all interpretations of texts are destined to *underdetermination*: whatever interpretation happens to arise, it could have been something other than what it is, and at some future moment it runs the risk of being displaced by another interpretation that, within its context, accounts for the same text with equal effectiveness. The first level view of the Garden mirrors the edifice of classical logic, and it marks its demise.

The second level, a Baudrillard sort of *simulations* and *simulations* of *simulations* according to which each possible path along its bifurcating lines is virtually a reduplication of its two adjacent paths. This affords the image of a digital machine, where at each juncture there is a choice of either "1" or "0," a "+" or a "-," either a veering off to the left or to the right. It might appear that this machinic view is that of Paul Valéry's poem as a machine that reproduces an emotion, or Umberto Eco's and Italo Calvino's text that is a machine for generating interpretations. In such case, we are addressing ourselves to *computability*, and in such case we eventually enter into the limitative theorems of Alonzo Church, Emil Post, and Alan Turing, whose climactic finale is of the essence of Gödel's work in mathematical logic on *undecidability*. There is no way out, since if we are ourselves within the "hypertext," we are caught up in the same *inconsistency-incompleteness* morass. Besides that, we find ourselves swimming in the equivalent of the "sorites paradox." As the bifurcating lines become less and less discernible, the appearance of *simulacra* and nothing but *simulacra* becomes the rule, and there is no knowing how many paths (interpretations) we must sift through in order to find a path (interpretation) that makes a *difference* (that is, a *difference* that makes a *difference*, which is necessary, according to Gregory Bateson, in order to render the text meaningful).

The third level of Borges's work lands us in the paradox of the One and the Many, or in abstract Western thought, the "arithmetical paradox," alluded to by physicist Erwin Schrödinger. This paradox recapitulates

the "We are in the intertext" idea, as it is described by Schrödinger himself: "The reason why our sentient, percipient and thinking ego is met nowhere within our scientific [or topological] world picture can easily be indicated in seven words: because it is itself that world picture. It is identical with the whole and therefore cannot be contained in it as a part of it" (*Mind* 138) (brackets mine). If a given interpretation (text, ourselves, ego) is taken to be *that which is* in the here and now, it is the whole, but since it is within the whole, it is a whole that contains itself — i.e. Russell's paradox anew, or Borges's Aleph, a point in space that contains all points. This paradox, it bears mentioning, is tantamount to Nelson Goodman's "ways of worldmaking": a given time-bound world, which, like all worlds, is fabricated rather than found, cannot be coterminous with *The World*, but the concoction of all possible worlds, past, present, and future, *are The World*, yet *The World*, at any given moment in time, is either less than what it is (it is *incomplete*), or it contradicts itself (it is *inconsistent*) — i.e. Gödel in a new garment.

This observation brings us to the fourth level: *temporality*. The interpreting agent is in a sense a traveling point, an ambulating "Aleph," within the whole, the "hypertext." As she creeps along her "world-line," time becomes a factor, and the vantage points available to her are shifted time and time again. In other words, Derridean de-centering enters the scene: "ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a de-centering had come about: at the moment when European culture — and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts — had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference" (Derrida 251). If there is time, at least for the interpreting agent, then it might well appear that an imperious transcendental grasp of things could be at hand: I am *here*, *now*, taking the transient universe into my perceptual grasp. But if so, then a variation of the "preface paradox" results. The "preface" makes a statement about the text as if it were "outside" looking "in." The interpreting agent in ordinary circumstances thinks he does the same. It is as if he were to say, "There exists a text without intertextuality, and it is I." It is the protagonist of Borges's "Garden" moving along his "world-line" as if he were bringing about the desired end-product regarding his universe, that is, as if he were "outside" looking "in." But he is not. The assertion "There exists a text without intertextuality" is inextricably caught within the "intertext," the "hypertext" as it were, and as such it is true insofar as it addresses everything but itself and false insofar as it includes itself: once again, the import of the "liar paradox." If time exists at all, and in Borges's "Garden" the labyrinth is

precisely within a certain conception of time, not space, then every-
thing is *in* it and everything *is* it—Borges says so much in the conclud-
ing lines of his "New Refutation of Time."

At any rate, we might wish to conclude, a labyrinth is a mirror or
model of the universe, according to traditional wisdom, and since we
can perhaps get a reasonably successful grasp of labyrinths, they can
help us to understand the universe, at least at some intuitive level.
However, models are not quite the reliable key we would like them to
be, as Calvino's Mr. Palomar painfully learned. According to classical
dictates, an ideal model is "that in which nothing has to be changed,
that which works perfectly." The problem, Palomar discovered, is that
reality "does not work and constantly falls to pieces, so we must force
it, more or less roughly, to assume the form of the model" (Calvino
1985:109). This sounds reasonable enough. Models cannot be more than
extremely limited abstractions, and as abstractions, something must be
left out of the *modelandum*; that it, it must be whittled down somewhat
in order to fit the *modelans*. Palomar, quite understandably, wanted
classical impassiveness, detachment, and objectivity, but no sooner
than the serene harmony of his chosen model appeared to be at hand,
"irrelevant accidents" would pop up in his modeled world. A "delicate
path of adjustment" was constantly required. He never ceased re-
sponding to the call for "gradual corrections in the model so it would
approach a possible reality, and in reality to make it approach the
model" (*Palomar* 110). Soon, he needed not merely one or two models
but a great variety of them. With the continuing proliferation of models
it became apparent that a model of his models had become imperative.
Finally, after things evolved into a conceptual swamp of mind-
numbing complexity (that is, "intertextuality"), Palomar concluded that
"what really counts is what happens *despite* them" (111). So he erased
all the models and models of models, from his mind. Then he was free
to face reality, which consists of no more than Humean-like fleeting
fragments of experience. Yet he felt he was in this state of existence the
owner of some pretty fine thoughts. That is to say, they were poten-
tially fine thoughts, for to be thought and said, they must be put into
systematic linguistic form, and thus they would constantly threaten to
become models of one sort or another. So Palomar decided to "keep his
convictions in the fluid state, check them instance by instance, and
make them the implicit rule of their own everyday behavior, in doing
or not doing, in choosing or rejecting, in speaking or remaining silent"
(112). But in this state of mind Palomar's world could be nothing more
than flux, fluctuation, instability, uncertainty. In other words, although

he could now be quite certain of each and every step as an atom unto itself and divorced from the complex (intertextual) whole, he could know nothing of the whole, that is, without throwing himself once again into the unruly ocean of uncertainty.

That Supreme Labyrinth, the Universe.

But, then, after all is said and done, life is quite often uncertain for most of us, almost always uncertain for some of us, and absolutely certain for none of us. The gods appear to be rolling the dice, and they may even be loaded, but if so, their loading seems to be definitely out of our favor. In ancient cultures, the cosmos was considered to be chiefly a roll of innocent dice. Now, in the age of the "new physics" and the "science of complexity" ("intertextuality"), it's still a matter of chance. But not quite pure chance. For though things are unpredictable, at the same time they are according to chaos theory at least in principle determinate, though determinacy at increasingly larger domains might continue to elude our finite, fallible minds into the indefinite future.

It might appear, consequently, that we have been thrown into a world without any necessary order, and without any given point necessarily of any of higher value than any other one. This situation is comparable to Palomar's final project, and also to that of poor "Funes the Memorious" (*Labyrinths* 59-66). For Funes, to know the number series is to know each numeral as an individual without there existing any necessary relation between it and any other numeral of the series. In fact, Funes once invented an alternative system consisting of arbitrarily selected terms that, given his unlimited mnemonic capacity, was equally effective. Like the most adept of "idiot savants," he could in the blink of an eye multiply, say, "Plata" (= 1,275) and "Quebracho" (= 836) and respond with "Rosario" (= 1,065,900). For Funes, language also consists of an unordered concoction of signs very loosely related, if at all, according to a haphazard sort of *ars combinatoria*. Or, from another perspective, it is like an unordered set of numbers arbitrary connected in such a way that whatever connections may have been made, they could have always been otherwise.

Within Funes's world, how could one hope to find any sort of order? The signs and their concepts in our world of everyday living, we would like to believe, are tied up with the furniture of our world to which they refer. We see a lemon and properly classify it as a "lemon" because we are familiar with "lemons," with "lemonness," with "yellowness," and so on. Or at least our ability to so use language is one of our last great hopes that words can and actually do correspond to our

world: at all costs we would like to fear not the possibility of our signs and our world becoming hopelessly chaotic. Consequently, we would be quite homeless and totally lost in Funes's world. It would appear to us to be somewhat in the order of a Buddhist flash-dance where everything is always already different. For Funes, what is becoming isn't yet, and since it isn't yet, then once it is, it's already becoming something else, but it isn't yet. What it will be, that is what it is becoming, is the dissipation of what it was in the last moment, and what it will have been becoming in the next moment. That is, at each moment it is what it is, but it actually is not what it is because it is always already transforming itself into something other than what it is. But actually, in light of the above sections there is no guarantee that we have any certainty we can put our fingers on than our hapless friend, Funes. In fact, inspired by Funes's world, it would be possible for us to imagine and invent new terms of all sorts at the drop of a hat, and we would never cease to be surprised, awed, dumbstruck, and even either shocked or numbed by the plethora of new signs we found ourselves spewing forth. Funes, who can see only particulars, sees, in the sense of the four levels of the "Garden," sees nothing but points. But a point is a point, capable of containing many points, in fact, of containing all points. The gazer of Borges's "Aleph" and the protagonist of the "Garden" would like to think they perceive and conceive of everything that is. In an abstract way of putting it, they perceive and conceive of a concoction of points, which in its totality in in essence no more than a point. Is their perceptual and conceptual grasp really superior to that of Funes? What advantage, really, can they possibly have anyway? Are they not trapped within the "hypertext" just as much as is Funes? Can the same not be said of us?

But once again, we instinctively rebel in the face of such confusion. What about what *is*, that is what surely *must be*, clearly and distinctly and once and for all? That Parmenidean fantasy in defiance of Heraclitean flux and flow is difficult to shake. Another turn to Calvino may help clarify the issue.

And Then There Was Time, Complex Time.

Calvino's "The Count of Monte Cristo" (*T Zero* l37-52) offers a vivid example of the form of what goes by the name of "complex time."

The protagonist is confined to a cell with a tiny barred window "at the end of a shaft that pierces the thickness of the wall: it frames no view; from the greater or lesser luminosity of the sky I can recognize approximately the hours and the seasons; but I do not know if, beneath

that window, there is the open sea or the ramparts or one of the inner courtyards of the fortress" (137). This affords him no more than a tunnel perspective, or better, a funnel perspective. Since the funnel is inordinately long, it is possible that the walls could contain another cell between his cell and the outside, and between this inner cell and the outside, and the inner cell and his own cell, there could be two more cells, and so on, a situation reminiscent of the "Menger sponge" of fractal dynamics (for a discussion, see Stewart).[2] It is also the image of a static form of "intertextuality," the "hypertext" timelessly there for all time.

This being the case, the number of cells in the prison is unforseeable, as is the total length of the walls of these cells. Moreover, if the "Menger sponge" were complete, its virtually innumerable walls would finally dissolve into space and the "sponge" would be completely empty. Consequently, our prisoner would have no way of knowing how much of the prison consists of walled cells and how much of unconfined space. That is to say, if the "Menger sponge" prison were extrapolated to its ultimate, it would consist of pure space, hence it would be no prison at all but would allow for pure freedom. The walls would be infinitely thin, no more than a mathematical imaginary line. Yet, the sum of the area of the walls of the cells would be infinite, so at the infinite stretch of things the prison, this cosmic prison, would in a sense be more confining than ever, paradoxically. It would be a *plenum*.

In the dank darkness of his dungeon, the narrator's perception is more auditory than visual, even with intractable elements of tactile, olfactory, and gustatory imagery. He pricks up his ears at the faint sounds indicative of jagged spaces and forms around him. He tries to infer "the network of the corridors, the turns, the openings, the straight lines broken by the dragging of the kettle to the threshold of each cell and by the creak of the locks," but succeeds "only in fixing a succession of points in time, without any correspondence in space" (138). He becomes obsessed with escape. But in order to realize his goal he must first know the whole plan, the pattern, of the edifice. But he cannot know the whole, for, like the human library rats in Borges's "Library of Babel," he is caught within a minuscule portion of it.

Abbé Faria, another prisoner, has perforated the walls of the edifice in every direction. His itineraries wind around themselves like a ball of yarn or a "strange attractor." As a consequence, he long ago lost his

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[2] Indeed, we read that "the cell, the aperture, the corridors along which the jailer comes twice a day with the soup and the bread could be simply tiny pores in a rock of spongy consistency" (*T Zero* l38).

sense of direction: he no longer recognizes the cardinal points, and ze-niths and nadirs have no meaning for him. At times the narrator can hear him, perhaps scratching at the ceiling; plaster falls; a hole opens up:

> Faria's head appears, upside down. Upside down for me, not for him; he crawls out of his tunnel, he walks head down, while nothing about his person is ruffled, not his white hair, nor his beard green with mold, nor the tatters of sack-cloth that cover his emaciated loins. He walks across the ceiling and the walls like a fly, he sinks his pick into a certain spot, a hole opens; he disappears. (141)

Faria even has trouble distinguishing one cell from another. As such, the fortress has no favored point, no center. Or better, like Borges's "Library," every point can be conceived as the center, and its circum-ference can therefore be construed as everywhere. In other words, it appears to follow diverging, converging, convoluted, involuted, nonlinear lines to nowhere and everywhere. In a strange way, it is *rhi-zomic* (i.e. "hypertextual" in the most perverse way). And time, within this "block" universe, is not that McTaggart A-Series time as a flow from the past into the future along the knife-edge of the "now," but rather, it is B-Series time consisting of static *befores* and *afters* with noth-ing in between; it is "complex time," mathematical or "imaginary" time based on the function of $\sqrt{-1}$, which is actually timelessness from the perspective of our own subjective time.

Finally, as Faria opens another breach in a wall—or perhaps the floor or the ceiling—he bursts into Alexandre Dumas's study, where the au-thor is in the process of writing a novel about the narrator in the for-tress. As it turns out, in this concentric fortress Dumas's desk contains the narrator, and all the other prisoners as well, along with the treas-ure, and even the "supernovel" *Monte Cristo*, "with its variants and combinations of variants in the nature of billions of billions but still in a finite number" (*T Zero* 150).[3] And we once again become trapped within that paradox plaguing the four levels of the "Garden." Might we call it the "intertext paradox," the "interdoxal paratext" (or perhaps simply the "hypertext")?

Advancing or at a Standstill, Wherever We Are?

We get a complementary sort of uncanny feeling, for an instant we even sense a sort of *mise en abyme*, regarding an impossible end-point

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[3] We have read this story before, of course, from the narrator of Borges's "Library of Babel" who is in the Library and in the act of writing the short story about the Li-brary which the reader is in the act of reading, also, presumably, from within that selfsame Library.

during a reading of Borges's "The Book of Sand" (117-22), The narrator is introduced to this infinite book by an unnamed stranger who told him the book was so called "because neither the book nor the sand has any beginning or end." He asks the narrator to find the first page:

> I laid my left hand on the cover and, trying to put my thumb on the flyleaf, I opened the book. It was useless. Every time I tried, a number of pages came between the cover and my thumb. It was as if they kept growing from the book.
> "Now find the last page."
> Again I failed. In a voice that was not mine, I barely managed to stammer, "This can't be." Still speaking in a low voice, the stranger said, "It can't be, but it is. The number of pages in this book is no more or less than infinite. None is the first page, none the last. I don't know why they're numbered in this arbitrary way. Perhaps to suggest that the terms of an infinite series admit any number." (119)

As if the stranger were thinking aloud, he then remarks: "If space is infinite, we may be at any point in space. If time is infinite, we may be at any point in time" (119). The infinite knows of no beginning, middle, or end. It imply is as it is, and if it is "cut," somewhere, at an arbitrarily selected point, the "cut" is *our* "cut": we are ourselves "cuts" that never cease to exercise "cuts" in the continuum of possibilities before us, possibilities that we are a part of. The infinite is tropologically recapitulated in Renaissance philosopher Nicolas da Cusa, the circumference of whose sphere which is God is nowhere and whose center is everywhere. Or, also tropologically speaking, it is like Borges's "Library," or the dungeon within which the narrator of Calvino's "Count of Monte Cristo" has been thrown. Up or down, forward or backward, here or there, this "center" or that "center," it's all the same. It is "infinity in all directions," if I may avail myself of Freeman Dyson's provocative phrase.

The narrator's predicament in Borges's tale also reminds us of mathematician Georg Cantor's work with infinity. Cantor teaches that we can add 1, 10, 100, or 10^{10} integers to our initial sign depicting infinity and it will be that much larger, though the numbers contained within that infinite set is still the same, infinity.[4] If the number of pages in the book

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[4] Infinity, I must clarify at this juncture, comes in two shapes: *actual infinity* and *potential infinity*. We tend to experience a chalk mark on a blackboard as continuous (an actual infinity) but it is not, for it merely fails to reveal noticeable gaps to the naked eye. It is no more than the visible expression of a potential. Zeno's paradoxes are predicated on the concept of a potential infinity (a never-ending succession of steps). However, since the implication of actual infinity underlies this concept, Zeno is not a finitist, and finitistic arguments, which merely banish the idea of the actual infinite altogether, cannot legitimately dispel him (Benardete, *Infinity* l3-20).

were less than infinity, and yet if that number is virtually unfathom-able—as was the number of pages in the book for the narrator—then there is no way one can know without a shadow of a doubt whether the book is of infinite or finite length. What is more, there is no know-ing where the beginning and ending of the book are to be found, or where one is when opening the book to a particular page. This is the same dilemma that confounded the inhabitants of Borges's "Library." For ages it has also been the dilemma we have confronted in this laby-rinth we call the universe. Is the universe infinite or finite? Orderly or disorderly? If infinite and either orderly or disorderly, we cannot know that it is so until and unless we reach the infiniteth point, which we cannot do, so we cannot know. If it is finite and orderly, we can at least in principle know it is so, but according to the latest scientific reports it is more disorderly (chaotic) than orderly. Still, we cannot know, ulti-mately know.

Significantly, in this light, astrophysicist David Layzer ("Arrow" 68) has put forth the radical hypothesis that not only can we, from our "microcosmic" vantage, not know where we are in the universe, such information would be impossible even at the "macrocosmic" level, for:

> The order is unknowable even in principle. Imagine an unbounded stack of playing cards, topless and bottomless, deck piled on deck without limit. Information about the order of the cards in one section of the stack is of no help, because any given sequence is repeated an infinite number of times elsewhere, in the same way that patterns of stars and galaxies are repeated throughout the universe. It is mean-ingless to say that you are at such and such a place in the stack, even when you have full information about the order of the cards and that place. You still don't know whereabouts you are in the stack, any more than the typical observer knows whereabouts he is in the cosmos.

In fact, an infinite sequence of spatial increments or temporal intervals has no last term; neither does it have a first term, for the finite human agent that is.

Samuel Beckett's entire *opus* also bears witness to this sort of phenome-non. Each work, each chapter, paragraph, sentence, word, is subli-mated from Beckett's brain-mind with increasing excruciation, until hardly any words are forthcoming at all. In his trilogy, Molloy, caught up in a journey toward the whereabouts of his mother, ends up in a ditch, face down. Malone's pencil scratches fewer and fewer words on paper as the seemingly interminable moments drag by. The Unnamable longs for, but never encounters, "the story ... that I should never have left, that I may never find again, that I may find again, then ... it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning

again, how can I say it, that's all words, they're all I have, and not many of them, the words fail, the voice fails, so be it" (*Molloy* 413). The protagonist of *How It Is* painfully inches forth in the ooze within which he finds himself, having departed from an irretrievable beginning and with no possible end in sight. If that last word could have come gurgling from his mouth, from the depths of his body and mind, it would have been virtually no word, perhaps a mere syllable, perhaps even less, surely even less. It would have been well-nigh nothing, no-*thing*, at the end of the Zenoesque infinitely stretched asymptote. It would be itself and nothing but itself. It would be one pearl of the entire Buddhist string of pearls each of which mirrors the whole. It would be a cosmic black hole, or a "naked singularity"—or Borges's "Aleph"—containing everything and every event in the entire history of the universe. In a footnote at the conclusion of Borges's "Library" we read of a comparable phenomenon. It consists of the hypothesis that, "rigorously speaking, a single volume would be sufficient" (*Labyrinths* 58). The middle page of this solitary, all-encompassing volume would have no reverse because it would be the equivalent of "0," that marvelous state of absolute nothingness, whose origin lies in Buddhist philosophy and the Sanskrit language, separating the positive integers from the negative integers. It would have no reverse side, for there would be nothing (no-*thing*) to see, since an infinite series will not tolerate an existent final term.[5]

But actually, what have we in our infinite series if not the ultimate of complexity? Of asymmetry, disequilibrium, fluctuation, dissipation, fractal geometry, virtual chaos, that is, "hypertext"? And at the same time, what is this complexity that we may somehow know it if it is not the ultimate of simplicity? It must be of the most simple of simples, if, ineffable though it is, we can nevertheless, and with great effort, somehow know it. From within this whole any part of which is tantamount to the whole itself, perhaps the best we can do is create impoverished images or struggle with our hopelessly inadequate language: Calvino's "Prison," Borges's "Garden," that Buddhist string of pearls, the fractal image of chaos that can be generated on the supersensitive monitor. Ah, yes, the monitor, and its ubiquitous "internet," product of the most recent monumental achievements of Western technology: its brilliant hues dazzle us, perhaps allowing us to think we can gently lift the veil somehow to perceive beyond. Beyond? No. Sheer illusion. There is no beyond, for everything is within itself.

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[5] I am assuming, of course, that we are taking infinity to be of the potential rather than the actual variety.

What are we, simple and fallible knowers, that we may somehow know complexity and its concomitant chaos, and what is complexity ("hyper-text") that it may somehow be known by us, minuscule parts of that which is simply known?

Floyd Merrell
Purdue University

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