Querides Evelyn, Cristina,
lo prometido.
Un fuerte abrazo,
Alberto

Alberto MOREIRAS:
The leap and the lapse: Hacking a
private site in Cyberspace.

Rethinking Technologies

Edited by
Verena Andermatt Conley
on behalf of the
Miami Theory Collective

MINNESOTA

University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis
London

1993

nostalgia to a cinematic "thickening" of the present to an electronic flattening of temporality into an instant. Much of what she has to say about electronic culture is relevant to the present argument.

27. Tom DeHaven, *Freaks Amour* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

28. Nichols, "The Work of Culture," 43.

29. Lanier discusses this aspect of virtual reality in Kevin Kelly, "Virtual Reality: An Interview with Jaron Lanier," *Whole Earth Review* 64 (Fall 1989).

30. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

31. See Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semio-text[e], 1983), 60.

32. Anthony Wilden makes this same point when he suggests that the real conflicts are not between one country and another but between the military-industrial complexes of all countries and ordinary people; see *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

33. For a further explanation of genetic engineering techniques and the colonization metaphor, see N. Katherine Hayles, "Postmodern Parataxis: Embodied Texts, Weightless Information," *American Literary History* 2, no. 3 (1990): 394-421.

34. Greg Bear, *Blood Music* (New York: Ace, 1986).

35. Techniques of scientific visualization go beyond cyberspace, although virtual reality is part of the computer revolution in visualization. For a complete account, see Richard M. Friedhoff and William Benzon, *Visualization: The Second Computer Revolution* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989).

36. Scott Bukatman, "Who Programs You? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle," in *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1990), 201.

37. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977).

38. Jaron Lanier has gone so far as to suggest that the kinesthetic manipulation of cyberspace will supplant language, making it an unnecessary and superfluous adjunct to virtual reality. This position ignores the underlying assembly language that governs the syntax of the computer program. It also fails to take into account that our sensibilities are formed through language, so that in this sense language pervades even nonlinguistic domains.

39. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); and *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

40. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* (New York: Grove, 1988).

41. Nichols, "The Work of Culture," 46.

The Leap and the Lapse: Hacking a Private Site in Cyberspace

Alberto Moreiras

Thinking Cyberexcess

Octavio Paz remarked in 1967 that cybernetics came close to poetry in its use of universal analogy.[1] Virtual reality, grounded in the production of analogues aiming at the total illusion of reality, is an apotheosis of what the old metaphysicians called *analogia entis*. But a total illusion, insofar as it approaches completion in the realization of its essence, equivocates the real while at the same time breaking the ground of analogy.

Analogy must be founded. *Esse* founds the possibility of the universal analogy of the *entes*. Virtual reality, as the possibility of total replication, including the replication of the ground of analogy, forces the question: Is analogy analogical? Virtual reality, which I shall define as analogy of analogy, opens the abyss of ontotheology by radically soliciting the essence of ground. In that sense, virtual reality, as the future of technology, holds within itself the possibility of ungrounding technology. Virtual reality threatens the stability of the highest principle of technological being, the principle of sufficient reason, according to which there is nothing without a reason, there is nothing without a ground.[2]

A question that seemed settled at the height of the Cold War, namely, that our times were historically marked as the nuclear age, has now become undecided. Whether or not we think that the possibility of a nuclear confrontation has temporarily receded, the indecisiveness concerning the mark of the times has increased with the fall of the Berlin Wall; so has the claim of cybernetics and its password, *information*. In their realm of possibility, both cybernetics and atomic

technology depend upon representational-calculative thinking, that is, the thinking that gives itself over to "the demand to render sufficient reasons for all representations."[3] In virtual reality, the principle of sufficient reason holds at its most extreme. Virtual reality is also the site of the most extreme withdrawal of what the principle of sufficient reason cannot comprehend.

If poetic experience, as Paz and also Jorge Luis Borges claimed at a certain moment, is an experience of analogical transcendence, then poetic thinking may no longer be sufficient to distinguish human thought from computer information-processing capabilities.[4] In a crucial sense, in and through the development of virtual reality, the poetic principle of tropological production is being absorbed today by cybertech. Does cybertech merely put tropology at the service of onto-theological (technical) reproduction? In other words, is cybertech contained within the reproductive mode proper to metaphysics, understood as ontotheology? Or does it hold another possibility?

If virtual reality is to be defined as an analogical transposition of the real, a trans(in)formation of the real working through analogy, then virtual reality is a metaphoric mode. But metaphor, depending as it does upon the division between the sensible and the nonsensible, "exists only within metaphysics."[5] However, there may be ways of dwelling within virtual reality that are nonmetaphoric, insofar as they come close to the end of metaphor.

If, like poetry, cybernetics can incorporate the real in its most extreme moments, as shining, objectified presence on the one hand, and as total withdrawal on the other, then cybernetics can also be interrogated analogically. By an *analogical interrogation* I mean a mode of questioning concerned with finding the point of articulation of presence and withdrawal in the technical system of representation. Can cybertech reflect on cybertech? I will attempt to think cyberspace as poetic space, and poetic space from the perspective of cyberspace. It remains to be seen whether or not analogy is the last principle of poetry and/or of the cybernetic real—that is, of virtual reality.

That cybernetics is complicitous with ontotheology remains undecided. On the sinister side, we read the dystopic projections of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, who, in their novel *The Difference Engine*, imagine a so-called Modus Program, whose virtue would be to do away with the limitations embedded in the Leibnizian dream of finding a *characteristica universalis* in logical closure. The Modus Program, incorporating transfinite principles, will "form the bedrock of a genuinely transcendent meta-system of calculatory mathematics."[6] As a result, it will give the cyberengine a self-referential capacity. As the machine grows sufficiently large, what had up to then been a vicarious eye will develop an I: "The Eye at last must see itself."[7] An ultimate panopticon will be set in place. Onto-theology will have come to its radical completion through a most extreme form of simulation: the reality engine, the matrix of all human engineering, will take its long-announced position as First Subject. An apotheosis, completion will come

as the exact reverse of the nuclear Armageddon: it will not be, at least not preeminently, a destruction, but a totally in-formed construction.

Other accounts, such as Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," substitute a euphoric, highly celebratory mood for the dejected and destitute one:

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war. From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.[8]

For Haraway, high-tech culture offers the possibility of challenging phallogo-centrism, but only if high-tech culture is accompanied by a refusal of victimization stories, all of which, whether explicitly or not, advocate "an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology":[9]

> Every story that begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness imagines the drama of life to be individuation, separation, the birth of the self, the tragedy of autonomy, the fall into writing, alienation; that is, war, tempered by imaginary respite in the bosom of the Other. These plots are ruled by a reproductive politics—rebirth without flaw, perfection, abstraction. In this plot women are imagined either better or worse off, but all agree they have less selfhood, weaker individuation, more fusion to the oral, to Mother, less at stake in masculine autonomy. But there is another route to having less at stake in masculine autonomy, a route that does not pass through Woman, Primitive, Zero, the Mirror Stage and its imaginary. It passes through women, and other present-tense, illegitimate cyborgs, not of Woman born, who refuse the ideological resources of victimization so as to have a real life.[10]

Haraway refuses resentment, and her position is active rather than reactive. Her politics of real life "insist[s] on noise and advocate[s] pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine."[11] Haraway places her emphasis on "disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling," a coupling that would be far from traditional coition, pointing as it does against a metaphysics of the reproductive copula.[12] However, Haraway's manifesto for a radically nonessentialist, postgender world in cyberspace seems oblivious of its consequences. Antiessentialism has a short memory. In a sense, Haraway's celebration of the cyborg's subversion of identity within contemporary technology disregards the "within-ness," the essential mark that the frame inscribes upon any enframed antiessence. Supposing that this disregard is not a consequence of nonknowledge, but

rather an active blindness, an active oblivion, will it achieve what it is meant to achieve?

Cybertech, as the future of technology, is within the purview of the calculative-representational enframing of the world, and, as such, it is essentially to be understood within the scope of the principle of sufficient reason. In its short form the principle says: *nihil est sine ratione*, nothing is without reason. The apotheosis of analogical reason in virtual reality is such that, in virtual reality, everything is in virtue of *ratio* understood as proportionality. Analogical reason is the ground of virtual reality. From the perspective of virtual reality, nothing is without an analogue. Virtual reality renders the real as the mere possibility of replication, only awaiting the moment in which replication can double itself in self-replication. There is danger in this, as Gibson and Sterling see it, because the disappearance of the real can mean that the real has been sequestered. But there is also seduction, as Haraway sees it, because, in a world with no original, there is but the rhetorical effectiveness of translation. Is it possible to think beyond danger and seduction, or, even better, affirm both the seduction of danger and the danger of seduction?

Virtual reality challenges the human capacity to realize understanding of being. In virtual reality, artificial intelligence, familiar in its technical conspicuousness, reverts into the most unfamiliar obdurateness as it purports to replicate the human world, returning to us in the process worldliness as the most obstinate form of familiarity. Within virtual reality, there is no always-already, except in the merely privative mode; that is, virtual reality, even in the extreme form of total success at representation, cannot but perpetually enact the world as lost object. Within virtual reality, the worldliness of the world unconceals itself, even if in the form of absence. To ask whether nonrepresentational thinking can help us deal with the phenomenon of virtual reality is also to ask whether or not virtual reality can offer an opening onto critical-historical thinking. It is not only to ask whether virtual reality can be experienced as a possibility for a thinking of the Outside, but also whether it affords the possibility of a break. It would have to be a break away from the calculative-representational frame that originated it. It would also be a break into a region of thinking where the calculative-representational frame would not be merely ignored or forgotten, but brought to account for itself.

Can we define a task of thinking that would refuse to believe itself above and beyond technique? This question, which has plagued contemporary philosophy, is also to be found within poetic thought.[13] It recurs in several stories written by Borges in the 1940s, and particularly in "El Aleph," which presents one of the earliest literary treatments of the kind of technological space that we now call cyberspace.

The space defined by the object called Aleph is not properly speaking cyberspace, understood as the locus where the human interfaces with artificial intelligence machines. Nevertheless, in Borges's text the Aleph is announced analogically as the site of encounter where "modern man" meets robotic control of reality.[14] If cybernetics comes from the Greek word *kybernetes*, meaning pilot or governor of a ship, and if it designates the steering function of the brain-within-machines, then the antagonist in Borges's story talks about the cybernetic man when he observes that, for the moderns, "the act of travel [is] useless." The old pilot of the ship can now reach the world from his own study, using "telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, radiotelephone apparatus, cinematographic equipment, magic lanterns."[15] Action at a distance, telepraxis, would create the space of the cybernetic human, cyberspace. As a transposition of this cyberspace, analogically, the text gives us the uncanny apparatus properly called Aleph.

An Aleph is "one of the points in space containing all points."[16] It can be directly experienced, but it cannot be translated; it can be indicated, but it cannot be expressed. It is a radical place of disjunction, where language breaks down. Borges calls it "the ineffable center of my story," where there occurs his "despair as a writer."[17] As it can be named only analogically, it thereby grounds the insufficiency of analogy. It is the site of the real, where the real announces itself in withdrawal. It is a *punctum*, in the Latin sense that Roland Barthes emphasizes: a place where the trace of presence is poignantly felt in default, a site of mourning, a private site.[18]

As the narrator is lying down, alone, in the basement of his late beloved's house, uncannily undergoing an experience of encryptment within the analogue of Beatriz's dead body (the house is about to be demolished), he sees the Aleph. I will quote only the end of his description:

> I saw tigers, emboli, bison, ground swells, and armies; I saw all the ants on earth; I saw a Persian astrolabe; in a desk drawer I saw (the writing made me tremble) obscene, incredible, precise letters, which Beatriz had written Carlos Argentino; I saw an adored monument in La Chacarita cemetery; I saw the atrocious relic of what deliciously had been Beatriz Viterbo; I saw the circulation of my obscure blood; I saw the gearing of love and the modifications of death; I saw the Aleph from all points; I saw the earth in the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth once more and the earth in the Aleph; I saw my face and my viscera; I saw your face and felt vertigo and cried because my eyes had seen that conjectural and secret object whose name men usurp but which no man has gazed on: the inconceivable universe. I felt infinite veneration, infinite compassion.[19]

"Desde todos los puntos vi en el Aleph la tierra y en la tierra otra vez el Aleph y en el Aleph la tierra": in this frenzied, chiastic doubling of analogy, this analogy of analogy, or abysmal experience wherein the point that contains every point must perforce contain itself and therefore also reveal itself as the uncon-

tainable, the ground of analogy breaks in excess. The excess exceeds analogy. Borges mentions "inconceivable analogies" in trying to equate the Aleph with the mystical experience of divinity, which Alanus de Insulis had described by calling it "a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."[20] The inconceivability of analogy is here the mark of an excess with respect to analogy. This excess connotes an experience of the real-in-withdrawal that can perhaps be located in what I will call "a private site."

As *privare* is in Latin to deprive, to take away, to set apart, it also consequently means to release from common use and therefore to secure into its own. A private site is a site in need, where what lacks is at the same time protected. As set apart, it stands on its own. On its own, it lacks that from which it has been secured. It is a site of releasement where excess can be rendered as recess. In recess, in withdrawal, the private stands secluded, out of reach. Concealed, always concealing, it is experienced as a site of loss.

The mystical experience turns toward divinity, but the poetic holds fast to the necessity of expression, in which recess, as withdrawal, as the end of analogy, as the abyss of tropology, remains a vanishing point and not a point of advent. Because the point vanishes, Borges is led to conclude: "The Aleph in the Calle Garay was a false Aleph."[21]

At the end of analogy, when language opens toward the real as withdrawal, poetic thinking thinks the nothing as withdrawing excess. If the nothing as withdrawing excess is revealed in writing, it is revealed as a break in tropology. But tropology names literary technique. Now, we have to ask, will it work in cybertech? What experience of thinking does cybertech make possible, even necessary?

The Want of the Letter

Hacking, the word commonly used to describe the acts of those who manage to clear their way into locked computer systems, originally carried the meaning of severing with repeated blows, clearing by cutting away vegetation. A computer hacker makes a clearing for her- or himself. The addictive quality of hacking could be emblematized in the words of Dirk-Otto Brzezinski, one of the hackers implicated in the Project Equalizer espionage case, who told his judge: "I was never interested in the contents. Just in the computers themselves."[22] His remark does not replicate the common rhetorical distinction between form and content within a literary text; rather, it points to a different realm of experience. The distinction between "contents," the actual information stored within a given computer system, and "computers themselves," referring to something more than a mere machine, raises the question of excess anew.

The hacker wants to break in. Breaking in is the addictive principle of hacking, so that the clearing made possible by hacking can manifest itself. The "com-

puters themselves" are the engines that make breaking in possible. More radically, the computers themselves are the clearing. The computer-as-clearing opens onto cyberspace as transgressive space, the space beyond the break. Howard Rheingold, in *Virtual Reality*, comments, "It is a place, all right. What kind of place it is, is a big question"; he goes on to quote Gibson's definition of cyberspace from the 1984 novel *Neuromancer*:

> Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.[23]

Cyberspace is a receding space, a withdrawing space, a space as recess. To break into the perpetual recession: such is the addiction that dreams cyberspace as a private clearing for its human interfacers. It produces anxiety, as it is a melancholic exercise in endless loss.[24]

At the end of his book, Rheingold devotes a few pages to speculation on popular cyberdreams such as "teledildonics" (sex at a distance) and "electronic LSD." Rheingold makes it clear that, although both technologies remain undeveloped, they are not beyond the pale of technical prediction. One example:

> If you can map your hands to your puppet's legs, and let your fingers do the walking through cyberspace, as it is possible to do in a crude way with today's technology, there is no reason to believe you won't be able to map your genital effectors to your manual sensors, and have direct genital contact by shaking hands. What will happen to social touching when nobody knows where anybody else's erogenous zones are located?[25]

I can't wait. But the sheer possibility of perpetual overdose has on its flip side the poisonous presence of deprivation. Rheingold says that "privacy and identity and intimacy will become tightly coupled into something we don't have a name for yet."[26] Or rather: the name is, will be, unavowable.

Cyberexcess—as writing once did—will kill the need for memory. Excess as primary manifestation links cyberspace and the space of writing. In "El Zahir," another story from the 1949 collection, Borges retells the myth of Fafnir and the treasure of the Nibelungs.[27] If Fafnir's mission is to keep watch and therefore to guard the existence of the treasure, that treasure can be accessed only by killing Fafnir. And what kills Fafnir, the sword Gram, bears the name of writing, or of the letter. Gram opens the treasure, gives the treasure, but at the same time Gram kills what secured the treasure. The letter releases what it was supposed to secure, the gift of memory. The letter, as excess, is also a form of want.

Clearing into cyberspace radically engages cyberware as a writing machine. Cyberspace is not a letter, but our relationship to it has the structure of our relationship to the letter in the following sense: primarily understood as an entrance into analogical production, clearing into cyberspace is also at the same time an excessive activity that takes analogy to a breaking point. In the break, cyberspace is felt as a wanting space, a space of default. Cyberspace is a site of disjunction, where analogical production comes to find the limits of analogy. The experience of the limit that cyberspace affords is an anxious, addictive experience in which the real appears as withdrawal and loss. Cyberexperience is in that sense akin to the experience that Borges tells of in "El Aleph."

The want of the letter is ultimately the theme of "El Aleph." An Aleph is "the first letter of the alphabet of the sacred language," and as such a symbol of "pure and unlimited divinity."[28] That it lacks even as it gives itself, that it gives itself in lack, that is what the principle of reason cannot account for. Through reading "El Aleph"'s relationship to woman, in the following section of this essay I will try to show that, at a certain point, the poetic need for ontotheological reproduction breaks down. Such a break is a function of writing itself as "technique." A certain analogy between writing and cybertech obtains even as both announce the end of analogy. This end of analogy, far from being a point of ultimate disjunction between philosophic, poetic, and technical thinking, is a gathering point, where the task of thinking can retrieve the possibility of going beyond the private.

The Lapsarian Experience

In "Two Words for Joyce," Jacques Derrida talks about "two manners, or rather two greatnesses, in this madness of writing." One of them, for which apparently no instance is given, is the writing of the gift: "There is first of all the greatness of s/he who writes in order to give, in giving, and therefore in order to give to forget the gift and the given, what is given and the act of giving, which is the only way of giving, the only possible—and impossible—way."[29] The second greatness is that of a "hypermnesiac machine" such as the Joycean text (or the textuality given in Borges's Aleph, or, even more pointedly, the cybertext): "You can say nothing that is not programmed on this 1000th generation computer— Ulysses, Finnegans Wake—beside which the current technology of our computers and our micro-computerified archives and our translating machines remain a bricolage of a prehistoric child's toys."[30] If the first kind of writing places itself by definition in a paradoxical gratitude involving not only the writer and the reader but also the matter at hand, whatever that is, the second kind of writing involves not gratitude, but its opposite, "resentment and jealousy." "Can one pardon this hypermnesia which a priori indebts you, and in advance inscribes you in the book you are reading? One can pardon this Babelian act of war only if it

happens already, from all time, with each event of writing, and if one knows it."[31] Is cyberspace implied, from all time, in each event of writing?

If the hypermnesiac machine, the 1000th generation computer, acts with each event of writing, we may wonder whether the writing of the gift also operates every time. And what about their mutual coimplication, and the relation, in writing, between gratitude and resentment? Doesn't the impossible combination of those affects organize the melancholic state? In virtual reality, is there one "greatness" without the other? Is there a gift in cyberspace? Or is there only a negation of the gift? Are we but resentment freaks, who love the debt, and are grateful for what pains us? These questions also need to be asked of "El Aleph," and of the kinds of writing it contains.

Its narrator takes a leap into the excessive region of total, hypermnesiac presence. Accounting for that experience organizes "El Aleph"'s writing field. As the narrator cannot replicate the "ineffable center" of his experience, he must give himself over to a sort of lapsarian writing: a writing that can only refer to a fall into that which exceeds its possibilities of expression, a writing understood as the site of the fall into the withdrawing recess of expressibility.[32]

In "El Aleph," writing indicates what has slipped away, that is, what has withdrawn and, in withdrawing, has made itself obtrusive, and has in such a way come into paradoxical presence. Writing, thus understood, does not essentially differ from the cybernetic experience of virtual reality. Cybertech, in its extreme form, opens the possibility of an experience of the ground of technology as withdrawing ground—that is, not the ontotheological ground that secures every object into the shelter of a foundation, but the receding ground that releases the real as vanishing materiality, beyond analogy, beyond memory.

Borges's writing is essentially metadiegetic, a telling of telling. For Borges, "we can mention or allude, but we cannot express."[33] For Borges, writing is never more, or less, than an indication. In "El Aleph" Borges compares critical writing to the activity of those persons "who dispose of no precious metals, nor steam presses, nor rolling presses, nor sulphuric acids for minting treasures, but who can indicate to others the site of a treasure."[34] "El Aleph" is precisely that kind of gesture: an indication of an ineffable center that cannot be named as such, but only analogically. Borges's description of the Aleph fails to give the Aleph: the Aleph cannot happen in writing, for writing is the place of its lapse. Writing organizes the want of the letter, and can give only what it does not have, like virtual reality, as in virtual reality the world can be experienced only as the lost object of analogy.[35]

Within the system of "El Aleph," writing occurs on a dead woman's body. As Beatriz's house houses the Aleph, Beatriz's house is the site of the gift. However, as the Aleph can only be forgotten—all Alephs are false Alephs—Beatriz's house is also the site of resentment and jealousy. Writing copes with both gratitude and resentment on indicating the lost object: an object that can be mentioned or al-

luded to, but that cannot be expressed, for it remains in excess. Borges's writing is an attempt to seduce the excess into self-revealing, an anxious attempt to turn the lapse into a leap, to make withdrawal come, as such, into presence. At the same time, however, Borges marks another possibility of writing, whose parallel possibility we can also find in cyberspace.

At the very beginning of "El Aleph," the narrator tells us that his visits to Calle Garay on the day of Beatriz's birthday were a ceremony of mourning. By returning to Beatriz's house, the narrator gives himself over to mournful memory: "Now that she was dead, I could consecrate myself to her memory, without hope but also without humiliation."[36] Beatriz's death is therefore initially understood as affording a certain chance, involving a double renunciation—on the one hand, the renunciation of Beatriz as gift; on the other, the renunciation of the torturing possibilities of jealousy and resentment. That chance is the chance of memory, understood as consecration, that is, self-offering. The narrator wills such an offering to be free of poignancy, of pain. By keeping Beatriz in his memory the narrator will live in the memory of Beatriz: a self-willed self-giving, nothing else, studied, and contained.

Every time Borges's narrator arrives at the house in Calle Garay he is made to wait. There, "in the twilight of the overladen entrance hall," he

> would study, one more time, the particulars of [Beatriz's] numerous portraits: Beatriz Viterbo in profile, in color; Beatriz wearing a mask, during the carnival of 1921; Beatriz at her First Communion; Beatriz on the day of her wedding to Roberto Alessandri; Beatriz a little while after the divorce, at a dinner in the Club Hípico; Beatriz with Delia San Marco Porcel and Carlos Argentino; Beatriz with the Pekingese . . . ; Beatriz . . . smiling, her hand under her chin.[37]

At the threshold, before being summoned to the depths of the house in whose cellar he will find a very different rapport to the images of Beatriz, the narrator chooses, explicitly, a way of relating to those photographs consonant with his desire to live in memory of Beatriz "without hope but also without humiliation." The narrator's conscious investment in Beatriz's death is made according to an economy of limited expenditure: or rather, an economy of nonexpenditure, an aberrant economy of repression in which, however, mourning follows its normal process of completion. In this studious relationship to Beatriz we find one of the possibilities of experience that virtual reality may have to offer: a guarded experience in which everything is made to function by analogy, through calculative, mimetic memory. By apparently resisting jealousy and resentment, this mimetic memory essentially yields to jealousy and resentment, since it refuses to hold itself open to the anxious possibility of the gift.

I cannot go here into the aspects of the Borgesian text in which that studious relationship to the monument is linked to the practice of a certain kind of repro-
ductive literature. The writings of Carlos Argentino Daneri (who acts, in spite of his name, as the narrator's Virgil) exemplify a mimetic literature of exhaustion, regulated by the will to express the expressible, to saturate the field of the real. Against them, Borges's metadiegesis opts for the breaking of mimesis: the (non) expression of the inexpressible, the fissure in consciousness. But both possibilities, the mimetic possibility of replication and the lapsarian possibility of release, are also the two sides of the cybernetic interface.

Daneri, the narrator's Virgil, takes him to the cellar of the house in Calle Garay, and makes him lie in a "dorsal decubitus" position: "Now, down with you. Very shortly you will be able to engage in a dialogue with all of the images of Beatriz."[38] The Aleph, as the point containing all points, will be given as the site for the essential breaking of the studious reproduction of the real. In the Aleph, the real returns as what is essentially out of reach, beyond appropriation. Beatriz, who shows up in the narrator's account as the receiver of obscene letters, and as the atrocious corpse within La Chacarita's funeral monument, returns blindingly as the occasion, the chance, for infinite jealousy and resentment, even as her house, her memory, is also the region of the endless lucid gift. With it, with them, the narrator lives in memory of Beatriz, in her memory as total memory, no longer guarded, no longer self-willed. He could repeat what Barthes said: "I could live without [her] (we all do it, sooner or later); but the life who for me remained would be, certainly and until the end, *unqualifiable* (without quality)."[39] When our narrator comes out of his experience he feels, curiously and almost impossibly, not only awe and pity, but also, for a moment, "indifference."[40]

After the protagonist in Borges's story has experienced the Aleph, after he has had his tragic immersion in infinite awe and pity, he comes out of it in deep shock, and refuses to share his experience: "I refused, with suave energy, to discuss the Aleph." He has, at that point, decided to take the gift, and he has used it to placate the envy he feels for his rival Carlos Argentino. The gift becomes obsessive: "I was afraid that I would never be quit of the impression that I had 'returned' [*Temí que no me abandonara jamás la impresión de volver*]."[41] But oblivion sets in. The narrator can then come to the conclusion that the Aleph was false. Since it was false, it goes back into concealment, into "the innermost recess of a stone."[42] The narrator can once again experience the world outside analogy. Oblivion, and not the Aleph, is ecstasy. Oblivion is the gift, as it is the (broken) end of mourning. "There is first of all the greatness of s/he who writes in order to give, in giving, and therefore in order to give to forget the gift and the given."[43] Oblivion has to be gained, and it is therefore an active oblivion, in the sense of an active opening toward the work of the gift.

We can argue whether this kind of writing is still subject to phallic bliss, or whether, by announcing the end of analogy, it has explicitly put an end to the ontotheological need for self-reproduction. Lapsarian writing does not want more

of the same: rather, what it wants cannot be had. The leap, which is not the leap of the narrator as character, but that of the narrator as narrator, as metadiegetic writer, is taken not toward the treasure, but toward the site where the treasure vanishes, which is the private site. The site where the treasure vanishes is, however, the site of closest proximity to the treasure: the region of its recess, a region both dangerous and seductive, the region where the private opens itself to the unavowable.

The leap into the unavowable is also the most radical possibility of the cybernetic human. Within cyberspace, two experiences are given: the mimetic experience, which is the experience of cyberspace as a space of analogical production; and the lapsarian experience, which comes to the end of analogy. As in "The Aleph," those two experiences can also be explained by reference to woman.

The expression "cyborg envy" has been used to talk about the inversion of the classical "penis envy" taking place in the longing for cyberspace. Stone notes that the cybernetic mode "shares certain conceptual and affective characteristics with numerous fictional evocations of the inarticulate longing of the male for the female."[44] In "cyborg envy" we long to become woman. In the cybernetic act, "penetration translates into envelopment. In other words, to enter cyberspace is physically to *put on* cyberspace. To become the cyborg, to put on the seductive and dangerous cybernetic space like a garment, is to put on the *female*."[45]

To understand entering cyberspace as the act of putting on something or other, someone or other, is to understand cyberexperience as essentially mimetic in nature. But we have seen that entering the Aleph is not to become Beatriz. Entering the Aleph, and entering cyberspace, can be felt as experience of a break, and therefore experience of distance and of loss, having nothing to do with envelopment, since they occur in the real, like danger, and seduction. "Putting on" the female, as a mimetic experience in cyberspace, is on the side of the studious, guarded relationship to mourning that Borges's narrator experiences at the threshold of Beatriz's house.

In the Aleph experience woman figures as the ground of the gift, but also as the ground of the infinite withdrawal of the gift, which is the ground of memory and oblivion. In computer hacking the contents are much less interesting than the puncturing of the computers themselves, as ground of memory and as total resistance to memory. It may then be that entering cyberspace can offer the possibility of being poignantly enveloped by the self-revealing withdrawal of the real: an experience of the loss of otherness that does not result in a reappropriation of sameness, but in a disjunction that manages a particular form of juncture, letting juncture come into its own.

The lapsarian experience is the most radical experience of cyberspace. Antimimetic, because it comes to the end of mimesis, it may use the mimetic engine up to a certain point. If "putting on the female" means, for Stone, not just to

replicate or subvert penis envy, but to engage in a strategy of replication the sense of which is to release lapsarian writing into its own, then it might also mean to go beyond the principle of reason, into an experience of the real that, having already given up the need for appropriation of the gift, is no longer naive enough to assume that the 1000th generation machine can really read us all. For even if it wants it, it cannot have it. This refusal is also an act of love, reasonable too, though melancholic.

The extent to which oblivion needs to have a reason is the extent to which the Aleph, and with it cyberspace, is always already implied in every act of writing and of reading. The lapse, without which there is no leap, is not a mere abyss, not just an inversion of the principle of reason. The reason, the ground, of oblivion, is also the ground of lapsarian writing. Oblivion forsakes analogy, and brings the end of representation within the possibility of an excessive/recessive call of thinking.

Virtual reality, as a mere replication of possibilities, readily affords to be used as a mimetic tool for analogical exhaustion. In virtual reality, we can put on woman, no less than we can put on anything we have or anything we do not have. In this mood, we are fully within the space of the calculative-representational frame expressed by the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason. But cyberspace also opens itself to the lapsarian experience: at the end of analogy that (un) grounds all analogy, cyberspace shelters a gift for which we can never fully find, or render, a reason.

Notes

1. Octavio Paz, *El arco y la lira*, 3d ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), 33.

2. For a discussion of the importance of the Leibnizian principle for technological thinking, see Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

3. Ibid., 33.

4. See Jorge Luis Borges, "El arte narrativo y la magia," in *Prosa completa*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1980), 1.163-70.

5. Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 48.

6. William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1991), 421.

7. Ibid., 429.

8. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 196.

9. Ibid., 223.

10. Ibid., 219.

11. Ibid., 218.

12. Ibid., 193.

13. A classically Heideggerian question, it is also, arguably, the question of deconstruction. See Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: Pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1989), 109.

14. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph," in *A Personal Anthology*, ed. and trans. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove, 1967), 140; and *Prosa completa*, 2.113.

15. Borges, "The Aleph," 140; and *Prosa completa*, 2.114.

16. Borges, "The Aleph," 146; and *Prosa completa*, 2.119.

17. Borges, "The Aleph," 148; and *Prosa completa*, 2.121.

18. Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: L'Etoile/Gallimard/Seuil, 1980), 48-49ff.

19. Borges, "The Aleph," 151; and *Prosa completa*, 2.122.

20. Borges, "The Aleph," 149; and *Prosa completa*, 2.121.

21. Borges, "The Aleph," 153; and *Prosa completa*, 2.124.

22. Quoted in Katie Hafner and John Markoff, *Cyberpunk: Outlaws and Hackers on the Computer Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 240.

23. In Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality: The Revolutionary Technology of Computer-Generated Artificial Worlds and How It Promises and Threatens to Transform Business and Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 16.

24. See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 611-12, for an association of anxious melancholy and a vision in which "all objects allside showed themselves," and a lot more.

25. Rheingold, *Virtual Reality*, 352.

26. Ibid.

27. Borges, *Prosa completa*, 2.81.

28. Borges, "The Aleph," 153; and *Prosa completa*, 2.124.

29. Jacques Derrida, "Two Words for Joyce," in *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 146.

30. Ibid., 147.

31. Ibid.

32. For a notion of the "lapsus" as the organizing space of reading and writing, see Jacques Lacan, *Encore: Le séminaire XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 37.

33. Borges, *Prosa completa*, 2.329.

34. Borges, "The Aleph," 144; and *Prosa completa*, 2.117.

35. "To give what one does not have" is the Lacanian definition of love quoted by Jacques Derrida in "Given Time: The Time of the King," trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Winter 1992): 163; from Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 628. See Derrida's discussion, pp. 162-63 and *passim*. The article deals with the theme of the gift.

36. Borges, "The Aleph," 138; and *Prosa completa*, 2.112.

37. Borges, "The Aleph," 138-39; and *Prosa completa*, 2.112-13.

38. Borges, "The Aleph," 148; and *Prosa completa*, 2.120.

39. Barthes, *La chambre claire*, 118.

40. Borges, "The Aleph," 151; and *Prosa completa*, 2.123.

41. Borges, "The Aleph," 152; and *Prosa completa*, 2.123.

42. Borges, "The Aleph," 154; and *Prosa completa*, 2.125.

43. Derrida, "Two Words for Joyce," 146.

44. Allucquere Rosanne Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures," in *Cyberspace: First Steps*, ed. Michael Benedikt (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 108.

45. Ibid., 109.