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Is prose by any other name still prose?

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Upon preparing to do a review article on a book with a subtitle the likes of 'Interpretative Variations on [Borges's] Literary Methods and Epistemological Foundations', I had sharpened my claws in anticipation of an adventurous hunt. But, somewhat to my chagrin, I soon discovered that not only does the volume generally fail to revolve about issues commonly central to the concerns of semioticians, but also, there is little regard for 'epistemological foundations', as they are customarily conceived. However, I would submit that, when all is said and done, Borges definitely *is* of central concern to the Peircean notion of *semiosis*, and Peirce's thought and Borges's work are both germane to the current debate over *episteme*. With this in mind, and after some deliberation, I set for myself the task of illustrating how the contributions to the volume under review reveal a semiotic strain underlying Borges's work.

Preliminaries

Blüher and de Toro's *Jorge Luis Borges* (hereafter *JLB*) bears a salad variety of critical approaches, methods, and analytical techniques. The reader confronts notions of origins and ultimate ends in Borges's literature (Alberto Julián Pérez, Leo Pollmann), the question of the *other* (Laura Silvestri, Graciela Latella, and Eberhard Geisler with regards to Borges and Henri Michaux), the dream-world/fictive-world problem and the idea of literary creation as 'controlled dream' (Volker Roloff, Pérez), the enigma of knowledge by way of remembering and of literary creation by way of forgetfulness (Pollmann, Nicolás Rosa), 'postmodernist' notions of intertextuality, palimpsest, self-referentiality, rhizomaticity,

* Karl Alfred Blüher and ^{AJG de Toro} Alfred de Toro (eds.), *Jorge Luis Borges: Variaciones interpretativas sobre sus procedimientos literarios y bases epistemológicas*. Frankfurt: Vervuert Verlag, 1992.

meta-narrative, parody, and irony (Rosa, Blüher, de Toro), and 'isotopies' in Borges's poetry (Wladimir Kryszynski). And to boot, the volume is brought to a close with a handy working bibliography, including interviews and conversations with the Argentine writer (Carsten G. Pfeiffer).

In spite of *JLB*'s variegated appearance, there is an overriding theme. The editors point out that over the last decade there has been renewed interest in Borges which is germane to the recent controversy over 'postmodernism-postmodernity'. As a consequence, they propose, for their volume, a series of studies of this 'new Borges', which generally shed light on the concept of 'literariness'. This, then, will be the focus of my own interest, which will serve to place both Borges and our contemporary milieu, through *JLB*, on the stage of Peircean semiotics.

The other of the other

The celebrated and often denigrated 'loss of the self' (Sypher 1966), the 'disappearance of man' or the 'subject' (Foucault 1970), the 'dissemination of the self' (Derrida 1981), the ubiquity of the 'other' (Foucault 1977; Lacan 1966), the 'deterritorialized nomad' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 1987), and the notion of 'simulations' and nothing but 'simulations' (Baudrillard 1983, 1988), all are part and parcel of what has gone by the name of 'postmodernism' and/or 'postmodernity' in one guise or another (de Toro *JLB*: 147–149). These themes are also central to Borges's prose, especially the dialogic between self and *other*.

Silvestri (*JLB*: 49–66) illustrates how Borges uses biographical affairs about which he constructs fictions that appear to become aloof and indifferent with respect to his actual personal life — this certainly contributes to what Rosa (*JLB*: 187–189) dubs the 'monstrous illegibility' of Borges. In developing her thesis, Silvestri, like Latella (*JLB*: 91–102), draws from 'The other' (Borges 1978: 11–20). In this story, the young Borges, who in 1918 at 19 years of age once sat on a bench in Geneva near the Rhone, suddenly appears from nowhere in 1969 and takes his place on a bench next to the aged Borges in Cambridge facing the Charles River. The author of the story reveals in his afterword to the *Book of Sand* (1978: 123), regarding 'The other', that he had to ensure that the two interlocutors were adequately different to be two persons and yet similar enough to be one. True to form, the younger Borges remarks: 'We resemble each other, but you're much older and your hair is gray' (1978: 12). And later, the older Borges reflects: 'We were too similar and too unlike. We were unable to take each other in, which makes conversation difficult. Each of us was a caricature of the other' (1978: 18). They

are identical but different; they are different but identical: unity in diversity and diversity through unity, an enigmatic polarity or complementarity that, Silvestri notes, 'is incomprehensible because it contradicts the first principle of logic (something cannot be and not be at the same time), hence the *other* (young Borges) believes the encounter is a dream and he is not even convinced that it is real when the narrator (older Borges) names various significant incidences of his life' (*JLB*: 51).

The enigma reaches a shrill pitch when the narrator shows his young counterpart a bank note bearing the date, 1974, which is future to the narrator's own account of the fortuitous conjunction of the two Borges, which occurred in 1972.¹ The fact that 1974 remains outside the three events making up the story (1918, 1969, 1972) suggests a strange Parmenidean 'block' conception of 'time' according to which everything is 'always already' there, awaiting our perception-conception of it, much in the order the 'modernist' notion of literature and the classical world view. In such a 'timeless time', as Borges (1964: 106-108) has put it, Kafka exercises an influence on Cervantes that is no less important than Cervantes's influence on Kafka. At the outset this notion reminds one of André Malraux (1951: 368) for whom each genius that causes a rupture with the past also changes earlier forms. Or T. S. Eliot (1941: 1), also mentioned occasionally by Borges, who writes that 'what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them'.

But obviously Borges's idea regarding Kafka-Cervantes and 'The other' is more all-encompassing. It is not only protoactive but retroactive as well. It is simultaneously a radicalization and a deconstruction of the well-known fallacies of intention and influence. For example, Borges (1964: 106-108) provides a list of unlikely 'antecedents' to Kafka's work: Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, Browning, Leon Bloy, and Lord Dunsany. He then suggests that, though each member of this heterogeneous collection resembles Kafka, they do not resemble each other. Yet, through Kafka, they are interconnected. In other words, Kafka's idiosyncrasies exist in each of those who influenced him, but had Kafka not written what he did, those idiosyncrasies tying each of them together would not have existed. Our reading of Kafka consequently changes, though at times imperceptibly, our reading of Browning, of Kierkegaard, of Cervantes, even of Borges and Shakespeare.² Borges concludes that each writer *creates* his or her own precursors. His or her work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future, since each work and

each reading of a work affects, to a greater or lesser degree, the totality of 'intertextuality' — a topic to be taken up below.

Now, the 'block' nature of time evinced by this interconnected Parmenidean *plenum* contradicts the Heraclitean flux and flow suggested by the 'differences' the two Borges present, as well as allusions to the two rivers in question beside which they find themselves at different times in their lives. Silvestri (*JLB*: 52) observes that any space-time anchors in the text that might initially have provided it some modicum of verisimilitude are destroyed once the contradictory dates surface. And she is correct, regarding our ordinary conception of time. However, what she refers to as the 'erroneous' date on the bank note does not jibe with the thrust of much of Borges's prose, for if merely an 'error', interconnectedness, past, present, and future, is not in effect. On the other hand, if there is no 'error', then time as we most intimately know it, psychological time, does not exist, though the 'complex' or 'imaginary' time of contemporary physics can account for it.³ Such 'nonpsychological' time is precisely that of fiction in terms of the conglomerate of all texts that is 'always already' there, as outlined by Borges. The customary fictionalization of the 'real', that is, the process by which the fiction leads its reader to recognize it as if it were 'real', becomes in 'The other' a 'play of mirrors that dissolves the semiotic myth of the existence of linguistic signs capable of recovering the objects of those signs in terms of their pristine purity' (*JLB*: 52).

The upshot is that just as there is no hope of recovering the past — since, Borges reminds us frequently, memories are not memories of the original event but memories of the least remote memory of that event — so also the future is inaccessible outside our expectations and anticipations, which may or may not bear fruit. Silvestri demonstrates this through an analysis of Borges's 'Autobiographical notes' (1970). There, Borges implies that just as at each point in one's life a virtual plethora of choices lie before one, so also, in retrospect, one can reconstruct an indefinite number of possible biographies. And just as one is always confronted with choices, one can also construct virtually an unlimited number of future lives, though only one of them stands a chance of being actualized. Significantly, in this regard, upon considering Pollmann's (*JLB*: 29–47) study of Borges's 'The immortal' (1962a: 105–118), we read, by way of a Francis Bacon epigraph to the story, that the product of Plato's 'knowledge is recollection' and King Solomon's 'novelty is forgetfulness' yields no more and no less than textuality, an interconnectedness of all things. In other words, the process of thinking, like the experience of novelty, is the result of having unknown what had been known but was relegated to forgetfulness. Once again, we have the self-identity of the whole and at the same time differences within the whole.

Such concerns were also quite germane to Peirce: his near obsession with Zeno, his various allusions to Royce's map paradox of a map containing itself, *ad infinitum*, his constantly meddling with the continuum problem, and with infinity and finitude, time and space, immediacy and mediation, Firstness-Thirdness and Secondness. According to Peirce, Firstness *is as it is*, and Thirdness *is what would be* in the long run of things. It is Secondness, the actualization of signs (as *haecceities*), that ushers in the apparently eternally differential or transient nature of things of our 'real' world.

The image of 'modernity' presented by Borges's above allusion to the interconnectedness of all texts (of all signs in the Peircean sense) is that of a monstrous fabric of which the purview of any and all finite and fallible human beings is destined to remain *incomplete*, though it is what *would be* (Thirdness, the Final Interpretant) 'out there' in the infinite stretch. And if we wish for at least some sort of conceptual grasp of this totality, then it is that incomprehensible realm of chance, of utter *vagueness* (Firstness, the possibility of all that *might be*). The young Borges and the older Borges of 'The other', like veritable nominalist rats, had waltzed through life's processes while catching fleeting glimpses, ephemeral space-time slices (Seconds), of what was to become the totality of their (actualized) biography. Their brief discussion, the narrator's speculation, and the author's ruminations in the afterword to the volume of short stories, serve as an attempt to lift the veil concealing that which remains 'beyond', that which makes up their realm of possibilities (Firsts) and of probabilities or necessities (Thirds). There is, on the one hand, the transient, ever changing world of contemporary thought, and on the other, the ideal everlasting 'block' of classical thought. It seems that, in spite of his radically distinct setting, Peirce, like Borges, was a child of 'modernity-modernism' caught up with what were to become the concerns of 'postmodernity-postmodernism'.

With this in mind, let us turn to the principle theme suggested in this section: *intertextuality* and its relation to *dream*.

From a labyrinthine point of view

Blüher's study of 'postmodernity and intertextuality' in Borges is itself a catalog of intertextuality. He suggests that Borges has developed a 'new semiotic method' of writing consisting of a play of ambiguity, irony, and paradox by means of multiple allusions to known texts and to familiar as well as unfamiliar intertextual relations. There is no doubt, he writes, that Borges's 'postmodern aesthetic' represents an important facet of the

neofantastic genre that since Kafka, Apollinaire, and the surrealists has become divorced from fantastic literature of the nineteenth century. Borges's technique entails purely linguistic, not mimetic, creation of fantastic elements, with 'intertextual hyperventilation', rather than the more accustomed, rather simplistic, departure from 'real world' reference (JLB: 129).

Borgesian intertextuality is, as a consequence of this characteristic, radical nonlinear; it is decentered, pluralistic, nonsymmetrical, and self-reflexive (but always with a difference — *différance*). Rosalyn Frank and Nancy Vosburg (1977: 582) observe that Borges's intertextuality reinforces the 'double reality', the 'real' and the 'irreal', to be found in his stories. But this is not the form of intertextuality Blüher — nor I, for that matter — has in mind. It is more akin to Gérard Genette's (1982) 'time of the book' — or better, perhaps, the 'timeless time' — which is not the limited time of writing and of particular readings, but the limitless time of all possible readings, which, akin to memory, is all there all at once. It is the 'timeless time' of Kafka's influence on Cervantes, or of the dialogue between the two Borges.

This interpretation of intertextuality entails signs becoming signs in a delirious process within which signs are both identical to themselves and different: they provide for their own *otherness*. That is to say, the entire sphere of signs is One, yet, from the vantage of a given semiotic agent, it is radically pluralistic, and Many (a concept that reaches a shrill pitch in the juxtaposition of Borges's 'The library of babel' (see 1962a: 51–58) and 'The lottery of Babylon' (see 1962a: 30–35).

This tension between sameness and difference, One and Many, surfaces quite significantly in 'Pierre Menard, author of Quixote' (see 1962a: 36–44). The reader is provided with a list of Menard's writings prior to his attempt to write the *Quixote*, which is revealing. On the one hand, there are works predicating the unique: a symbolist sonnet that appeared twice with variants, a monograph 'on the possibility of constructing a poetic vocabulary of concepts which would not be synonyms or periphrases of those which make up our everyday language', a treatise on different solutions to the problem of Achilles and the Tortoise, and an invective against Valéry, which is the 'exact opposite' of his true opinion toward the French poet. On the other hand, there are typical products of the academic grist mill: a monograph on 'certain connections and affinities' between Descartes, Leibniz, and John Wilkins, another on Leibniz's *Characteristica Universalis*, a rejection of the possibility of innovating the rules of chess, a worksheet on George Boole's symbolic logic, and an examination of 'the essential metric laws of French prose' (1962a: 37).

The first grouping, entailing a penchant for difference, change, novelty,

is juxtaposed with the second, imaging order, harmony, symmetry, repetition. Menard abhorred the second, which is fit only 'to enthrall us with the elementary idea that all epochs are the same or are different' (1962a: 39). He was not out to compose merely another *Quixote*, he desired to pen *the Quixote itself*, identical to the early seventeenth-century work down to its most minute detail. After an initial abortive attempt, his ambition is at least partly realized in a collection of fragmentary passages. But the project backfires; his critics fancy that his text has become, rather than identical to the *Quixote*, a set of successive differentiations that are even contradictory at some points. That is to say, Menard's readers place the text within the context of its early twentieth-century writing. It is appropriate that Menard's *Quixote* remain unfinished: the fragments, like all works, the collection of which constitutes the fabric of intertextuality, must remain forever open.

Intertextuality, of course, is incompletable, that is, asymmetrical, for mere finite readers. A cosmic perspective of the whole of intertextuality, if indeed such an ideal Laplacean being could exist, is not for us. We can do no more than read the text through a small window affording us an action-packed movie — space-time slices — of constant flow; things happen in the 'now' because we perceive that time transpires: the 'now', wherever it is, wherever we are, at some indeterminable point in the labyrinth. I bring up this question because it is, I believe, and as we shall note, germane to the concept of *semiosis* — and this, in spite of the contributors' generally ignoring Peirce and semiotics in *JLB*.

Sameness and difference in 'Pierre Menard' is patterned by the ordinarily mutually exclusive and perennially antagonistic concepts of nominalism and realism found in other Borges works. Funes, of 'Funes the memorious' (1962a: 59–66), only sees particulars. A prototypical sort of 'supernominalist' in the physical world sense (of sign-events), he is incapable of abstractions, of generalizations, of thinking in the ordinary human manner. On the other hand, the Tlönians of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1962a: 3–18), see only what their minds construct, and when they are not seeing, their world ceases to exist. They are 'supernominalists' of the mental sort (regarding thought-signs). In other words, what these semiotic agents see is a discrete succession of actualized Seconds, without their being interrelated in the proper intertextual mode (i.e., in the sense of mediating Thirdness). This is a Humean 'reality' consisting of fragmented and stationary states, each being what it is at its particular moment and independent of all other states. Two states, A_1 and A_2 , are logical absolutes; they are related only symmetrically; each is a First to the other, without the possibility of any definite linear, irreversible transition from one to the other; the relations are entirely reversible.

This notion is, interestingly enough, also quite comparable to that taken up by Borges in 'New refutation of time' (1964: 171–188), with the aid of Hume and Berkeley. In a nutshell, Berkeley, Borges writes, denies, like the Tlönians, the existence of an external reality independent of our perception of it, while he retains the notion of a perceiving subject. Hume discounts the existence of a perceiving subject; the subject, much in the order of Funes, is merely a discontinuous bundle of sensations. That is to say, we cannot speak of the form and color of the moon; they *are* the moon. Nor can we speak of the mind's perceptions; the mind is *nothing more than* a series of perceptions. Combining Berkeley with Hume, Borges proposes that both external reality and the subject disappear. Perception occurs solely in the present, and if there can be a single instant of repetition, that is, of two identical discontinuous instants, then that will be evidence enough to deny time altogether — in other words, it will be the equivalent of myriad discontinuous instants fused into a continuum. Then in the grand tradition from Parmenides to Francis Bradley and McTaggart, Borges cites examples of various repetitive instants, concluding that time therefore does not exist. And yet, his final words are an effort at some sort of denial of his denial of time: 'Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river that carries me away, but I am the river; ... it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, alas, is real; I, alas, am Borges' (1964: 186–187).

To deny time is to give in to classical realism, which Borges, in spite of himself, resists. In fact, the 'timeless' universe posited by classical realism is reminiscent of Borges's conjunction of 'reality', fiction, and dream into an intertextual fabric. This conjunction is nowhere more evident than in 'The dream of Coleridge' (1964: 14–17). A thirteenth-century emperor dreams a palace and builds it, and a nineteenth-century poet dreams a poem about the same palace, unaware that the structure was derived from a dream. This puzzle gives rise, Borges conjectures, to the notion that the series of dreams, poems, and labors has not ended. Perhaps, in fact, the series is endless, or perhaps the last person to dream will have the key. At any rate, whoever might have compared palace to poem 'would have seen that they were essentially the same' (1964: 17). This is, indeed, the vision of a 'timeless' order of intertextuality accessible solely to what Borges calls a 'superhuman performer'. Over the long haul, intertextuality, as described above, evinces the ultimate unity of a *terminus ad quem*, a final goal. But, of course, that goal is undefinable, a receding horizon in the sense of Peirce *infinite regressus* and *infinite progressus* of signs about which much controversial ink has flowed (*CP* 1.339). The interconnected fabric implied by 'The dream of Coleridge', whether in reference to 'reality', fiction, or dream, necessarily includes

both the world of readers and authors as well as the world of texts — that is, of all semiotic agents and their signs.

In the same vein, elsewhere, after presenting the Royce map paradox, Borges (1964: 43–46) asks why the idea of this ‘timeless’ interconnected whole should disconcert us, or why it should disquiet us to realize that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote*, or Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*. He believes he has found the answer. These inversions ‘suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious’.

Now, I need not make mention in a review intended for an audience of semioticians of Peirce’s notion of the interconnected fabric of signs making up *semiosis*. Nor is there any call for allusion to Peirce’s enigmatic and notorious ‘Man \approx Sign’ equation, which would foreground Borges’s ‘Reader \approx Writer’ and ‘Text \cap Readers-Writers’ concepts. It is sufficient, I trust, that I re-voke Peirce’s notion of Seconds (*haecceities*), in contrast to Firstness and Thirdness. Secondness implies not mere relations of symmetry and reflexivity, for in the *semiotic* process it is never completely divorced from Firstness — from whence it arose — nor from Thirdness — serving to bring it into relation with Firstness and hence also with that selfsame Thirdness. The fact of Secondness coming into relation with Firstness and Thirdness introduces asymmetry, thus excluding two radical doctrines: Hume’s and Russell’s perceptual atomism or absolute pluralism, and an extreme form of monism in the sense of Francis Bradley (Merrell 1991: 83–91). Secondness is the actualization of a possibility, of Firstness, and it ‘points toward’ Thirdness. Firstness as what *might be* becomes what *is*, which will invariably have some successor drawn from it by Thirdness, or conditionality, what *would* or *could be* under certain circumstances. Peircean Seconds are not the myriad particulars of Borges’s Funes, that supreme nominalist. Nor are they the mental fabrications of those superidealists, the inhabitants of the planet Tlön. And his Firstness coupled with Thirdness (*vagueness-generality*, or *possibility-necessity*) is not the monistic ‘block’ refuting time or the totality of ‘The library of Babel’ (1962a: 51–58). Indeed, all these venerated philosophical constructs of the mind are fodder for Borges’s games of irony, ambiguity, and paradox. On the other hand, Peirce’s ‘objective idealism’ entailing methodological and epistemological ‘realism’ and ontological ‘idealism’ is a collusion and collaboration of ‘isms’ affording him — at least that was his elegant hope — a vague conceptual grasp of the universe of *semiosis*, even though he realized it could not exist for the finite, fallible semiotic agent.⁴

Now, I have strayed considerably from *JLB*. I did so not in disrespect, but, commensurate with my professed objectives, I wish to ‘fill in the

gaps', demonstrating that the implications of the volume under review stretch out beyond it, evincing multiple lines of contact with Peirce. Perhaps Borges is not so 'postmodern' that he has not left one foot in the doorway leading into 'modernity', and perhaps Peirce was not so steeped in nineteenth-century discourse of 'modernity' that he could not have projected out into that brave new world of 'postmodernity'.

Let us pursue this conjecture further.

Fiction, dream, 'reality', and more on the *other*

Pérez (*JLB*: 11–27) and especially Roloff (*JLB*: 67–90) develop the Borgesian theme of literary creation — indeed, of literature itself — as dream. If, as Borges suggests, dreams can be considered in terms of fictive texts, then analysis of the one should be carried out by the same methods as analysis of the other.

Roloff takes Borges at face value in this regard, most particularly with respect to his *Book of Dreams* (*Libro de sueños* 1976). For Borges literature is dream, but not dream in the ordinary sense. It is 'controlled dream' or 'hallucination'. It is comparable to the 'artificial paradises' of De Quincey and Baudelaire, to Proust's daytime dreaming, or to Sartre's willful control of the imagination. It consists of a wide-eyed somnambulism enabling the author to edit as he or she so desires (Roloff *JLB*: 73–75). It is the willing postulation of an invented reality (Pérez *JLB*: 13–18).

This idea is O.K. as far as it goes in reference to Borges in particular and all writers in general. But, I would submit, it is by no means limited to literary creation, and the dreamer is not always entirely cognizant of what he or she is doing.⁵ Take the hard-nosed physical scientist, for example. Arthur Koestler (1963) calls her a 'sleepwalker', a semi-awake person who tinkers, dabbles, and plays (but see Agassi 1975). She is somewhat like a child in a game of make-believe, or like an accomplished fabulist. She often tries things out simply to see if they work, and if she is fortunate, she hits upon an answer. But she could not really see where she was going, nor could she know what she was doing, except in retrospect. She exists, in other words, at two levels: the person of day-to-day living, and the *other*, that person of her mental constructs, who maintains constant vigil over herself as if in a dream.

Here, those familiar with Borges will recognize Borges's *other* of 'Borges and I' (1962a: 246–247), analyzed by Silvestri (*JLB*: 52–58) and Roloff (*JLB*: 79). In this brief story-essay, the 'other one, the one called Borges', is the one things happen to. The everyday Borges, on the other

hand, is the one who walks the streets of Buenos Aires, stops for a moment to gaze at various scenes, the arch of an entrance hall, or perhaps the grillwork on a gate. He knows of the 'other Borges' only by the mail he receives, his appearance on a list of professors, or in a biographical dictionary. The flesh and blood Borges realizes that he is 'giving over everything to the "other", though I am quite aware of his perverse custom of falsifying and magnifying things' (1962a: 246). Years ago he endeavored to free himself from his 'other' by writing stories of games, time, and infinity, but now all this belongs to the 'other'. His life is thus a flight, he is losing everything to oblivion, or perhaps to the 'other'. And the rumination ends: 'I do not know which of us has written this page' (1962a: 247).

This beautiful counterpart to the scientist as 'sleepwalker' gives insight into the human mind's remarkable capacity for ordering the disordered, producing structure out of chaos. Even during sleep, the quest for harmony persists. The nightly drama may seem to be random and chaotic, totally out of control, but, examined in fuller detail, patterns inevitably emerge, and the complex of dream images is interrelated. It has been suggested that dreams reveal some of the basic characteristics of a theory-making machine; or, by extrapolation, a fiction-making device (Campbell 1982: 230-237). Images are fitted to images in an overall pattern of relations, and new patterns are generated, apparently from nowhere. They are grasped as if 'bolts from the blue', free flights of the imagination. Borges's 'controlled dreaming' is in this respect significant. Our past is 'nothing but a sequence of dreams. What difference can there be between dreaming and remembering the past? Books are the great memory of all centuries' (Alifano 1984: 34).⁶

We have witnessed the same problem, of course, in 'The other'. The aged Borges speculates that if they are both dreaming, their 'obvious duty' is to accept the dream 'just as we accept the world and being born and seeing and breathing' (1978: 13). Yet, after the brief conversation between the two Borges, the narrator broods over this for days, finally arriving at what he believes to be the key. The meeting was 'real'. But the young man was dreaming, while the aged Borges was not, and this 'explains how he was able to forget me; I conversed with him while awake, and the memory of it still disturbs me' (1978: 20). Forgetfulness is notorious where dreams are concerned; memory favors wakefulness. The two men represent incompatible states of mind in this regard. Moreover, they apparently could not adequately understand one another: 'We were unable to take each other in, which makes conversation difficult. Each of us was a caricature copy of the other' (1978: 18). A half a century separates them. The young Borges of Borges's memory is now

vastly different from the young Borges as he was, and the former is incapable of comprehending the latter. The important point is that if, metaphorically speaking, one Borges is dreaming and the other one is awake, are the aged Borges's memories in essence any different from the dream? If not, then it is *as if* he were dreaming also, and if so, then the two did not exist in incommensurable frameworks after all.

This problem is also germane to Borges's 'The immortal', as Pollmann (*JLB*: 39–44) discusses it. The individual immortal is tantamount to the entire city of immortals — one person is everyone — for a 'segment' of infinity is still infinity and hence equal to the whole. This immortal has seen everything, knows everything, and forgets nothing. Time for him hardly exists. But if to know is to remember, *pace* Plato, and if novelty or creativity is oblivion, forgetfulness, *pace* Solomon (according to Pollmann's opening remarks), then there can be no creativity and knowledge is equally impossible for the immortal. Quite significantly, in this regard, he is completely indifferent to his surroundings, for he is met with no surprising events (Pollmann *JLB*: 42). In fact, he isn't even surprised that he is not surprised that he is not surprised, much in the order of Beckett's (1955) 'Unnamable'.⁷ It is as if he were hearing a suspended note in high C, with no variation, no change, no novelty, no recollection of anything else, no time (pure Peircean Firstness).

Borges's enigma of dream and fiction, coupled with knowledge and novelty, bears on the age-old problem of knowing whether or not we are dreaming. Most explanations are, however, materialistic, even behavioristic, and therefore far removed from Borges, who says that according to idealism, 'the words "live" and "dream" are rigorously synonymous' (1962a: 164). For Borges, 'controlled dream' is not a contradiction or an oxymoron, but more appropriately, and when viewed from an all-encompassing framework, it is *a strange sort of tautology, for dream state and wakeful state are not absolutely incommensurable*. To dream, in the sense of 'controlled dreaming', is to idealize, and ultimately, if the dream is 'fictionalized', to turn the world *into* words, to assume the world to be nothing *but* words. When one says all that can be said about the world, this concoction of words *is/becomes* the world; it is simply that words are virtually all we have to go on when regarding fictions. This is because language abstracts from the world. To use words in a certain way is the equivalent of forgetting what could otherwise have been said (abstracted) but was not. And since dreams are more prone to forgetfulness than awakefulness, to equate thinking with dreaming and thus abolish the distinction between the 'real' and the hallucinatory seems to deflate the world quite violently. But the concomitant inflation of fiction is only temporary precisely because it is fictive.

Berkeley, in a certain stretch of the imagination, believed our fictions *are* our world; they are the simultaneity of thought-signs of God, who is the ultimate dreamer. Berkeley's curious metaphysics has been unpalatable to all but a few hardy idealists. James Jeans, however, was one of the first contemporary physicists indirectly to shed light on idealist philosophy when he declared that 'there is a wide measure of agreement which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine' (Jeans 1930: 158). Jeans went on to speculate that since the universe has the appearance of a 'Great thought', thought must exist in the mind of a 'Great mathematician'. Repugnance over the spiritual implications of this notion alienated many scientists during the early days of relativity and quantum theory, but today it appears to bear more than a slight degree of validity. Indeed, the power of mathematics has been outstanding. Perhaps, as Einstein mused on numerous occasions, the stately dream of the ancient Pythagoreans may yet be realized.

Yet the Pythagoreans' dream *was* a dream, a 'controlled hallucination' or 'hyperfiction', that they desired to interject into the world; that is, they attempted to beat 'reality' into shape so that it might conform to their most cherished dream. Are the harmonious spheres or the labyrinthine confusion of symbols in today's physics a pattern that actually mirrors the world? To this question a forthcoming answer, of course, is more than can be reasonably expected.⁸ Yet cognizance of the interactive play between desire and the 'real', dream and the world, coupled with our feeble, fallible efforts to understand and the recalcitrant opposition of that which must be understood, at least serves to prevent the quest from dying altogether.

Peirce, fiction, and dream: A digression

Speaking of dreams, or fiction, as it were, once Peirce, after reiterating his time-honored doctrine that the end product of thought, the object of final belief, is 'reality', asked: 'Now what is the difference between reality and a fiction? A fiction is something whose character depends upon what we think about it; a reality is what it is whatever we may think about it' (*W* 2.45–46, also *MS* 200).

When Cervantes penned *Don Quixote* he was at liberty to endow the land of *La Mancha* with such characteristics that seemed to suit his purpose, given limitations presented by the geographical, social, and historical conditions of Spain at the commencement of the seventeenth

century. One might suppose that had he decided to fill the Don's mind with logic rather than lunacy, with no-nonsense realism instead of derangement, he would have been in comparison severely restricted. But *prima facie* he was quite free to do as he saw fit. Spain as Cervantes fictively reconstructed her had no alternative but to correspond to the words he put down on paper. As a consequence the 'semiotically real' Spain — her traditions, her present culture, her language — could not but experience certain alterations as a result of Cervantes's work. However, Spain as she 'really' existed in terms of a brute physical entity outside her traditional cultural imperatives, would continue to be as she was, despite Cervantes's wisdom, whims, and wishes to the contrary (see *CP* 8.12). Even though *Don Quixote* might have turned out to be a 'realist work', actual 'reality', that is, that 'reality' above and beyond any and all 'semiotically real' worlds or fictions, would have persevered, remaining quite unruffled, thank you.

Now, though the character of a fiction depends upon the will of its author and readers, and though 'reality' is what it is regardless of our willing otherwise, the fact remains that, *ab initio*, the author had before him a potentially infinite range of possibilities, and the indefinite number of possible readers over time have enjoyed the freedom of a potential infinity of interpretations. However, 'reality' is in a sense as unruly as fiction, for we can also 'think about' it in an indefinite number of ways without ever exhausting it or enjoying cognitive possession of it in all its plenitude. Fictions are incomplete and incompletable insofar as they are incapable of telling us absolutely everything possible about their characters, objects, acts, and events; 'reality' is incomplete and incompletable insofar as, given its myriad complexity, we cannot say absolutely everything possible about its characters, objects, acts, and events, for once we say what they are, they have already become something other. Both textuality and the text of the world simply are as they are in spite of whatever interpretation we happen to give them, hence they are both equally indeterminate in regards to their totality. Then what, ultimately, is the fundamental distinction between fiction and 'reality', that is, the 'semiotically real'?

Peirce occasionally alludes to our living in 'two worlds, a world of fact and a world of fancy' (*CP* 1.321). The first is exterior, the second interior. We harbor an inclination to think we are the authors of our world of fancy. It might appear that we have but merely to pronounce by fiat, with no effort and facing no resistance, the existence of something in our 'inner' world, and therefore it exists by the sheer force of our will. On the other hand, regarding the external world, 'we are master, each of us, of his own voluntary muscles, and of nothing more' (*CP* 1.321). But we

are also sly, Peirce continues, deluding ourselves with the somewhat secure belief that we somehow have a grasp on our external world, the 'real'. Eventually, however, expectations generated by this belief collide with our *experience*, that is, with the brute force of the external world, which rudely disturbs our 'inner' world, and the ways of our thought are then subject to modification to a greater or lesser degree. And, we would hope, life felicitously goes on.

This slippery distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' bears on Peirce's demarcation between 'reality' and fiction, which, he disconcertingly tells us with hardly any rationale, is 'plain enough'. Commensurate with Peirce's theme, the 'internal' is couched in *thought-signs* that do not remain entirely independent of the 'real'; the 'external' is independent of whatever character a given set of *thought-signs* 'in here' or *sign-events* 'out there' might happen to have. Peirce concedes that it would be a grave mistake to suppose that he has thusly clarified the ideal of 'reality'. In the first place, he by no means asserts that fictions, as well as dreams or hallucinations, are in no sense 'real'. On the contrary, dreams and hallucinations, while occurring, are 'real', though their *substance* is not. Moreover, if we consider a fictive or hallucinated object, act, or event to be indubitable, then it is just as one thinks it to be, and if one's judgment regarding it happens to change, then the object, act, or event would be altered in commensurate fashion (CP 2.141–142, 2.337, 5.405). We possess no comparable capacity willfully to alter the 'real', hence an important distinction between 'unreal' domains and 'reality'.

Yet under highly improbable, though remotely possible, circumstances, the *substance* of a dream or hallucination could be construed as 'real' — i.e., a 'real world' event apparently foreordained by a dream or hallucinated object, act, or event. Perhaps here we encounter the crux of the issue regarding the externally 'real' versus the internally 'real'. Every proposition whatsoever refers to a subject, whether or not it can enjoy any sort of reference in the physical world. This subject is to a degree related to a singularity actually reacting upon the utterer of the proposition as well as on its interpreter, be this action of 'inner' or 'outer' worlds or thought-signs or sign-events. And all subsequent propositions regarding this subject relate to the same singularity, that is, to a particular world of objects, whether 'real' or not. Thus the real world cannot with absolute certainty be distinguished from a fictitious world 'by any description' (CP 2.337).

Was Hamlet mad or not? Are space and time infinitely or finitely divisible? Do quarks and black holes exist or not? Such questions and the disputes arising out of them bear witness to the need for *indicating* (denoting) something in the/a world, whether 'real' or not. Thus the 'real'

as we (think) we know it is dynamic; it is there, asking to be *indicated*; it is that ubiquitous other, Secondness, incessantly forcing itself upon us. As a case in point, Bohr's planetary model of the atom was not 'real' enough, so he and other physicists, bowing to the demands of 'reality', developed the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics with hopes that it might be closer to the mark. On the other hand, Cervantes was not forced to give ground in the least, we might suppose. The Don was precisely as his author made him. But such a conclusion is problematic, for, generally following conventionalist-constructivist philosophy, and quite in line with recent philosophy of science and Heidegger-Gadamer hermeneutics (Bernstein 1983), what is perceived ultimately boils down to thought-signs, and thought-signs are ultimately free-wheeling inventions of the mind (Skolimowski 1986, 1987).

It might appear, then, that dynamical signs of Secondness should be potentially capable of *distinguishing* and *indicating* (indexing) the 'real'. However, Bohr's planetary model as an *indication* of the 'real' was an analogy, the result of a *Gedanken* experiment, a fiction. In the beginning it was mere possibility (Firstness). Just as the *tone* (intonation, icon) of a speaker describing a make-believe world, a fantasy, or an out-and-out lie might give the possible *indication* (index) as to whether or not he is sincere, according to how his addressee imagines his messages, so at exceedingly more complex levels the *subtleties* of the world of appearance do no more than offer themselves up to the imagination of their observer. No language contains a Grand Infallible Index telling us whether or not the world spoken of is 'real', or that the speaker is sincere. Tones and appearances (Firstness, predicates, icons) must be 'read into' a statement, for indices (Seconds, subjects) clarify very little (CP 2.337).

Both Galileo and Newton's 'Nature is a book to be read and quantified' and Descartes's 'Divide the world into smaller and smaller components and conquer it' ignore that necessary companion aiding and abetting *indication* in its tenuous designation of the 'real' and its distinction from the 'unreal'. That companion, consisting of the wellsprings of quality, intuition, gut-feeling, sentiment, hunch, imagination, at bottom links any and all 'real world' constructs to fictional constructs. As such, our 'semiotically real' world we would like to call 'really real' is in the final analysis as much the product of our 'intervention' as is any fiction (Hacking 1983). Once Hamlet was made, he was as his maker made him, though subject to innumerable interpretations by his readers according to the manner in which he might affect them (as Firstness), given the limitations prescribed by his author's statements (Thirds) about him (a Second). Much the same can be said of the 'real world' and that labyrinthine

plethora of interpretations it has suffered at the forever beguiling hands and minds of humans.

Turning once again to Borges's fictive worlds and their relation to the 'real', chiefly as outlined by Roloff (*JLB*: 77–85) and Pérez (*JLB*: 18–24), one is perhaps reminded of Nelson Goodman's (1978) 'ways of worldmaking'. But contrary to most 'worldmakers', Borges, like any wise fabulist, and like the best of scientists and philosophers, does not attempt to compete with 'reality'. He interjects 'reality' — properly a conventional 'reality' — into his fiction, he does not put fiction into a supposedly verisimilar or mimetic narrative. As such, he constructs a 'fictive reality' in which words take their rightful place among other words because words in the text, indeed all words, enjoy no necessary correlation with the 'real'. Yet one might retort that if, following Hans Vaihinger (1935), mathematics and science consist chiefly of fictions that at least in part coincide with the 'real', then it must be possible to pin them down to 'reality' at some point. But this is not necessarily so, in light of the above on Peirce, for if our knowledge of 'reality' is indeterminately variable, then it cannot be known precisely where the fiction ends and the 'real' begins.

Borges, one might wish to retort, creates alternative worlds in his metaphysical fictions. But scientists and mathematicians have always exercised the same prerogative. Copernicus's sun is an alternative to Ptolemy's sun, Reimannian geometry an alternative to Euclidean geometry, Einsteinian physics an alternative to Newtonian physics, and so on. And Borges's *Tlön* is an alternative not only to what we would like to consider the 'real', but, in addition, to all fictional 'worlds', past, present, and to come.

It would appear that in spite of our wish for a clear and distinct sense of the world and of fictions, we are condemned to a greater degree of freedom of choice than we would like. According to Borges, this often serves to pump us up, albeit artificially, deluding us with a sense of omnipotence we hardly deserve. To this topic I now turn.

Our vain individualism

Various contributors to *JLB* allude, either directly or implicitly, to the theme, common to Borges, that our concept of individualism is actually quite impoverished (see Pérez, Pollmann, Roloff, Latella, Rosa). This we find in 'Our poor individualism' (1964: 33–35), 'From somebody to nobody' (1964: 146–148), and 'New refutation of time' (1964: 171–188). But perhaps it is nowhere more evident than in 'Everything and nothing'

(1962a: 248–249), which Roloff (*JLB*: 79) refers to as the ‘insignificance of the individual author’ as a necessary facet of the concept of intertextuality and ‘postmodernism’.

In this brief essay a young man went to London at the age of twenty-odd years. He had already ‘become proficient in the habit of simulating that he was someone, so that others would not discover his condition as no one’ (1962a: 248). In London he became an actor and could now play at being another person before spectators who played at perceiving him to be that other person. After a long, illustrious career, and at the point of death, he came into the presence of God and petitioned him that he might finally become someone. Then, the ‘voice of the Lord answered from a whirlwind: “Neither am I anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your work, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dream you are, who like myself are many and no one”’ (1962a: 249). Just as God dreamed the world, so also the writer dreamed his work, a well-worn theme that nonetheless gives food for thought, especially regarding the virtual nothingness of the ego. For what remains paramount, according to the concept of intertextuality in its most radically idealistic sense, is the Schopenhauerian idea, recapitulated time and again by Borges, that one dream is all dreams, one work is all works, and by extension, one dreamer is all dreamers (Roloff *JLB*: 74–75).

Here also we find certain other ties between Borges and Peirce. Writing of the ego, Peirce refers to one of his many triads: *feeling-volition-cognition*. Feeling is Firstness, quality. Volition is dual: force and resistance, agent and patient, self and *other*. The shock of an unexpected event is volitional, the result of interaction between the self and the ‘real’ (outer *other*), which gives rise to dyadic consciousness of an ego and a non-ego (*CP* 1.334–335). Cognition, Thirdness, is the process of mediating between feelings and volitions. Metaphorically put: ‘Position is first, velocity or the relation of two successive positions is second, acceleration or the relation of three successive positions third’ (*CP* 1.337). Peirce’s analogy is apropos. Position implies changelessness. Velocity is continuous, but there is merely change of position. In contrast, acceleration is continuous change of change: both position and velocity undergo successive and continuous alteration. Feeling, volition, and cognition as First, Second, and Third correspond to Peirce’s tripartite sign. The representamen is immediate. That for which it stands, the object, is other than the self and subject to volition. And the idea to which the representamen gives rise is its interpretant, which entails cognitive activity.

Since the object of representation (signification) is not a ‘real’ but a ‘semiotically “real” object’ represented by the sign, it can be none other than another representation of which the first representation is the

interpretant, and an endless train of representations can be conceived to have the 'absolutely real' object behind it as a limit, though it can be no more than approximated (CP 1.339). In other words, the sign stands for — as position, as First (feeling) — the 'semiotically "real" object', which is pushed along the rail of Secondness (volition) by the incessant transmutation of interpretants into sign-representations, and the interpretant as mover (Thirdness, cognition) accelerates, like the force of gravity at 32 ft./sec./sec. or the expanding universe which brings about the 'red shift' phenomenon, toward an ideal limit.

The point I must emphasize is that the entrance of dyadic consciousness, the ego and non-ego, onto the scene marks the initiation of *semiotic* movement. In addition to the external 'outside', there exists an internal 'outside', the *other* self, created by the passing of sign into interpretant, interpretant into sign, and the self of one moment into the self of another moment. The radical absence of the self from its *other* self, semiotically evidenced by 'shifters', creates not stable but restless signs incessantly sliding along the slope of signification. This apparently renders the timeless identity of the self impossible: the self cannot be itself, but only what it *was not* during the moment past, and what it *not yet is*, what it *will have been* in some future moment. So how is it possible to identify that part of the self, its *other*, which is, so to speak, outside itself, absent, alien?

Peirce observed that, regarding volition, there is a difference between intentionally willing, say, a muscle to contract, and the passive and unintentional volition that produces a shock of surprise as a result of an unsatisfied expectation, which results in a sense of externality, of the 'real' of Secondness, of the *other* (CP 1.334). This *other* is aggravatingly elusive, however. Regarding the sign triad, the interpretant is acknowledgment of the *other* by way of mediation between representamen and object. But since it is itself another representamen, whose interpretant is yet another one, *ad infinitum*, its self-identity incessantly conceals itself, and, as Derrida (1974: 49) says of the signified, it is always on the move. The *other* to which consciousness points *via* the interpretant is never fully present, though its presence is always felt, since the 'real' represented by signs as the 'semiotically real' remains as fugitive alterity and absence:

In the idea of reality, secondness is predominant; for the real is that which insists upon forcing its way to recognition as the mind's creation. (Remember that before the French word, second, was adopted into our language, other was merely the ordinal numeral corresponding to two). (CP 1.325)

The 'real' conceived as *other* is in this manner resistance, surprise, a subversion of exteriority against the self-conscious self.

But this sense of externality, of the presence of a non-ego, 'which accompanies perception generally and helps to distinguish it from dreaming' (CP 1.332), is not merely a sense of the world 'out there'. It is the product, rather, of the dialogic 'I-me', the 'me' resting tenuously between the 'I' and the 'it', which constitutes the actual 'real'. Freud's (1953–1974 [1925]) concept of negation — which was to become the focal point of Lacan's Freudism — bears on this 'I-it' interaction. The pronoun 'it' marks an irreversible loss of the self's self-presence, the self's 'me' (the oncoming self) as absent from its 'I' (the immediate self). Quite commensurate with the becoming of I-*other* awareness, for Freud a child initially uses 'it' to designate what will later correspond to her own displaced self. At this early stage there is no subject/object, no inner/outer, no 'me' *here* and 'it' *there*. Then, gradually, the 'it' transmutes and bifurcates into 'me', on the one hand, and that which has become 'outside' and 'alien' in contrast to the 'inside' and generally conceived 'presentness' of the 'I', on the other.

And Peirce's concept of signs embodied in the 'I-me' dialogue once again surfaces. When one is thinking, the 'I' uses signs by means of which to persuade the 'me' that something or other is the case. During this activity:

a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is 'saying to himself', that is, saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade, and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. (CP 5.421)

The immediate 'I' as First (icon), refers to the object (index) or that which is the object of persuasion, in addressing itself to the interpretant (symbol) which is in the process of 'coming into life in the flow of time'. And the interpretant in turn becomes itself a sign with its own object (CP 2.274). In other words, the 'I' or self is itself split. There is the interpreting 'I' (First) as subject and the 'I' (Second) as object of interpretation. The first 'I' distinguishes itself and the sign from the process of interpretation; the second 'I' becomes one with the *semiotic* process. The first project, an impossible dream, is destined to remain incomplete, since there is no immediacy, only mediacy, of the self's perception and conception of the *other*, hence the 'I' is not genuinely autonomous. The second project, a tail-chasing dog game, is equally pathetic, for the 'I' cannot know itself as *it is* but mediately, as *it was*.

The upshot is that there is no pure 'I' or self. No person is an island, an entity unto itself, absolutely autonomous. We are all socialized; we set ourselves apart from *otherness*, but actually, we cannot completely

do so, since we are part of the *otherness* of our own *others*. We address ourself to the *otherness*, but at the same time part of that *otherness* is that which is emerging and that into which the 'I' is merging. Thus the 'I' is incessantly on the move, flowing into that *otherness* of which it is a part of and apart from. At the same time, our 'circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism' (CP 5.421).

Our impoverished individualism is masqueraded about, bloated by our vanities, kept afloat by our obsession for control, and in our 'postmodern' milieu, frocked with high-tech glitter and glitz. Yet, we continue in ignorant bliss, generally oblivious to our radical dependence on our *otherness*. The whole of this *otherness* and the impoverishment of our vain individualism bears on another Borges 'postmodern' theme. ...

Rhizomicity, or the self as everybody and nobody

Perhaps the most forceful pitch for Borges as a prime mover of 'post-modernism' is found in the 'rhizomic' character of his work, chiefly by way of his allusion to labyrinths.

De Toro (*JLB*: 145–155), most prominent in this regard, remarks on Borges's highlighting: (1) the 'signifier-signified' interaction between 'reality' and fiction, (2) the 'dissolution of the subject', which flattens authors, narrators, and readers to the same level, (3) the use of literary collage, montage, palimpsest, and above all, 'literary' rather than 'reality' mimesis, in the deconstruction of text of all stripes, genres, and disciplines, and (4) discursive plurality (i.e., satire, irony, humor, parody, allegory, meta-narrative, historicity, interculturality). This concoction of strategies serves to 'rhizomatize' and 'destabilize' Borges's fictive 'worlds' and their relation to the 'real world', thus creating a labyrinth of semantic relations in the face of which the reader, when properly converted into a Deleuzian 'nomad', can hardly do other than oscillate between the *either* and the *or*, ... *or*, ... *or*, ... *n* in a polylinear chain of multiple undecidability.

Julia Kristeva (1968, 1969) and Gérard Genette (1982) are evoked by de Toro in developing his quite intriguing theory of Borgesian narrative strategies which include a bird's eye view toward: (1) intratextuality, (2) intertextuality, (3) hypotextuality (the 'avant-texte' or 'pretext' — relations of the text to interconnections that might come to bear on its production), and (4) hypertextuality (the 'post-text' — all possible inter-textual relations that might come to bear on the hypotext) (*JLB*: 159–161). The intricacies of these relations, implicit within Borges's texts,

call for 'palimpsestual' readings in order not merely that the *aporia* lurking behind texts may be revealed, but also, that the *aporia* Borges himself draws from the texts to which his own text refers may become sufficiently evident. Thus the Borges text places other texts in a *negative* light, drawing out some *inconsistencies* they have hitherto made efforts to conceal, and, given the ensuing *undecidability*, and *infinite regress* becomes the inevitable yield.

In a roundabout way, this reflects on Peirce's own concept of the sign and the sign processor — all caught up in the 'rhizomically' interconnected multidimensional fabric of *semiosis*. In capsule form, for Peirce the self as itself a sign is nothing more than a bundle of errors, of *negation*, which nature submerges in the deep waters of *vagueness*, within which, as sign, it ultimately can do no more than merge with its *other* self 'always already' in the process of entering the scene in the *semiotic* drama (see Merrell 1995).

But that is a big issue, too much to bite off here. Allow me briefly to evoke a distinctively Peircean metaphor-model that remarkably illustrates interconnectedness. We can imagine the total realm of possible 'assertions', Peirce tells us, as a 'book of separate sheets, tacked together at points, if not otherwise connected' (CP 4.512). The first sheet of this book is the standard 'sheet of assertion', a 'universe of existent individuals'. Different sections of it represent sentences asserted concerning that particular subuniverse. A 'cut' in this sheet enables one to pass into a successive sheet, into areas of conceived sentences which are not yet actualized. Further 'cuts' in this and other sheets then allow one to pass into an indefinite number of possible and imaginary worlds.

Peirce's 'book of assertions' is a metaphor for what Eco (1976: 69–71) calls *unlimited semiosis*. I would suggest an even more labyrinthine image. Consider each sign possibility to be a point (potentially the Cartesian factor) with an infinite set of lines connecting it to all other points in the universe (the non-Cartesian factor). Each sign-point is like a chimerical octopus whose body is the point and whose tentacles are the infinite number of lines emanating from that point and ready to suck in one or more of all the other sign-points, which will then become its interpretant and hence another sign-point. (Actually, more in accord with Laplace and God, each tentacle would have an eye at its extremity enabling it to 'see' all other sign-points simultaneously.)⁹

This entire conglomeration of lines, to be true to form, will have certain characteristics: (1) the whole can be 'cut' at any point and reconnected along any one of its lines, like Peirce's amorphous 'book of assertions', (2) at a given instant the conglomerate is static, but it holds the possibility for all future connections — this instant is not the Saussurean synchronic

slice out of the semiological salami, it is the entire conglomerate given *in bloc*, holding all past, present, and future possibilities — and (3) the conglomerate is self-contained, twisting and doubling back on itself, like an infinity of infinitely thin Möbius strips intersecting each other at the point of their twist. However, (4) with respect to finite sign users, and unlike point-octopuses, all observations and relations must remain inside; there is no global vision, for immanence rules. And (5) there can be no complete description of the whole, since, commensurate with Peirce's plastic 'book of assertions', logical connections do not remain the same over time, and since, with our own finite number of appendages and sensory organs, we can never process all signs in an instant.

Now this IS intertextuality with a vengeance! And yet it is, I would submit, an adequate image insofar as: (1) it avoids the problematics of a Saussurean synchronic slice freezing the signifying process, and (2) *indefinite semiosis*, which it implies, is compatible with indeterminacy, incompleteness, undecidability, plurivocity, and intertextuality, all of which surface in *JLB*, especially from the contributions by Pérez, Silvestri, Blüher, de Toro, and Rosa.

I wrote in the beginning that *JLB* does not quite meet the promises of its billing. Many of the authors dub Borges a 'deconstructionist' and a writer of the 'postmodern' mode, yet they generally ignore the heated debates revolving about the issue, especially by Habermas-Lyotard, Habermas-Rorty, Foucault-Derrida, and Gadamer-Derrida, as well as the work of Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Serres, Andreas Huyssen, Linda Hutcheon, and others. And yet ... to rephrase Borges himself, *JLB* is the substance Borges (the *other*, the writer) is made of. It is a river which sweeps him along, but he *is* that river; it is a fire which consumes him, but he *is* the fire. Borges, fortunately, *is* real; and *JLB*, fortunately, is Borges. All is prose, the prose of the world, wherever we happen to find it, and which, by whatever name, remains as it is, in spite of what we might think it to be.

It appears that Borges, in the final analysis, is more relevant to the semiotic enterprise than *JLB* reveals, and *JLB* has more to do with methodological and epistemological freedom than its authors would most likely care to admit.

Notes

1. Strangely, the English translation of 'The other' gives 1964 instead of 1974, which softens the time-space paradox considerably. I cannot help but sense that somehow a typographical error is involved, especially in view of the fact that the translation by

- di Giovanni was carried out in collaboration with Borges, and I cannot imagine Borges enacting any measure that would serve to reduce the shock factor inherent in his story.
2. In this light as well, a summary reading of 'An examination of the work of Herbert Quain' (Borges 1962b: 73–78) will prove insightful.
 3. For a technical description of this 'timeless time' of contemporary physics, see Eddington (1946), and for a discussion of the same, see Fraser (1982).
 4. For a critical discussion of 'objective idealism', see Almeder (1980).
 5. For example, the 'magician' of Borges's 'The circular ruins' (1962a: 61–70) discovers, in the final analysis, that his presumed intentional dreaming of a son with the idea of interpolating him into 'reality' was actually not a controlled act at all, but that he was nothing more than the product of a controlled (or perhaps equally uncontrolled) dream by someone else.
 6. Derrida's 'white mythology' (1974) might also be roughly applicable to science as, in the beginning, a collectively 'controlled hallucination', which, over time has become 'embedded' within the somnambulist activities of the general scientific community such that any erstwhile modicum of control has long since been lost.
 7. In this respect see also Rosa (*JLB*: 191–192) on memory and forgetfulness.
 8. In fact, the entire question has been the object of disrepute, especially during the past decade and a half, following Rorty's (1979) deconstruction of the mind-as-mirror-of-nature idea.
 9. See Merrell (1986), where I originally developed this theme. Eco (1984: 81–82), incidentally, uses a comparable but less cumbersome image, the 'rhizome', taken from Deleuze and Guattari's (1976) book by the same title.

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