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# Time

## For Borges

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IN THE PROLOGUE TO THE *OBRAS COMPLETAS* VERSION OF *EL OTRO, EL MISMO* (The Other, the Same), Borges ascribed his preference for this collection of verse to the fact that it encompassed all of his particular literary obsessions: "There, likewise, are my habits: Buenos Aires, the cult of the elders, Germanic studies [*la germanística*], the contradiction of time that passes and the identity that endures, my stupor at the fact that time, our substance, can be shared" (1996, 2:235).<sup>1</sup> The items in this list might be generalized in the following terms: space (Buenos Aires), the archive of cultural secrets ("the cult of the elders"), philosophy (Germanic studies), time, identity, and the possibility of community. It would be a mistake, however, to think Borges accords each of these obsessions equal importance. He does not. For Borges, the most compelling problem is "the contradiction of time that passes and the identity that endures."

In what follows, I would like to tease out the implications of this "contradiction" for a reassessment of Borges's work. My claim is not that Borges

consistently articulates a coherent solution to the problem of time and identity that most vexes him. I will argue in fact that he does not. Such inconsistency and incoherence, however, ought not empower either those who dismiss Borges as a philosopher or those who claim him simply for literature.<sup>2</sup> It has never been a criterion of philosophy that it solve the problem of time and identity consistently and coherently, that is, that it solve this problem reasonably by rigorously accounting for the definition of time within the determination of identity. Indeed, Borges argued that the problem of time could not be solved: "I believe Henri Bergson said that time is the capital problem of metaphysics. If that problem were resolved, everything would be resolved. Happily, I do not believe there is any danger of it being resolved" (1996, 4:199). If the problem is both fundamental to philosophy and unsolvable, then both the concern for it and the failure to resolve it are constitutive of philosophy. According to this logic it would be impossible to exclude the Borgesian text from the philosophical archive.

Borges underscores the importance of the problem of time and identity by repeatedly insisting that time is the fundamental problem of metaphysics. In a lecture entitled "Time [*El Tiempo*]," Borges concluded: "time is an essential problem. I mean that we cannot do without time. Our consciousness is continually passing from one state to another, and that is time: succession" (1996, 4:199). Elsewhere, Borges intimates that although we might be divested of the intuition of space, that is, of exteriority, we cannot do without the intuition of time. "The problem of time," Borges remarks, "touches us more than the other metaphysical problems, because the others are abstract. The problem of time is our problem" (4:205). No doubt because the problem of time is *our* problem, Borges figures it as a problem of identity: "Who am I? Who is each one of us? Who are we?" (4:205). The problem of time touches us where we can no longer *simply* locate or touch ourselves. It follows, therefore, that the joint problem of time and of identity is no less a problem of space.

The distinction between space and time can be read in an anecdote Borges related to Carlos Peralta: "an Argentine philosopher and I were talking about time, and the philosopher said: 'We have made a lot of progress in that in the last years.' And I thought that if I had asked him about space surely he would

have answered: 'We have made a lot of progress in that in the last blocks'" (Irby et al. 1968, 108, my translation).<sup>3</sup> In both cases the philosopher measures progress according to the particular intuition of sense under discussion, as if the measurement of space and time were absolutely discrete, as if it were possible to progress over the last few years without a spacing of time, or alternatively, as if it were possible to progress through the last few blocks without a temporalization of space.

Furthermore, Borges notes the teleological orientation of the "well known" philosopher's remarks, namely, that one need only wait "until the end of the month" in order to know "everything about time" (Irby et al., 1968, 108). Presumably, upon arrival at the end of the block, one would know everything about space. To the philosopher—thus to philosophy writ large—Borges attributes the messianism of the coming end of time: at the end of the month, time will be both absolved of itself and absolutized in itself. At the end of time, which also implies the end as time's self-comprehension, its actualization or perfection, we will know everything *about* time. The messianic conception of the fulfillment of time begs the question of the possibility of our *knowing* all there is to know about time, since the possibility of knowing takes time. The philosopher thus posits time at the end of time, a time beyond time that is nonetheless temporal.

Although the joke is on the philosopher, Borges in fact does not object to the logic that conceives space and time as distinct from one another. A few years earlier, during a "conversation" at New York University, Borges observed, "I tend to be always thinking of time, not of space. When I hear the words 'time' and 'space' used together, I feel as Nietzsche felt when he heard people talking about Goethe and Schiller—a kind of blasphemy. I think that the central riddle, the central problem of metaphysics—let us call it thinking—is time, not space. Space is one of the many things to be found inside of time—as you find, for example, color or shapes or sizes or feelings" (Christ 1974, 400–1). In the same vein, in the lecture on time, Borges argues that it is possible "to do without space, but not time, in our thought" (1996, 4:198). The privileging of time over space corresponds to Kant's argument that as time is the a priori form of inner sense, there can be no sensibility, thus no experience whatsoever, that is not temporally determined.

Given Borges's avowed privileging of time over space, the question of identity haunts him. If our substance is time and if time ceaselessly passes, how is it possible, Borges asks, to account for identity, which requires duration or permanence over time? In *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life*, Martin Hägglund points out, "the difference of time could not . . . be marked without a synthesis that relates the past to the future and thus posits an identity over time" (2008, 17). In "Historia de la Eternidad [History of Eternity]," Borges too recognizes that "successive time" is "inconceivable" (1996, 1364; 1999, 136) without the possibility of identity. He acknowledges that without a synthesis of time, temporal succession would be unknowable. As we have already noted, Borges succinctly characterizes the problem of succession and synthesis as "the contradiction of time that passes and the identity that endures" (1996, 2:235). This "contradiction" troubles philosophy from its inception. According to Hägglund, "Philosophies of time-consciousness have usually solved the problem" posed by the infinite divisibility of time by anchoring the synthesis of time "in a self-present subject, who relates the past to the future through memories and expectations that are given in the form of the present. However, this solution to the problem must assume that the consciousness that experiences time in itself is present and thereby exempt from the division of time" (2008, 17). If we are essentially temporal, as Borges avows, then there can be no possibility of an atemporal consciousness or mind that would ground the synthesis of time. Borges in fact makes just this argument against both Berkeley and Hume in "Nueva Refutación del Tiempo [New Refutation of Time]" (1996 2: 135-49):

The outline of the problem is already clear. On the one hand, Borges not only supports the distinction between time and space, but he privileges time over space. On the other hand, he follows the classical philosophical determination of time as infinite succession. These two positions result in an intractable problem for the constitution of identity in that without some form of spatiality, pure succession would not allow for the determination of identity. This is so because identity requires not only temporal succession, but also the simultaneity that characterizes space as the form of extensity. Space makes possible the remaining without which there can be no identity.

The notion of the trace addresses the apparently intransigent problem of what Hägglund calls "the link between the problem of temporality and the logic of identity" (2008, 16). The philosophical tradition inherits this problem from Aristotle, who, in *Physics* IV, establishes that, to think time as succession, there must be, as Hägglund writes, "at least *two* nows—an earlier one before and a later one after" (16; Hägglund quotes Aristotle 1984, 219a). Nevertheless, in thinking time as succession, "Aristotle realizes that it contradicts his concept of identity as *presence in itself*" (16). The definition of identity as presence in itself derives from the principle of noncontradiction—that "the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject" (Aristotle 1984, 1005b)—that governs the logic of the Aristotelian text:

The conception of identity as presence in itself, Hägglund notes, "leads Aristotle to an impasse, since his logic of identity cannot account for the succession that constitutes time" (2008, 16). It is to this impasse that Derrida's notion of the trace responds. The logic of the trace derives from Derrida's taking seriously Aristotle's understanding, on the one hand, that the "now" marks the limit of time as the possibility of its measure, and on the other hand, that it is impossible "for the 'now' to remain always the same," insofar as "no determinate divisible thing has a single termination" (Aristotle 1984, 218a). This is necessarily the case because the limit, whether thought temporally (the "now") or spatially (the point), is already divided in itself. The impossibility "for the 'now' to remain always the same" provides the key for reading the logic of the trace as the only chance for thinking through what Aristotle characterizes as the aporia of time. In sum, it is impossible to think the synthesis of succession or the link between succession and identity—again, what Borges considered the happily irresolvable contradiction between changing time and unchanging identity—without recourse to the trace. So long as the "now" remains thought as indivisible and inalterable, thus as presence in itself, neither succession nor identity will be conceivable.

The principle of noncontradiction, however, holds that it is impossible for a thing to be and not to be *at the same time*. The principle of identity stipulates that something must be *before* it can *then* be destroyed. According to Hägglund, were the principle of identity regulative, time would be

unthinkable because “[a] self-present, indivisible now could never . . . give way to another now, since what is indivisible cannot be altered” (2008, 16). The destruction of any “now” by a succeeding “now” is only possible if the present “now” is divided “*in its very event*.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no succession, no time, without the division of the “now.” But time cannot be thought as the simple division of the “now,” as if there were pure succession. There is no succession without an operation of synthesis that constitutes the “now” through a movement that refers the no longer to the not yet. Without such referral, there would be neither succession nor identity, neither memory nor anticipation. There would be nothing at all. The operation of the synthesis allows for the possibility that what passes away leaves a trace that is exposed to what comes. In order for what passes away to be related to what comes, there must be a spacing of time because space is the figure of exteriority in general, and as such, it provides for the possibility of simultaneity.<sup>7</sup> “The trace is necessarily spatial,” Hägglund argues, “since spatiality is characterized by the ability to remain in spite of temporal succession. Spatiality is thus the condition for synthesis, since it enables the tracing of relations between past and future” (2008, 18).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the remaining that characterizes the trace cannot endure in itself, because, as Derrida notes, the spatial trace is “already vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future” (1982, 13). Hägglund explains: “The synthesis is always a trace of the past that is left *for the future*. Thus, it can never be in itself, but is essentially exposed to that which may erase it” (2008, 18).

Hägglund’s elaboration of the temporal logic of the trace opens onto the logic of survival. Only what is mortal survives, lives on, always at risk of being destroyed, eradicated, forgotten. To survive means to live on exposed to the time of life, to mortality. On the one hand, there is no survival without the possibility of the future; on the other hand, the future necessarily threatens the possibility of survival. To overcome the “radical finitude of survival” (Hägglund 2008, 1) is literally undesirable because the structure of desire affirms the temporal logic of survival: “The desire to *live on* after death is not a desire for immortality, since to live on is to remain subjected to temporal finitude. The desire for survival cannot aim at transcending time, since the given time is the only chance for survival” (2). Hägglund insists, moreover,

that “immortality cannot even hypothetically appease the fear of death or satisfy the desire to live on. On the contrary, the state of immortality would annihilate every form of survival, since it would annihilate the time of mortal life” (2).<sup>9</sup>

The logic of survival can be read in the conclusion of Borges’s “History of Eternity,” which repeats, *verbatim*, a text Borges published in *El idioma de los argentinos* (The Language of Argentines) in 1928. “Sentirse en Muerte [Feeling in Death]” presents Borges’s “personal theory of eternity” (1996 1:365; 1999, 137).

“Feeling in Death” dramatizes one of Borges’s most persistent claims, namely, that a single repetition is enough to destroy time. At the instant Borges articulates “the facile thought *I am in the 1800s*,” that thought “ceased being so many approximate words and became [*se profundizó a*] reality” (1996, 1:366; 1999, 138). “I felt dead, I felt myself an abstract perceiver of the world” (1996, 1:366). Borges does not, however, feel that he had arrived at the source—“*las presuntivas aguas*”—of time. Rather, he suspected that he had become the owner (*poseedor*) “of the reticent or absent sense of the inconceivable word *eternity*” (1996, 1:366; 1999, 138). *Feeling* oneself to be dead, then, is what it takes to be in possession of the meaning of eternity. Here is Borges’s definition of the imagination of his own death and, with it, of eternity: “That pure representation of homogeneous acts . . . is not merely identical to what was there on that corner so many years ago; it is, without appearances or repetitions, the same. Time, if we can intuit that identity, is a delusion: the indifference and inseparability of a moment from its apparent yesterday and another from its apparent today, are enough to disintegrate it” (1996, 1:366; 1999, 138). It should be obvious, however, that were yesterday inseparable from today, nothing will have happened, not even the disintegration of time, insofar as there would be no possibility of registering either the past or the present; nor would there be any possibility of presentation, which requires temporal division to constitute itself in the first place. That is, presentation is an effect of the synthesis of passing away and coming to be.

Borges derives the following conclusion from his “experience” of feeling in death: “life is too poor for it not to be also immortal. But we do not even have the security of our poverty, in that time, which is easily refutable in

aspired to chronological rigor, it would have been more reasonable to depart from the hexameters of Parmenides ("it has never been nor will be, because it is"). I do not know how I could compare Plato's Forms to "immobile museum pieces" and how I did not understand, reading Schopenhauer and [Johannes Scotus] Erigena, that these are living, powerful and organic. Movement, occupation of different places at different instants, is inconceivable without time; likewise so too is immobility, occupation of the same place at different points of time. How could I not sense that eternity, lovingly longed for by so many poets, is a splendid artifice that frees us, even in a fleeting way, from the intolerable oppression of succession. (1996, 1:351)

The title "History of Eternity" is no less ironic than that of "New Refutation of Time," which Borges published in *Otras Inquisiciones (Other Inquisitions)* in 1952.<sup>12</sup> A history of eternity can only be the history of the *concept* of eternity, since eternity as such would be timeless, thus properly ahistorical. The historical determination of eternity effectively corrupts eternity by temporality, since eternity as such would be timeless, thus properly ahistorical. The spatialization of time ("occupation of different places at different instants") and the temporalization of space ("occupation of the same place at different points of time"). In short, the immobility of eternity remains necessarily mobile, which means eternity must be exposed to what comes, since without an openness to the future and to alteration, nothing would move.

Additionally, Borges's recognition that eternity is a "splendid artifice"—thus technical and temporal—does not mitigate his mistaken understanding of its effect. Because the liberation eternity ostensibly makes possible is *fleeting*, it must be conceded that eternity cannot liberate us from "the intolerable oppression of succession," for succession, however oppressive, is the condition of possibility for anything—including liberation—to *fly*. The conception of liberation as fleeting ought not be understood as a derivative instance of freedom. Quite the contrary, liberation must be fleeting. Otherwise, liberation would not be emancipatory. An eternal or absolute freedom would, by definition, not be free in that it would obviate the possibility of the decisions constitutive of freedom, which would have to include the possibility either that one would abdicate one's freedom or that another would

the sensible realm [*lo sensible*], is not so [easily refutable] in the intellectual realm, whose essence seems inseparable from the concept of succession" (1996, 1:366; 1999, 138). The determination that time qua succession is easily dismissed at the level of sensibility, while perhaps impossible to dismiss at the level of cognition or intellect, follows from a basic misunderstanding. Borges suggests that sensibility is immediate, whereas thought is essentially mediated. Accordingly, feeling or sensibility happens in a present unscathed by either passing away or coming to be. Sense perception, on this account, is therefore atemporal. Cognition requires time precisely because it is mediated by concepts, hence by abstraction and generalization. Borges thus argues that sensibility or perception is unmarked by temporal division; consequently it is unmarked by the synthesis of time. Yet, the absence of temporal synthesis obviates any perception in that the synthesis of time makes possible the relation to the future, thus, to alteration and alteration, without which nothing happens. Therefore, without the synthesis of time qua succession, Borges would not be able to *feel* in death; he would not be able to *feel* himself an abstract perceiver of the world, nor, for that matter, would he be able to discern the "pure representation of homogeneous acts." Without the synthesis of succession, in short, nothing happens, nothing arrives, not even, as Borges writes, "in the confessed irresolution of this page, the true moment of ecstasy" (1996, 1:366; 1999, 139). No ecstasy without the exposure to the future, *here and now*, as precisely that which constitutes the impossible possibility of the here and now.<sup>13</sup> In sum, to *feel* oneself in death is not an experience of immortality; it is not an experience of eternity. On the contrary, it is mortal through and through. And the repetition of this experience makes this clear, not least because repetition takes time.

Borges's problematic relation to eternity and to time notwithstanding, the logic of survival—hence, the trace structure of time—is legible throughout his text. For instance, in the 1953 "Prologue" to *Historia de la eternidad* (History of Eternity),<sup>14</sup> Borges offered the following reflections on the structure and the stakes of that book and its investment in the idea of eternity:

I will say a little about the singular "history of eternity" that gives the name to these pages. In the beginning I speak of Platonic philosophy; in a work that

take it. Absolute freedom, then, is no different from absolute bondage. As a consequence, what Borges calls “the oppression of succession”—which the idea of eternity dissembles rather than suspends—provides the *only* possibility of liberation.

If eternity is a “splendid artifice” and if the logic of the Borgesian text demonstrates that eternity is undesirable, then why invoke it at all? Borges does so because he believes only the concept of eternity and the permanence it promises answers “the contradiction of time that passes and the identity that endures.” On this argument, the idea of eternity secures identity and memory against the ravages of time. Moreover, although he recognizes that desire necessarily relates to the future, he conceives the future of desire in terms of a return to eternity. Despite Borges’s determination that eternity guarantees memory, identity, desire, even time, the Borgesian text insistently articulates the logic of survival. Indeed, even Borges’s description of the origin of the concept of eternity is organized by the affirmation of survival.

In *Historia de la eternidad*, Borges notes that “remote men, bearded, mired men conceived” of eternity, “ostensibly to confound heresies and defend the distinction of” the Trinity, “but secretly in order to staunch [*restañar*: to detain] in some way the flow of hours” (1996, 1:363; 1999, 135). Thus they conceived eternity as a way to put off or delay the passage of time, for as Borges quotes from George Santayana, “To live is to lose time; we can recover or keep nothing except under the form of eternity” (1996, 1:363; 1999, 135). Borges emphasizes the desire to hold on to, or staunch the flow of time when he claims, “Archetypes and eternity—two words—promise firmer possessions [*posiciones más firmes*]. It is certain that succession is an intolerable misery and that magnanimous appetites desire [*codician*] all the minutes of time” (1996, 1:364; 1999, 135–36). To desire or to be greedy for (*codiciar*) time means to hold onto—to detain or delay—the passage of time. According to Borges, however, to put off or delay is the very definition of time: “It is true that *time* . . . must be synonymous with delay [*demora*]” (1996, 1:361; 1999, 132). To hold onto time, which is to delay time, on the one hand, means to deny the very condition of life, our constitutive temporality; on the other hand, it means to desire more time insofar as time is delay. At stake here is the logic of survival. The passage of time results in the desire to hold on to time, to

delay its passage under the figure of eternity. However, *putting off time takes* time. Hence, the desire to hold on to time is the desire to put off or delay the passage of time; yet, the desire to put off time amounts to what Häggglund calls the “unconditional affirmation” of time as the condition of possibility of mortal life.<sup>3</sup> Borges himself seems to acknowledge this in the lecture on time: “[T]here is no moment in which we could say to time: ‘Stop. You are so beautiful . . . !’ as Goethe wished. The present does not stop [*no se detiene*]” (1996, 4:205). The desire for eternity therefore dissembles the desire for *more* time. The putative desire for immortality is in fact a desire for survival, a desire to live on, which means a desire for mortality.

The same logic informs Borges’s conception of the relation of eternity to memory and identity. For instance, Borges writes, “Personal identity is known to reside in memory, and the annulment of that faculty is known to result in idiocy” (1996, 1:364; 1999, 136). Without memory, we are idiots. The possibility of the “annulment” of memory indicates that the ostensible archive of personal identity is temporal and thus insecure. Because it is always possible for memory to be annulled and for us to forget ourselves, Borges suggests that memory must be protected by the idea of eternity: “Without the idea of eternity, without a sensitive, secret mirror of what passes through every soul, universal history is lost time, and along with it our personal history—which rather uncomfortably makes ghosts of us” (1996, 1:364; 1999, 136). On this argument, eternity makes it possible for what “passes through every soul” not to be lost time, but rather to remain perpetually present. If memory is secured by the idea of eternity, then what passes does not pass. It persists, which means the “no longer” simply *is*. In Borges’s calculation, in the absence of the idea of eternity and its “sensitive, secret mirror,” which supposedly holds onto time, what passes through every soul would pass incessantly, without halt or detention. Without the idea of eternity to hold onto time, identity would be impossible as there would be no synthesis of time. This would be the argument in favor of the necessity of the idea of eternity. Following the logic of the idea of eternity, identity would only be possible for Borges if time were *not* to pass. On this account, time ruins the possibility of identity at the same time that it is the condition of life, for as Borges argues, time is the substance of life.

The possible loss of memory and with it the loss of identity haunts Borges and no doubt leads to the suggestion that memory is guaranteed by eternity. It is this haunting—which instances the relation to an undetermined future—that gives the lie to the idea of eternity as necessary for the constitution of identity. Without the idea of eternity, there is no identity because there is no memory, the loss of which, Borges suggests, "makes ghosts of us." In the absence of the idea of eternity, the ghost signals the absolute loss of identity, which means that for Borges identity is possible only in an indivisible or absolute present. Borges thus necessarily posits identity as presence in itself. But this is a mistaken understanding of the ghost. The ghost—which is virtual, an apparition, but which is not of the order of being"—figures the impossible possibility of identity. Identity is impossible because of the insensate division of time. As a consequence, identity is never secured in itself, never present to itself. All identity is spectral; we have never been anything but *revenants*, ghosts. Identity, then, is *not*, as the condition of its possibility, for without the coming of the future, without the exposure to the other, to the *revenant* that we are, there could be no relation to the past as what haunts us, that is, as what comes (back). Hence there could be no identity at all. There would be only an absolute resting in peace, without memory, without identification, without life.

In "Vindicación de la cábala [In Defense of Kabbalah]," published in *Discussion* in 1932, Borges had already acknowledged the tension between an undetermined future and its anticipation, when he admitted that he tried "to bear in mind that every object whose end is unknown to us is provisionally a monster" (1996, 1:210; 1999, 84). Against what appears to be Borges's express intention, this early remark explains why time cannot be "the gift of eternity." Insofar as the idea of eternity corresponds to a desire that seeks to fulfill itself in an eternal present, it must not be susceptible to temporal division. As in itself, eternity must necessarily be absolutely determined. But if everything is absolutely determined, if everything is decided, then there can be no giving, no gift, of anything at all. Moreover, insofar as eternity is conceived as absolute presence in itself and thus as absolute being, eternity cannot give time, since time is not and therefore could never be generated out of being or presence. On the one hand, eternity lies in state and, because

it cannot give anything, it remains intestate, without will or bequest. It is impossible to inherit from eternity, from the immortal and the immemorial. On the other hand, time incessantly comes. It is time, then, that gives. But what or who comes remains necessarily undetermined as the condition of its coming. Thus the gift of the future is a monster, a promise, and as such both a chance and a threat, which explains why we must welcome, anticipate, and fear the gift.

Borges retreats from the furthest implications of the understanding of the future as undetermined. In so doing, he reimports the authority of the present in the figure of eternity. In the lecture on time, he writes, "The idea of the future would turn out to justify [*vendría a justificar*] that ancient idea of Plato, that time is the mobile image of eternity. If time is the image of eternity, the future would turn out to be [*vendría a ser*] the movement of the soul toward the future. The future would be in turn [*a su vez*] the return to eternity. That is to say, our life is a continual agony" (1996, 4:205). A future that returns to itself as eternity is not the future. It is not a monster, which is how Borges designated—however provisionally—the future that remains unknown and incalculable. On the contrary, an always already determined future is the present, which, because it is not exposed to the chance and risk of the future, is necessarily inalterable.

Consequently, what Borges here calls the future figures eternity. As a result, Borges posits eternity—the absolute present, immortality—as the horizon of time, as time's guarantor. It is toward this future eternity that we turn and to which we return to relieve ourselves of our temporal agony, to relieve ourselves of mortality. This is the metaphysical strategy. Because time is destructive, agonistic, metaphysics attempts to save us from time. To do so, it must save us from life, for life is unconditionally temporal. Even here, however, the logic of survival operates, for to turn and return takes time and a future that turns and turns again necessarily turns away from itself in turning toward itself.

Borges's determination that eternity gives time and, further, that only eternity can guarantee identity, memory, and desire, therefore must be wrong. Borges recurs to the figure of eternity to mitigate the deleterious effects of time, thus to hold on to or defer time. To save us from the passing

of time, Borges uses a prophylaxis that nevertheless destroys us, since, as he argues, time is our very substance. The upshot is that the possibility of identity, memory, and desire within the Borgesian schema would require that we be immortal. But an immortal being, because it would not be susceptible to alteration, would have no need of an identity, a memory, or desire, which are constitutively temporal. No identity, no memory, no desire, without finitude, which means the possibility of identity, memory, and desire is also their impossibility.



#### NOTES

For Paula Cucurella Lavín, who, when given the chance to hear the longer version of this paper in Viña del Mar, Chile, in July 2008, politely declined the opportunity.

1. Where no second page reference is given in the parenthetical citation, the translation is my own. Where a second page reference is given, the translation is often slightly and silently modified.

The issue is not whether Borges was a philosopher; it is rather whether he took philosophy and philosophical problems seriously. In the Balderston volume, *Borges: Una encyclopedia*, the entry for "philosophy" (*filosofía*) cites Borges from conversations with María Esther Vázquez and Jean de Milleret, respectively. These citations point to Borges's essentially aesthetic appropriation of philosophical systems, on the one hand, and his understanding, oft-repeated, that philosophy and theology belong to the genre of fantastic literature (1999, 132–34). Additionally, and on more than one occasion, Balderston, who is one of the leading authorities on Borges, follows Carla Cordua, who, he writes in *Out of Context*, "argues that Borges was not a metaphysician and, hence, that for him 'the philosophical element, first isolated from its context and then treated not as a concept but as a thing or as a singular existing situation, is thus removed from its medium, separated from the function it had in that medium, and converted into an opaque sign, suggestive but in the final analysis undecipherable'" (140 n. 8, citing Cordua 1988).

More recently, Balderston relies on Cordua to assert that "Borges no hace la filosofía ni teoría, pero sus textos toman la filosofía y la teoría como objeto [Borges does neither philosophy nor theory, but his texts take philosophy and theory as an object]" (Balderston 2000, 154). The exact difference between *doing* philosophy and theory and *taking* these discourses as an object remains unclear. Further, it seems impossible that philosophical concepts could ever avoid being divorced from their context and being taken as "opaque signs." It should be noted that Cordua, one of Chile's and Latin America's leading

philosophical figures, offers no reading of any philosophical text in this essay; nor does she offer any detailed reading of Borges's engagement with philosophical problems.

In *Unthinking Thinking: Jorge Luis Borges, Mathematics, and the New Physics*, Floyd Merrell quotes from Borges's preface to Ronald Christ's *The Narrow Act* (1969) as saying that he is "neither a thinker nor a moralist, but simply a man of letters who turns his own perplexities and that respected system of perplexities we call philosophy into the forms of literature" (1991, ix). It should be noted that Merrell goes on to read the confluence of the Borgesian text with twentieth-century mathematics, physics, and language philosophy. Given that Borges inscribes all metaphysics within the genre of fantastic literature, it is perhaps of no real consequence whether he was or was not a philosopher, whatever that means. What difference is there between a philosopher, on the one hand, and one who takes philosophy as an object of inquiry, on the other? Of more interest—although by no means the object of this essay—is the question, from what does one save Borges when one saves him *from* philosophy? To what end, for what purpose, does one save Borges *from* philosophy? And to what end does one save him *for* literature?

2. William Egginton also refers to this anecdote at the outset of his discussion of time in the texts of Borges, Derrida, and Heidegger; he thanks me for alerting him to it. See Egginton 2007, 107.
3. It should be pointed out, however, that he does so to argue, no doubt ironically, that there is no time.
4. Note, then, that the principle of noncontradiction regulates Borges's determination of mobility (different places at different times) and immobility (the same place at different times) in "History of Eternity." Yet, at the same time (as will be demonstrated), by positing the necessary spacing of time and temporalization of space, the Borgesian text provides the resources for thinking against this principle.
5. This is what is at stake in Derrida's determination of time as "the metonymy of the instantaneous" and, in his reading of Roland Barthes, of the punctum as "what took place only once, while dividing itself already" (2001, 61).
6. For Derrida's decisive reading of Aristotle's *hama*, see *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), 53–57.
7. Derrida calls this the "becoming-space of time." For two such occasions, see Derrida 1982, 13, and 2005, 46.
8. In addition to his *Radical Atheism*, see also Hägglund's "Chronolibidinal Reading: Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis," this issue of *CR: The New Centennial Review*, in which Hägglund further develops the logic of survival in relation to the structure of desire.
9. Derrida explains: "Without reducing the abyss which may indeed separate retention from re-presentation, without hiding the fact that the problem of their relationship is none other than that of the history of 'life' and of life's becoming conscious, we should be able to say a priori that their common root—the possibility of re-petition in its most general form, that is, the constitution of a trace in the most universal sense—is a possibility which not only must inhabit the pure actuality of the now but must constitute it through the very movement of *différance* it introduces" (1973, 67). Derrida makes the



- same point in his reading of Freud in *Writing and Difference*: "No doubt life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral). But we must be wary of this formulation: there is no life present *at first* which would *then* come to protect, postpone, or reserve itself in *différance*. The latter constitutes the essence of life. Or rather: as *différance* is not an essence, as it is not anything, it is *not* life, if Being is determined as *ousia*, presence, essence/existence, substance or subject. Life must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence. This is the only condition on which we can say that life is death, that repetition and the beyond of the pleasure principle are native and congenital to that which they transgress" (1978, 203).
10. *Historia de la eternidad* was first published in 1936.
11. On the publishing history of "New Refutation of Time," see Borges 1999, 541.
12. Hägglund writes that the affirmation of survival "is not a matter of a choice that some people make and others do not: it is unconditional because everyone, *without exception*, is engaged by it. Whatever one may want or whatever one may do, one has to affirm the time of survival, since it opens the possibility to live on—and thus to want something or to do something—in the first place" (2008, 2). On the unconditional affirmation of survival, see also Hägglund 2008, 129–31.
13. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida suggests that the ghost "will not be thought so long as one relies on the simple (ideal, mechanical, or dialectical) opposition of the real presence of the real present or the living present to its ghostly simulacrum, the opposition of the effective or the actual . . . to the non-effective, inactual, which is also to say, as long as one relies on a general temporality or an historical temporality made up of the *successive* linking of presents identical to themselves and contemporary with themselves" (1994, 70). The implications of this can be succinctly spelled out. According to Derrida, because it is always already no longer and not yet, the ghost or specter cannot be comprehended according to the logic of the present, which is itself the effect of the Aristotelian opposition between *entelecheia* and *dynamis*, actuality and potentiality, where actually names presence and *dynamis* in fact names absence qua the potentiality to be present. The ghost is neither present nor absent. It is, rather, the specter of what cannot be thought either as *what has been* or as *what will be*. The ghost is not dominated by the present.
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