

**The foundation of western thought in
the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:
The postmodern and the postcolonial
discourse in Jorge Luis Borges**

ALFONSO DE TORO

In several previously published works I try to develop criteria for the discussion about postmodernity and postcolonialism in European and Latin-American culture, literature, and theatre, particularly as they relate to the work of Jorge Luis Borges. I do so with the intent of offering a scientific debate without the usual and well-known polemics on the topic. To start, I would like to summarize the main characteristics and constitutive marks of Borges's work that are at the same time the main characteristics of postmodern and postcolonial knowledge. Another preliminary remark seems to me to be important: I am not going to read Borges 'from outside', meaning 'from the center', from the postmodern or postcolonial European or North American system or from the perspective of the theory of Lacan, Derrida, Deleuze, or Baudrillard, but I will concentrate on the essential topics or problems of the last century, that are an inherent part of the work of Borges as well as European and North American culture. My approach is very much to the contrary: I have read postmodern philosophy and theory through Borges's work in a constant back and forth interconnectedness, and from his work I was able to confront postmodern and postcolonial issues. It is through these theories that I approach Borges and his works. There is no discrepancy between my reading of the text-object and my theoretical reading, since the object and the theory constitute a single unit. In this reading I did not omit the polemic of an 'Argentinean' and a 'universal' Borges who is 'stolen' by the culture of the center. I believe Borges is universal, and therefore, there is not a hierarchy of topic and sites. Instead, Borges's Buenos Aires is a place as real or mythical as Uqbar, since Borges does not produce a mimetic, illusionist literature of 'local color', but a self-referential literature. Having made this brief but necessary clarification, I can proceed with the central topic of this paper.

Borges's literary practice is characterized by a multilayered signic organization that has profound consequences to the treatment of reality and fiction. The text is a product of reading, and it follows that writing is a permanent rereading, as is rewriting. This 'rewriting' leads to the

dissolution of the characters, of the narrator's identity, and to the constitution of two fundamental and ever-present levels: the level of the textual object and the metatextual level. These are always found in a playful tension that leads to the overcoming of fiction as fiction. Borges's text performs its own 'defictionalization', that is, the narrated history is always unmasked as a 'fabrication', or as metatextual. Thus we do not perceive any attempt to materialize it.¹ Borges resorts to a series of textual techniques and philosophical theories that during the second half of the twentieth century, were widely practiced and well established by postmodern philosophy, and by literary theory. Thus, Borges goes much further with his theory and practice of literature than the authors of the 1950s vanguard by creating his own devices, devices unknown at that time. This should be clearly understood once and for all. Some of the central devices introduced by Borges are: *deconstruction* (Foucault 1966; Derrida 1967: 172; Culler 1983; de Toro 1992: 145-184; 1994a: 5-32), *rhizom* (Deleuze/Guattari 1976; de Toro 1992: 145-184; 1994a: 5-32) and *simulation* (Baudrillard 1981; de Toro 1995: 11-45; 1999a: 137-162; 1999b: 129-153). The act of rereading of Borges, like the act of rewriting, is not a mimetic and intertextual activity, but an overcoming elaboration (*verwindende Verarbeitung*) and a recodification of signifiers that perform as referential units or as referential *simulated* markers. The signifier is attached to a rhizomatic structure where any origin (*Ur*) and any final trace (*telos*) intersect with an infinite disseminating plurality. Instead of an orderly mimesis loaded with meaning, a simulation takes place as reality or as a literary-fictional textuality, but without a reality (referent) and without a text, as stated by Baudrillard, 'Le simulacre n'est jamais ce qui cache la vérité — c'est la vérité que cache qu'il n'y en a pas. Le simulacre est vrai' [The simulacrum is never that which conceals reality — it is reality that hides that which it does not have] (1981: 9).

In referring to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1976) we are able to understand the rhizome as an organizational principle in which one element is connected to others of a very different structure. Thus, a non-hierarchical, scattered, opened, and always developing movement takes hold. Topically formulated, we have a network of knots that produce a bifurcation that connect themselves to other knots. As a result the relation signifier/signified is of no consequence, except in terms of the form of the relation at the level of the signifier. Therefore, the question that arises is not what the signified of a syntagm is, but rather how the syntagm is connected. Simulation with Baudrillard (1981) can be understood as the placement of hyperreality, as the implosion of a reality that leads to the dissolution of the Western metaphysical realism, or of the limits between reality and fiction, with the narrator as a mediating site.

For the duality between an I-narrator and an I-actant is dismantled: the I-narrator is split into several I's, thus assuming a hybrid identity (this is also the case for the third person narrator).

There also disappear the traditional limits between the author and the reader, between the author and his characters. Through these devices the structure becomes fragmented, while the text becomes somewhat anonymous and experiences a reduction towards itself. Thus Borges, with his literary theory and practice, evolves what the *nouveau roman* and the *Tel Quel* group later showcased during the 1960s and 1970s: the self-referential generation of textuality. With this the author becomes a 'scriptor' (*scripteur*) and it is he who motivates and starts the activity of the reader as co-author, since he must go through the rhizomorphic play set up by the author and the narrator. The reader is then obliged to equate the processes of reading and writing. In several interviews and essays, Borges, based on his reading of Kafka's work, stated that each writer is first and foremost a reader. Thus, each reader becomes a co-author.

Borges's deconstructive devices do not attempt to produce a signified, a traditional type of message, instead they seek the search as a goal. For the reader, a true 'adventure trip' takes place by means of different signifying systems, which, due to their iteration throughout the centuries, have lost their denotative capacity. Thus they allow only for the search of other carriers of meaning. Then, by a radicalization of this search, it becomes solely the search of signifiers, which are more often than not attached to signifieds, whose function is that of a 'hook', but which are later found to be without meaning.

Having briefly described some fundamental terms and conceptions of Borges's literary discourse, we can proceed to deal with some central aspects of his thinking. But let me underline, again, that Borges introduced the very foundations of western thought during the second half of the twentieth century, and it is here that we discover Borges as the *Urvater* of postmodernity and postcoloniality. Thus at the very base of the central aspects of Borges's writing are 'anti-intertextuality', 'the anti-fantastic', 'rhizomatic simulation', and 'guided randomness' (= *azar dirigido / dirigierter Zufall*).

Postmodernity: Referentiality, mimesis, anti-fantastic, anti-intertextuality, rhizomatic simulation, and guided randomness

The problem of referentiality and mimesis

Borges introduced a new literary paradigm in the twentieth century (postmodernism), and in this I have detected at least two pivotal literary

positions. Firstly, Borges does not consider literature as 'mimesis of reality' (independent of the definition of the term of 'mimesis' in literary criticism), therefore his literary activity has nothing to do with realism. Instead, Borges suggests that literary activity, as a 'mimesis of literature/fiction', is a mirror of literary references, a weaving of networks that emerge in the form of intertextuality. He refers to the topic position of 'reality vs. fiction/mimesis of reality' in order to replace the notion of 'reality' through mimesis of the fiction/literature. He clearly states that the world and reality are constituted by signs. Thus the author has detached himself from the ontological notion of 'reality'. His second position represents a radicalization of the first, in as much as the opposition 'mimesis of fiction vs. literature' as a condition for literary activity, is replaced by an even more drastic opposition of 'mimesis of fiction/literature vs. pseudo-mimesis of fiction/literature'. The notion of 'reality' is replaced by 'mimesis of fiction/literature' and the notion of 'fiction' by 'pseudo-mimesis of fiction/literature'. This then negates and questions not only the intertextuality, but the presence of the fantastic in Borges's work. Borges's texts, at best, establish relations with other texts, but not with reality. Reality emerges only as a quotation, and when evoked, it proceeds from other texts. The relations with other texts is evidently *intertextual*, if by intertextuality we understand the *intertextual practice* as defined by Genette (1982) and by criticism in general (Lachmann 1982; Pfister/Broich 1985). Borges admits that he creates his texts from other texts (*Als-Ob-Prinzip*), but he does not *practice* intertextuality, since the 'pre-text' (de Toro 1992: 161) is not used as such, that is, as a *contextual* form: Borges *invents/imagines* such texts. His literature is a major simulacrum. It is hyper real because his discourse overcomes the semiotic limits between reality and fiction. Such limits, if they still exist, are inscribed in books, and even these are undermined (*sie lösen sich auf*) by Borges as is masterfully exemplified in 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote'. Accordingly, when literature is inscribed instead of reality, literature becomes reality, is made into reality and is thus hyper real. As a consequence of the elimination of reality and mimesis as literary components, that is, the opposition between 'reality' vs. 'fiction', Borges's texts cannot be classified *pars pro toto* as mimesis of reality, or as the clash between reality and fiction, or as what is known as the fantastic. The epistemological and narratological definition provided by Todorov (1970) is based on the uncertain doubt of what has taken place. Thus the fantastic springs from the opposition between 'fiction' and 'reality'. By foregrounding the notion of mimesis in relation to literature/fiction, Borges compels the reader to change his/her receptive attitude. He/she may not expect from Borges's work a traditional and coherent story,

or the reflection of a given reality or a message. Instead, the text must be understood as an immanent reality, on its own, at the very moment of reading. Its structure is marked by a tangled web that contains an indeterminate amount of known, less known, unknown, or simply invented texts, all of which are valued by different predicatives such as 'universal' or 'trivial' by a given cultural system, but not by Borges himself. The reader may or may not accept this adventure if he/she decides to trace the names of people and works, of quotations and allusions, or if he/she simply agrees to be overtaken by the flow of the signifier and attracted by the search inscribed in the texts. For it seems that for Borges a distinction between the different *genres*, and objective valorizations with respect to literature do not exist, only personal preferences do so. Thus, only signs exist as objectivity, never the 'works' themselves, with syntagms or morphosyntagms as determining units. In this sense Borges is a minimalist and a fragmentarist. His reading activity makes him a producer of texts with the opposite never taking place. Or, in other words, his reading makes him a mediator of multiple signs which then allows him to create a rhizomorphic system.

As I indicated above, Borges's texts do not address the opposition of 'literature' and 'mimesis of literature', but rather the binomial mimesis of literature vs. pseudo-mimesis of literature. Borges creates a dialogue with other texts, de facto imagines/invents those texts, which in turn make believe that they imitate something (for instance, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'). He leads us to believe that his point of departure is an encyclopedia and other texts, which are entirely or partially invented. Another alternative he uses is to erase the original referential connections to such a point that they get lost in endless traces.

Thus Borges's texts are not intertextual for at least three reasons. First, he marginally (*debole* = weak) codifies his texts, he removes them from the evoked referential system, and finally he simulates a referential system that quotes and makes believe that he is going to imitate it. His model is exactly the opposite of what takes place in Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Hidalgo, don Quijote de la Mancha*. Since Borges imagines his referential systems, his intertextuality becomes self-referential, a phantom, a simulation. Therefore, this allows him to do away with the duality that characterizes intertextuality.

Borges aesthetic position is similar to that of Roland Barthes (1970) in *S/Z*, as shown by his description of the ideal vanguard literary text. From the perspective of Derrida and the *Tel Quel* group, *scriptible*, or a literary activity where reading and writing are found in the process of an equivalent and open relationship; reading is transformed in a rewriting. In Borges's and Barthes's cases we have a reading in an absolute present

(from the absolute of *hic et nunc*):

c'est nous en train d'écrire, avant que le jeu infini du monde (le monde comme jeu) ne soit traversé, coupé, arrêté, plastifié par quelque système singulier (Idéologie, Genre, Critique) qui en rabatte sur la pluralité des entrées, l'ouverture des réseaux, l'infini des langages. (Barthes 1970: 11)

Past literatures are activated by Borges the author and by the reading performed by the implicit reader of Borges's texts. However, neither in the textual production nor in the textual reception is the objective to attribute to the quoted texts a new meaning in terms of the present. Despite the fact that this activity was central for the Konstanz school of theory of reception, the objective remains neither to interpret nor to reconstruct them. Since texts are reproduced in a radically fragmented form, they only serve as the base for the next text, which has little to do with the syntagm being used. In our view, this is the central aspect of Borges's poetics, and it is this aspect that led him to the conception that all texts have already been written. For Borges then, his work becomes the repetition of other already written, known or unknown works, and therefore, he can state that he limits himself to 'writing notes' about them.²

Borges's position is not simply a 'coquetry', but rather the cornerstone of his literary system, which resulted in a new theory of reception.³ Thus, he denies the possibility of reactualizing (making contemporaneous) the original meaning of past literary texts. What Borges takes from the original texts is not their content, but rather their structure, which is placed at a different level and therefore transformed. The texts used seem to have only one meaning, and to generate one idea. This is why Borges always reveals his sources as fiction within the fiction.

The opposition 'mimesis of literature/fiction' vs. 'pseudo-mimesis of literature/fiction' suffers a final transformation that provides a probable response as to why Borges simulates. Additionally, it provides an answer regarding the phantasmagoric absence of writing: the transformation is realized in the opposition 'pseudo-mimesis of literature/fiction' vs. 'reception/dream/mystical experience'. Thus we have a signifier that becomes ciphers and symbols of perception, in traces that motivate *différance*. Borges himself describes this process when he states that dreams always precede literature and the act of writing (Borges 1985: 17, 22). This tension between perception and dream, which is rhizomatic by nature, is nonhierarchical, unconscious, always open to movement, and develops following the principle of randomness, or of a trace without origin or finality. In its signic, linear, and intentional organization, it becomes neither a dialectical form nor a logocentric metaphysics of the

idea of the idea, but is preserved in all its diversity. It is here that we find the epistemological place that allows me to state that Borges's writing is placed 'beyond literature' (de Toro 1999a: 137–162; 1999b: 129–153), and that the signifieds err without meaning, as in the 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' and in 'Undr'.

The anti-fantastic and anti-intertextuality

In what follows I will make a case of why Borges's literature is not fantastic or intertextual, as most of the studies on his work have stated for decades.

Fantastic literature is anchored in narrative structures that cannot avoid the attempt to transgress a topographic or normative boundary (Lotman 1973). In addition, the structures of a mimetic type are conceived according to a given historical-cultural model of the world, and as such are prone to changes and transformations. What is conceived as the norm — limit and transgression — varies from culture to culture and from epoch to epoch. Thus these elemental 'mimetic' structures are inscribed in the contrastive relationship of 'reality' and 'fiction' as described by Jakobson (1971 [1921]: 373–391), Tynjanov (1971 [1924]: 393–431) and Höfner (1980).

When revising the research done on the 'fantastic', we learn that it is defined by the opposition 'reality vs. marvelous', presupposing that the fiction is always fixed on imitating reality in detail, on shaping it, on problematizing or competing with it.⁴ This, however, is exactly the reverse procedure employed by the novel. Thus the relationship 'literature/reality' can be subsumed by the opposition 'reality vs. fiction', where the fiction status, according to Lotman (1973), is that of a secondary modalizing system. Without the opposition of the inexplicable and the real, the 'fantastic' cannot be defined and the transgression of laws and norms of a given world (i.e., the transgression of laws of the verisimilitude) are considered fantastic. Consequently, the narration and the fantastic world contain all the elements of the everyday world, while the characters are confronted with events that transcend the experience of the real world.

Todorov (1970: 28–51; and in particular, page 49) defines the 'genuine fantastic' perceived by the reader and the characters, as the indecidibility of what has taken place, as shown by the phrase 'un événement étrange, qui provoque une hésitation chez le lecteur et le héros', which implies the identification between the reader and the character. Even if for Todorov this is not a sine qua non principle but a necessary condition, his definition

is still very problematic since it is a mode of reading and not a 'poetic' or 'allegoric' element of the text. These two literary devices, or modes of reading, are not considered as fantastic because they erase the necessary ambiguity that must govern the real and the supernatural. According to Todorov, this must be the case. For if everything which is only supernatural were considered a self-referential literary act, that is, lacking a mimetic reference or connection to the real world, then this would constitute something purely marvelous that one could accept or refuse. It would not, however, produce a conflict with the real, or with the marvelous interpreted allegorically, and so it would function metonymically or metaphorically as substitution of something else. Thus it would be either referential or self-referential.

It is in relation to this definition, accepted by investigators at large, where my doubts pertaining to the fantastic genre began. On the one hand, this definition would not apply when analyzing Borges's work, while on the other hand, as I will attempt to explain and show in what follows, Borges's work constitutes a negation of the fantastic.

Reality can only be defined by means of mimesis, through imitation of the external textual system 'reality', and in relation to a given concept of reality 'Q', of a culture 'Y', and in a given 'epoch X'. I propose to define 'mimesis' as the 'imitation of any given reality x ', thus allowing for diverse referential systems, such as reality, and books. I also keep the term 'anti-mimetic' for defining a self-referential literature, or one where this type of reference is predominant. In our context it is indifferent that 'mimesis' has been historically as just imitation. It also means that the form in which imitation is practiced as a compatible mimetic action with or without a given conception of reality, or as everyday experience. Something that depends on historic-pragmatic variables, it is not only and primarily a problem pertaining to imitation.

Regarding the fantastic in Borges's work, Bioy Casares (1996: 9-15; 1972: 222-230) proposes, in his introductory essay to the *Antología de la literatura fantástica* of 1940, several criteria to define the fantastic which are key to our own argumentation. Bioy quotes Borges's text, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' with relation to different types of fantastic plots. This text is defined as a 'metaphysical fantasy'.

With 'The Approach to al-Mu'tasim', 'Pierre Menard', and 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', Borges created a new literary genre, part essay and part fiction. These stories, exercises in unceasing intelligence and buoyant imagination, devoid of heaviness or of any human element — either emotional or sentimental — are destined for intellectual readers, for students of philosophy, and almost for specialists in literature. (Bioy Casares 1972: 228)

In the prologue to the collection of texts under the name of 'El Jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan', the first part of *Ficciones*, Borges (1989/96: 1.427) himself classifies 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'Las ruinas circulares', 'La lotería de Babilonia', 'Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain', and 'La biblioteca de Babel' as fantastic stories. But 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' is classified as a detective story, or something of that sort. At the same time, Borges considers the rest of the stories contained in *Ficciones*, as well as those under the title of 'Artificios' similar to the ones quoted above 'no difieren de las que forman el anterior' [do not differ from those which form the previous one] (Borges 1989/96: 1.483). In 'El Aleph', however, there is no prologue, but in the epilogue all the stories are classified as 'fantastic' (Borges 1989/96: 1.629).

In Borges's 1932 essay 'El arte narrativo y la magia' (1989/96: 1.226–232) and in the prologue to Bioy Casares's *La invención de Morel*, there are a number of observations regarding the status of the fantastic. Since both texts were profusely commented, analyzed and masterly interpreted by Rodríguez Monegal (1976), I will thus limit myself to some brief statements. I agree with Rodríguez Monegal when he states that Borges rejects a certain type of realistic literature with sociological overtones and adopts a fantastic literature instead. Monegal understands the 'fantastic' as 'art/artifice' (see also de Toro 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1998): literature is understood as something consciously fabricated and therefore does not attempt to imitate. What is central to Monegal's argument, however, is Borges's negation of reality as a referential system, and thus the negation of causality, as well as of time and space. It is this aspect that Borges addresses in the prologue to Bioy Casares's work and in his 'El arte narrativo y la magia'. The 'fantastic' for Borges then, is the equivalent of *fictionality*, *literariness* and *literature* which was reiterated in an interview in 1985. In this interview he states something similar to what he had already stated in his conference ('La literatura fantástica') in Montevideo in 1945 (see Monegal 1976: 185). This topic is also present in 'La flor de Coleridge' and in 'Magias parciales del Quijote':

Podría decirse que la literatura fantástica es casi tautológica, pero toda literatura es fantástica. (Borges 1985: 18)

[It could be said that fantastic literature is quasi-tautological, but all literature is fantastic.]

Thus he categorically established the homology 'fantastic=literature/fiction'. According to this definition supernatural events do not play any role whatsoever (cf. Borges's [1985: 25] observations on Wells and Kafka)

because these events are not considered as realist according to the nineteenth-century definition of this term. There is no doubt about Borges's position, particularly when he argues that 'La Segunda parte del Quijote es deliberadamente fantástica; ya el hecho de que los personajes de la segunda parte hayan leído la primera es algo mágico, o al menos lo sentimos como mágico', [The second part of *Don Quixote* is deliberately fantastic; the very fact that the characters of the second part have read the first one is something magical, or at least we feel it is magical] (Borges 1985: 18) concluding further down that 'La literatura es esencialmente fantástica' [Literature is essentially fantastic] (Borges 1985: 25).

As is well known, Borges paid particular attention to *Don Quixote*,⁵ as shown by the prologue which has as a background the picturesque novel. Ginesillo de Pasamontes (condemned to the galley), tells Don Quixote and Sancho Panza that he is writing his own life story and adventures, and that the title of his book is *La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte*, following in the tradition of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Cervantes establishes a parallel between life *in actu* and in the writing of that life and deconstructs paradoxically the 'realist' textual subtype that attempts to represent life as it is. Thus Cervantes establishes yet another parallel between Don Quixote and Sancho by confronting them with their own story. In part II, chapter 2-4, the 'bachiller' Sansón Carrasco informs Don Quixote and Sancho Panza that their story has been published in a book entitled *El Ingenioso Hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. We now have the duplication of the original in two additional works, and thus the characters have changed from imaginary characters to real ones. What began as fiction became a book, and for Don Quixote and Sancho Panza the book about their adventures becomes part and parcel of historiography. Both characters become 'readers' of their own story and discuss with Sansón Carrasco segments that, in their view, are incorrect and falsely rendered by the chronicler. Sansón Carrasco responds by stating that the poet must narrate the story as if 'esta hubiese ocurrido de esa forma' [it had taken place thus] and not 'como ésta ha ocurrido realmente' [as it actually took place], since that is the job of the historian. It is obvious that Sansón Carrasco is quoting Aristotle's *Poetics* and is thus reflecting on the relationship between reality and fiction (verisimilitude).

In 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' the *hrönir* surface from an imaginary planet, Tlön, into the 'reality of the fiction'. In Cervantes, the graphemes jump from the fiction to the real world, whereas in Borges we have objects and signs (the letter of the alphabet of Tlön). The origin of the origin of *Don Quixote* is to be found in the chivalry novels, that is, in fictional works. The origin of Tlön, however, is found in an article from an encyclopedia where a country called Uqbar is described, and here lies the

difference with Cervantes: the encyclopedia does not exist! Thus both authors proceed in a similar but also in a very different manner. The difference is inscribed in the attitude they adopt towards the relations of reality/fiction and in the way they deal with this relationship. Cervantes considers this relationship problematic, and thus merits a subject, but for Borges this is not the case at all. Whereas the question of whether or not writing is capable of capturing reality is at the very center of Cervantes's thinking, it is not present in Borges's case. Cervantes does not succeed in providing an answer to his question due to the complexity of reality and how it was conceived during Cervantes's time. Borges, instead, remains in the world of signs, since books maintain references only with signs and not with other systems. This is why Borges, in his terminology, views *Don Quixote*, and all writing (literature) as fictional or 'fantastic'.

Cervantes did not concern himself with the status of his writing, with whether it is fantastic or not, but rather he attempted to free himself from the tyranny of mimesis and of verisimilitude. He struggled with reality and took literary models as a referential system in order to resist the mimesis. It was Cervantes who opened the debate in the modern era of the opposition of 'reality vs. fiction' which would later be continued by Stern, Fielding, Diderot, Balzac, and Flaubert. In this case we are not dealing with the opposition of 'reality vs. supernatural', but rather with an epistemological-literary problem. Cervantes does not explain how his imaginary and phantasmatic characters were suddenly transformed into flesh and blood and serious characters who deserve to become subject matter for historiography. He abandons the opposition 'reality vs. imaginary' by not explaining how historiography spurts into reality which remains as something to be deciphered.

Our purpose in comparing Cervantes and Borges is to elucidate what Borges understood by 'fiction'. For Borges then, fiction is an anti-referential textual work, thus in no way, shape or form does he construct an opposition when defining 'fiction' as 'fantastic'. This becomes transparent when in 'La literatura fantástica' Borges lists distinctive categories pertaining to his definition of fantastic, categories such as 'the book within a book', 'the contamination of reality by means of dreams', 'travel through time', and the 'double'. In his interview of 1985 (Borges 1985: 25) he refused to define the 'fantastic' and instead left the term to 'float' ambiguously:

Todo es posible ... no sé, por ejemplo, en el caso de Wells tenemos un hecho fantástico entre muchos hechos cotidianos; en cambio en el mundo de Kafka no, todo parece fantástico. Todo puede ensayarse, pero lo importante es que el resultado sea feliz. (Borges 1985: 17)

[Everything is possible ... I don't know, for example, in the case of Wells we have a fantastic event among many daily events; in Kafka's world, however, everything seems fantastic. Everything can be tried out, but what matters is that the result be good.]

What is central for Borges is *imagination* and *dream*. In the same interview (1985), Borges stated that 'Arthur Machen ... afirma en su libro *Los tres impostores* que la función del hombre de letras es inventar una historia maravillosa y contarla de una manera maravillosa' [Arthur Machen ... states in his book *The Three Impostors* that the function of the man of letters is to invent a wonderful story and tell it in a wonderful way] and added that 'lo importante es soñar sinceramente, creo que si no hay un sueño anterior la escritura es imposible. Yo empiezo siempre por soñar, es decir, por recibir un sueño' [what matters is to dream sincerely, I believe that if there is no previous dream writing is impossible. I always begin by dreaming, that is, by receiving a dream before starting to write] (Borges 1985: 22).

Borges's conference in 1945, and the 1985 interview, reiterate his opinion pertaining to *Don Quixote* and fantastic literature (Borges 1985: 25). There is a difference, however, between the conference and the interview regarding the function that he attributes to the notion of the 'fantastic'. Borges considered fantastic literature 'como verdaderos símbolos de estados emocionales de procesos que se operan en todos los hombres. Por eso, no es menos importante la literatura fantástica que la realista' [as true symbols of emotional states of processes that take place in every man. For this reason, fantastic literature is no less important than realist literature] (Monegal 1976: 188). Thus processes and emotional states represent subjective perceptions of certain mystical forms. In the interview, when asked if he had been influenced by mystic literature, he replied that he had hardly read it except for the illuminists Swedenborg and Blake, and some Sufis, which is really an ironical *pointe* because Borges knew mysticism very well.

An excellent example of how Borges frees himself from the mimesis by the anti-fantastic and the anti-intertextuality is provided by the prologue to 'El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan' in *Ficciones* (Borges 1989/96: 1.429) where Borges quotes *Sartor Resartus, The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (1833/34) by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). This work, according to Borges, represents a perfect example of an author that has not only summarized and commented on books, but who has also simulated them. Borges also wrote about imaginary books such as *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, where there is an article on Uqbar and one on Tlön, an imaginary planet in a fantastic culture. If we were

to ask ourselves what we have learned by reading Carlyle that may contribute to our interpretation of Borges's stories, the answer is: nothing.

We experience exactly the same situation with Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586–1654), who in 1616 published a book entitled *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz anno 1459* in Strasburg. Although this was a fictitious work, it was held as a serious and true scholarly work to the point that Andreae was tried for heresy. Borges attributed to Andreae, the theologian from Württemberg, the work *Lesbare und lesenwerthe Bemerkungen über das Land Ukkbar in Klein-Asien* (1641). Thus the author Andreae was a real and a historical person, but the work attributed to him was invented, as was Borges's story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. The work that Andreae actually wrote was not mentioned by Borges, but apparently he had taken the name Andreae from De Quincey's (1785–1859) *Writings* (Borges 1989/96: 1.433).

In *Writings* we find a detailed summary on Andreae's life and work. As with Carlyle, however, we are no further ahead with regards to the traditional constitution of signification. What we have learned is reduced to the banal realization that the authors and works quoted by Borges were used in the attempt to replace reality by books, and that these books simulate books (any books). What this tells us is that Borges did not proceed in an intertextual manner, but instead he 'imitated' intertextuality. Thus when he simulated those texts, they remained similar to other texts but were not located in their place of origin. One may ask why Borges would proceed in such a fashion. Let us first state that intertextuality is the result of the principle of mimesis, where a posttext maintains a dialogue with pretext which results in an intertext (de Toro 1992: 145–184). Specific stylistic and semantic structures are taken from the pretext as is the case with Cervantes, where the chivalry novels are the pretext for *Don Quixote*. These novels then form a dialogical hypertextual base, or more precisely, an unmistakable and clear codification. In Cervantes's case this procedure can be clearly described in terms of the function of a chosen model with respect to another, by stating the reference and the transformation of that reference. This is also the case when only a hypotextual activity is present, that is, when literary dialogism is not obvious because we are still able to describe the underlying palimpsest by painstakingly isolating the functional changes from one text to another. When we speak of intertextuality we must start from a mimetic activity where the intertextual device uses strong or weak systems of codification which, at the same time, can be partially or completely decodified. If we do not start from the concept of mimesis, then we cannot speak of intertextuality, since the interaction will not be recognized. This matter does not reside in the imitation of a whole system

or a chain of syntagms, since smaller structures such as a lexeme, or a given *genre*, have the capacity to evoke a whole system, or a complete *genre* tradition. From any perspective then, what is important is the functionality of such structures, and the value of such dialogism as knowledge.

Borges quotes many texts in his stories. A good example of this is provided by 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'. However, these texts are not 'used' as a whole or a part of the level of the text-object, as Borges did not operate a syntagmatic-semantic function change to the quoted segments of the pretext present in the posttext. As a result, Borges's stories do not have an intertext and this is why intertextuality is not practiced, at least as it has been defined up to now: Borges *simulates* the practice of intertextuality. If Borges's writing was only an elitist form of *l'art pour l'art*, a literary game, and if a 'logic-rational' signification was absent from his writing, then we would not need to ask ourselves why he simulates. But we must ask this question. The answer is found at the epistemological level. That is, beyond fictional literature, in the field of pure signs, in the conception that the world *is* absolute signs and literature *is* agnostic-semiotic work that results from a profound skepticism and from the awareness that the world and reality cannot be seized since they are subjective and fragmented perceptions of the world. Thus Borges obliterated the 'I' as a center. Instead he opted for simulation and began to develop a rhizomatic thinking. This posture achieved the level of a semiotic mysticism literalizing the Gnostic discourse that was used as a type of signification. This is why 'the' truth does not exist for Borges, and if it does, it does so as an empty signified that wanders, loses itself, and is diluted as is the case in 'Undr' and 'La escritura del Dios'. Truth can only be foreseen or glimpsed at in the briefest of instants and may be experienced as a vision, a dream, or in the mystical trance, and this is why it is not transmissible. Borges rejected the possibility of scientific knowledge (empirical/positivist or logic) for the same reason as Flaubert, in the nineteenth century, in his unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1964).

It follows then, that if Borges did not produce a mimetic literature, since he hardly refers to reality, then his writing simulated the literary mimesis and his texts could not be, *per definitionem*, classified as fantastic. Borges disengaged himself from all mimesis pertaining either to reality or to literature, by replacing the principle of mimesis with the principles of simulation (in a third-degree Baudrillard 1981) and with rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1976).⁶ Earlier I had pointed out that Borges replaced the binary opposition 'reality vs. fiction' with 'mimesis of fiction vs. pseudo-mimesis of fiction'. In the former, 'fiction' means a mimetic-referential literature and 'mimesis of fiction' an antireferential, antimimetic, and

self-referential activity. I agree with the critique that recognizes that Borges's 'fiction' is not equivalent to an external referentiality to the text, but rather a literature as a kind of specific 'fantastic writing' as we have it explained above. However, for Borges the notion of the 'fantastic' suffered a profound transformation, and this is what I have attempted to demonstrate above. Genette (1964: 323–327) stated that Borges's scholarship was the very condition of the modern fantastic *genre*, and Chiacchella (1987: 103) shared this point of view. I, however, disagree with both of them in establishing scholarship as intertextuality; Borges *simulates* intertextuality but in addition uses the rhizome as a writing device.

'Rhizomatic simulation' or 'guided randomness'
(*'azar dirigido'*/'*dirigierter Zufall*')

Rhizomatic simulation

The term 'rhizome' is anchored in six principles: *connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography* and *decalcomania*. The rhizome is an ad libitum device of proliferation that has no center or origin. It brings to an end binarisms such as subject/object, and I/you, since the various element cannot be subsumed by a superior system. The rhizome allows for the crossing of different systems (historical events, social groups, theories, etc.) into one contiguous site, thus the various formations function without hierarchy. The rhizomatic thinking also has the capacity to 'deterritorialize' and 'reterritorialize' systems. The rhizome has no mimesis or similitude but instead allows the convergence of several heterogeneous systems. Additionally, the rhizome is associated with virtual reality and simulation with respect to reality. It is here where we find a connection between the rhizomatic theory and Baudrillard's (1981) simulation. He understood simulation as a virtual reality that is not empirical and therefore has no reference. It is an invented reality which produces something that does not exist, thus simulation becomes a virtual reality which replaces reality as hyperreality:

Aujourd'hui l'abstraction n'est plus celle de la carte, du double, du miroir ou du concept. La simulation n'est plus celle d'un territoire, d'un être référentiel, d'une substance. Elle est la génération par les modèles d'un réel sans origine ni réalité: hyperréel. Le territoire ne précède plus la carte, ni ne lui survit. C'est désormais la carte qui précède le territoire — précession des simulacres — c'est elle qui engendre le territoire et s'il fallit reprendre la fable. ... (Baudrillard 1981: 10)

For Baudrillard (1981: 12–13), simulation is the elimination of reference and this is why simulation has a high combinatory capacity. It is not, however, mimesis as parody, but rather the replacement of the ontological category of reality (*dissuasion du réel*). It contains all the signs of the real, but *de facto* it *simulates/replaces* (it does not reproduce). Simulation rejects the difference between reality and fiction, between what is true and false, between origin and effect, and eliminates causal relationships and thus radically expands the rhizomatic playfulness. This phenomenon is simple. There are signs that seem to hide something, others that seem to simulate something, and yet others that simulate something that does not exist. The first type represents the tradition of what is considered to be true and secret, while the second gives rise to the epoch of simulation (Baudrillard 1981: 16–17). The medium becomes the message (Baudrillard 1981: 41) and then it devours the message. The ever-growing quantity of information reduces the content to zero.

'Guided randomness' and simulation

After studying the work of Robbe-Grillet, the serial-aleatory music of Boulez, and Borges's work, I introduced the term 'guided randomness' (de Toro 1987; 1998). This device, when used in Borges's work is expressed by a rhizomatic structure; opened, and not ordered by dreams. Thus dreams and mystical visions are *literalized* and determined, or in other words they are 'guided'. The question that remains is once again why did Borges invent and simulate books? I believe that Borges attempted to express the perception processes within the perception context of a 'semiotic dream', that is, of a dream transcoded in signs. We have already established a new opposition: 'pseudo mimesis of fiction vs. perception/dream/mystical experience'. We have, then, a transcoding of signifiers that do not seek signifieds or references, but instead transform themselves in a desperate symbol, in a dream that attempts to communicate that which is possible to experience only in a situation of total subjectivity and intimacy. In this context, Borges's assertion that dreams must precede literature and the act of writing, acquires all of its significance. The 'guided randomness' is what I have called 'rhizomatic' simulation and the device that characterizes the rhizomatic literary expressions. I have also defined this type of literariness as the attempt to recodify signs, that due to their trajectory in the narration, have lost their significance (as is the case in *Pierre Menard*) (cf. also Schulz-Buschhaus 1991: 390–391). Therefore, Borges went beyond literature when he reached the limit of what is thinkable

(as is shown in his classification of animals in a Chinese encyclopedia in 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' or when he freed the signs from the signifier and transformed them into mystical signifiers, magical and open, capable of triggering a mystical revelation as in 'Undr').⁷ These transformations may be described as follows:

Oppositions

'reality' vs. 'fiction'
'reality vs. fiction' vs. 'mimesis of fiction'
'mimesis of fiction' vs. 'pseudo-mimesis of fiction'

Disintegration of Oppositions

'pseudo-mimesis of fiction'/'rhizomatic-guided literary activity'

'perception/dream/mystical experience'
rhizome/simulation

Postcoloniality

We understand postcoloniality as being a part of postmodern and poststructural thinking, knowledge and life. It is also the discourse of the colonizers and the colonized, of the periphery and the center, and a cultural notion that recodifies and perlaborates: the past and the present are in the future. Postcoloniality as a postmodern perspective is characterized by a deconstructionist attitude and thinking, that is, a critical/creative reflection, both intertextually and interculturally. It is also characterized by the thinking that recodifies history (or de-centers history), by a heterogeneous or hybrid thinking, which is subjective and radical, and by a radical particularity and diversity that is therefore universal. Postcoloniality does not exclude but rather includes a multi-dimensionality. In other words, the interaction of the diverse codified series of knowledge that aims to unmask what is contradictory and irregular in colonialism and neocolonialism, is what is imposed as the history, the truth. This procedure serves to interpret contradictions, plurality, ruptures, and the discontinuity of the culture actualized in a whole array of discourses, including the fictional discourse (see de Toro 1995: 16–21).

Borges also had an impact in the field of postcoloniality by his initiating a paradigm change which at first was not recognized. A good example of this is provided by the 'El escritor argentino y la tradición'.

My position springs from two premises. The first proposes that Borges is an author who appropriated the past, and by appropriating his debt with the past, he created a future. 'If Latin America is peripheral and colonized and everything is imported', then there exists the legitimization to appropriate cultural elements from the center. From the moment that Borges began his readings and initiated his travel through literature, he used literature not as an intertextual pastiche, as a parody, but he elaborated (*Verarbeitung*) and perlaborated it (*Verwindung*), producing his unmistakable, purely Borgesian (Argentinean?) discourse. The second premise is that the value of Borges's discourse, during modernity and neocolonialism, is neither recognized nor considered in the best of cases as it is avidly ransacked, without acknowledgement, and his contributions are denied, only to be reclaimed by the center. This situation partly changes when he is wrongly quoted without faith, and with indifference, but again, as in the first premise, he is made part of the center.

Borges's discourse presents the battle of a difficult relationship between periphery/center. This could be summarized in the following types of relationships: a) it is known, but it is hidden (i.e., *nouveau roman*, *roman Tel Quel*); b) it is known, but it is refuted as archaic (Ricardou); c) it is employed as a point of fundamental beginning (Foucault); d) it is employed, but it is partially misinterpreted (Baudrillard); and e) it is totally ignored (Deleuze and Guattari).

A brief analysis of the well-known text by Borges 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' will serve as an illustration of some of these points. Borges began his text by stating that the problem of the Argentinean writer and tradition is impossible to resolve. What is impossible to resolve is that which would characterize Argentinean literature (*lo argentino*), the question of Argentinean identity and its relationship with others, and that the periphery wants to be the center, and with the center (Borges 1989/96: 1.267). In fact, Borges states that the problem 'does not exist', for it deals with a rhetorical and pathetic problem, that is to say, with localisms, and with pub-patriotism. Thus the 'problem' for Borges is reduced to an 'appearance', to a 'simulacrum', and to a 'pseudo problem'.

The 'Argentinean' problem addressed here is the Latin American problem and, in general, that of the periphery. What Borges was really addressing, however, was the relationship between the periphery and the center according to the meaning that Bhabha and Spivak attributed to these phenomena. He analyzed the arguments used to constitute a legitimate discourse of the Argentinean and in so doing, refuted point by point, generic, thematic, and simply formal elements. Borges's argument can be summarized in three theses, which he exposed and argued against, and substantiated with diverse examples.

The first thesis concerns ideas of 'local color'. Argentinean literature is based on *gaucho* poetry and its lexicon, and in the procedures and themes which form an archetype, or a paradigm. Borges qualified this criteria as 'instinctive and lacking argumentation'. The representatives of this thesis used *Martin Fierro* as an example and, in its paradigmatic function, was compared with the works of Homer. Contrary to this thesis, Borges gave the example of *Alcorán*, Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra*, and his own works, particularly *La muerte y la brújula*.

The second thesis states that Argentinean writers must follow the Spanish tradition in order to ground their own work. *The third* proposes that Argentineans are estranged from the past, separated from Europe, and thus it is as if they were to find themselves in the first days of creation. With this in mind, searching for themes and European procedures would be a mistake. Borges's arguments against the *first thesis* are found in *Martin Fierro* as a paradigmatic work, but as a link in a chain it is not archetypal, it is not the starting point, nor is it even the origin. Furthermore, the equation proposed between the *gauchesco* genre and the art of the *payadores* (travelling country singers) is not a valid one since they are substantially different genres. Whereas the *payadores* tried to use a cultivated language and purposely avoided popular language, the cultivated writers of the *gauchesco* genre, such as José Hernández (1979), preferred to employ localisms to such an extent that they felt they had to provide the readers with a glossary in order to render the reading possible. Additionally, while the *payadores* favored general themes, the cultivated writers preferred the more popular and locally specific themes. Borges concludes that the *gauchesco* literature is as artificial as any other literature and so the criteria of local color does not adequately define what is Argentinean. He presented a series of examples of works which do not employ local color but are Argentinean (one needs only to remember Borges's negative opinion of *Salambô* by Flaubert). As such, Enrique Banchs mixes the local with the universal in *La urna*. For example, the roofs of the suburbs of Buenos Aires, and the nightingales belong to the Greek and Germanic traditions. According to Borges the Argentinean is rooted in the use of images: the nightingale symbolized Argentinean shyness, the difficulty they have in exposing their privacy, and their reluctance to be intimate.

This problem is located in a self-conscious and culturally peripheral context, but if one discusses the questions of essentialism, identity, and 'influences' from the Center, there is no problem. It is in this way that Borges refers to Racine and Shakespeare, who took their themes from Italian, Greek, and Latin antiquity. Yet no one would contest the fact that Racine was a French writer or that Shakespeare was an English writer.

Thus Borges adds that those who defend 'local color' should reject this theory as typically foreign aesthetics.⁸ Another example is Borges's *Alcorán*, a work in which camels are not mentioned, because, according to Borges, that which is a part of that culture does not need to be mentioned specifically. The absence of camels is transformed, in this case, into a test of authenticity for the *Alcorán*, which is a case of doubt, but it is not the negation of its identity. Now then: who would persist in mentioning the camels? Borges asks himself:

Un falsario, un turista, un nacionalista árabe mencionaría a cada paso los camellos y sus caravanas. ... Mahoma, como árabe, no tenía por qué saber que los camellos eran especialmente árabes; eran para él parte de la realidad, no tenía por qué distinguirlos ... pero Mahoma como árabe, estaba tranquilo: sabía que podía ser árabe sin camellos. Creo que los argentinos podemos parecernos a Mahoma, podemos creer en la posibilidad de ser argentinos sin abundar en color local. (Borges 1989/96: 1.270)

[A quack, a tourist, an Arab nationalist, would mention camels and their caravans all the time. ... Mahomet, being an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were not essentially Arab, for him they were part of their reality, there was no reason to distinguish them ... but Mahomet, as an Arab, was at peace: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I believe that we Argentineans can be more like Mahomet, we can believe in the possibility of being Argentineans without abounding in local color.]

In another example, Borges quoted some of his own early works which abounded in localisms, and which he considered to be '*libros ahora felizmente olvidados*' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271). He also criticized his own text, '*La muerte y la brújula*', which is, by his own account, a nightmare in which elements of Buenos Aires are deformed, and the places are called by French names. Despite everything, however, the readers discover '*el sabor de las afueras de Buenos Aires*' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271).

A final example noted by Borges is *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes. Although this book qualifies as a national symbol, according to Borges, it is full of metaphors '*de los cenáculos de Montmartre, cuya fábula toma de Kim de Kipling y cuya acción tiene lugar en la India, obra que a su vez está bajo el influjo de Huckleberry Finn de Mark Twain, epopeya del Mississippi*'. He remarks that this novel, which is considered a national symbol, has required three cultural contexts in order to be considered epic. Furthermore, he finds it unacceptable that 'los nacionalistas' pretend to '*venerar las capacidades de la mente argentina*' limiting '*el ejercicio poético de esa mente a algunos pobres temas locales, como si los argentinos [pudiesen] hablar de orillas y estancias y no del universo*' (Borges 1989/96: 1.271).

Arguments against the *second thesis*: Regarding the option to follow the Spanish tradition, Borges has two objections. First is that if Argentina (and Latin America) may be defined as the attempt to separate itself or distance itself from Spain, then to propose the former colonial power as an example of the origin is indeed a contradiction. The second is that the enjoyment of Spanish literature is acquired and the Spanish texts are not always well received by readers: 'dificilmente gustables sin aprendizaje especial' (Borges 1989/96: 1.272), unlike French or English literature, which does not create problem with their reception as Spanish literature does. With regards to the arguments against the *third thesis*, Borges did not share the opinion that Argentineans (and Latin Americans) are estranged from the past, separated from Europe, nor that they find themselves in a state of initiation and that is why all cultural association with Europe can be perceived as false, precisely because in Latin America there is another historical and temporal sensitivity. Because the bond with the old world is so close, everything that occurs there has a great impact in the new world, especially in Argentina.

After having refuted all of the possible cases of the discourse of *Argentineanness* from the categories presented above, Borges concluded with a lapidarian statement: Argentinean (Latin American) tradition is submersed in Western culture and so it has an even greater right to that tradition than those nations which are the owners of that tradition. Latin Americans act within Western culture, but without being tied to it, and so, from there the capacity for innovation arises:

Creo que los argentinos, los sudamericanos en general, estamos en una situación análoga; podemos manejar todos los temas europeos, manejarlos sin supersticiones, con una irreverencia que puede tener, y ya tiene, consecuencias afortunadas. (Borges 1989/96: 1.273)

[I believe that we Argentineans, South-Americans in general, are in a similar situation; we can handle every European topic, we can handle them without superstitions, with an irreverence which can, and in fact has, fortunate consequences.]

For Borges this discussion of *Argentineanness*, of identity, and of the self, is a false problem since it reflects '*el eterno problema del determinismo*'. That is, it reflects the eternal question of the origin, of the unifying trace, and of the continuity in time. Borges professes an open condition, of postmodernity, when he states that:

nuestro patrimonio es el universo; ensayar todos los temas, y no podemos concretarnos a lo argentino para ser argentinos: porque o ser argentino es una fatalidad y en ese caso lo seremos de cualquier modo, o ser argentino es una mera afectación, una máscara.

Creo que si nos abandonamos a ese sueño voluntario que se llama la creación artística, seremos argentinos y seremos, también, buenos o tolerables escritores. (Borges 1989/96: 1.274)

[our patrimony is the universe; to deal with every subject, and we cannot stick to Argentinean matters to be Argentinean because either being Argentinean is a fatality and in that case we shall be so anyway, or being Argentinean is a mere affectation, a mask.

I believe that if we abandon ourselves to that voluntary dream called artistic creation, we shall be Argentineans and we shall also be good or tolerable writers.]

This quote is a perfect example of what I have described as post-coloniality: the association and the relationship of one's own context with that of others who are outside their own locality, and the appropriation and the claim of cultural discourses and phenomena that belong to all, not only to one cultural region.

From early on, Borges showed us which road to follow, with a certain success. The Borgesian discourse is indelible and unmistakable, but is it Argentinean? The question seems meaningless, but if we try to answer it we can say that Borges's discourse is Argentinean only from a civic and geographical point of view. It is peculiar that for a long period of time, possibly even today, the great majority of Argentineans and Latin Americans, including the academic world, have failed to see, or refused to accept, that Borges was Argentinean and Latin American.

What makes Borges great is his universality. This is found in his capacity to incorporate in his literature and thinking what is local and universal, a literature without ideological and geographical borders. He shares this characteristic with Kafka, for whom Borges always felt a special fascination and interest, as is demonstrated when he describes Kafka's work. When doing this he describes his own work and writing. This fascination is obvious in a writing that never ends, which always escapes ('postergación infinita', Borges 1982: 10, 19) and can never be determined in a given space ('regressus ad infinitum', Borges 1982: 9, 19), as is exemplified in the following quotation:

Kafka en cambio tiene textos, sobre todos en sus cuentos, donde se establece algo eterno. A Kafka podemos leerlo y pensar que sus fábulas son tan antiguas como la historia, que esos sueños fueron soñados por hombres de otra época sin necesidad de vincularlos a Alemania o a Arabia. El hecho de haber escrito un texto que trasciende el momento en que se escribió es notable. Se puede pensar que se redactó en Persia o en China y ahí está su valor. (Borges 1983: 3)

[Kafka, on the other hand, has texts, mainly among his stories, where something eternal is established. We can read Kafka and think that his fables are as ancient

as history itself, that those dreams were dreamt by men of other times without any need of linking them to Germany or Arabia. The fact of having written a text which transcends the moment in which it was written is remarkable. It can be thought it was written in Persia or in China and there lies its worth.]

Conclusion

Borges's writing, in the 1940s, effected a quantum leap with regards to the epistemological basis of his work, and the cultural and philosophical thinking which was further developed in the second half of our century.

Since signs are impregnated with signification, Borges has had to rewrite them (in the sense that Lyotard uses this notion). In this rewriting he achieved the limit of what is thinkable and imaginable, thus he created 'linguistic monstrosities' (Foucault). Here resides the paradigm change and the fantastic component in its semiotic-epistemological level: the limit is manifested in what he thinks and writes, of what he seems to recognize but is rendered in a different manner.⁹ Borges created his own brand of the fantastic in as much as he '*n'altère aucun corps réel, ne modifie en rien le bestiaire de l'imagination*' (Foucault 1966: 7). Here we are describing the rhizomatic simulation: Borges makes 'literature with literature', in the same manner as the 'crocodile makes the resemblance of bark with bark'. The classification of the animals appears, in traditional thinking, as an irritant and a transgression. This is due to the placing together of diverse and even opposed semantic and pragmatic fields which have no relationship among themselves. Borges connected them by using an arbitrary continuity of terms which exclude each other. The 'monstrosity' of Borges's writing does not reside in the weaving and proximity of the terms used, but rather in the sharing of a common space (= text, written page) which rejects any semantic or pragmatic linkage. In this manner Borges erased the habitual language and replaced it with absolute signs, and thus we do not have a common logos. It is here that the 'terror' that Borges's texts provoke emerges, and so the abyss of what is not comprehensible is opened. This is the site of the fantastic *par excellence*, the site of pure fiction, of writing and literature, as Finné proposes for this textual subtype, but more importantly, a fiction without mimetic background. This is also a playful site, artificial (rhizome), and self-referential which contradicts the traditional notion of the fantastic. Following Foucault, Borges produced:

le désordre qui fait scintiller les fragments d'un grand nombre d'ordres possibles dans la dimension, sans loi ni géométrie, de l'hétéroclite; et il faut entendre ce mot au plus près de son étymologie: les choses y son 'couchées', 'posées', 'disposées'

dans de sites à ce point différents qu'il es impossible de retrouver pour eux un espace d'accueil, de définir au-dessous des uns et des autres un lieu commun. (Foucault 1966: 9)

The concept of the library topically represents what Borges practiced and Foucault described: the production of a disorder constructed by fragments of a limitless number of possible orders that are rhizomatically reproduced. Borges apparently evokes a discourse as if this were established a priori, and then proceeds to arrest its logos and to deconstruct it. The fact that Borges's metaphysical vacuum may be labeled fantastic as a result of an antimimetic activity, playful and unstructured,¹⁰ should not be confused with the type of discourse that functions against the given order of having a transcendental effect (or a transcendental meaning) as Finné seems to suggest. The effect of such a procedure lays in its unimaginability and its subjective perception. It is inscribed in the representation of the relativity of the real, as real as a vacuum which results in the fascination of a terrible infinity and not a '*harmonie consolatrice*' (Finné 1980: 10): its negation is realized as desire. It is here where the antiteleological nature of Borges's writing is inscribed by means of the relativity, iconized in the symbol of the 'rhizomatic labyrinth', that leads to its dissolution with the unlocking of the enigma of 'Undr' as 'Undr'. With regards to the symbol of the labyrinth as the emblem of the fantastic, Borges replies:

Quizá el fin del laberinto — si es que el laberinto tiene un fin — sea el de estimular nuestra inteligencia, el de hacernos pensar en el misterio, y no en la solución. Es muy raro entender la solución, somos seres humanos, nada más. Pero buscar esa solución y saber que no la encontramos es algo hermoso, desde luego. Quizá, los enigmas sean más importantes que las soluciones. ... (Borges 1983: 25)

[perhaps the end of the labyrinth — if the labyrinth has an end — is that of stimulating our intelligence, of making us think about the mystery, not about the solution. It is very strange to understand the solution, we are but human beings. But looking for that solution and knowing we do not find it is something beautiful, of course. Perhaps, the enigmas are more important than the solutions. ...]

Thus Borges has abandoned the normal experience of language, of the world and of knowledge. His chattering finality works as a goal and places us in the absolute referentiality: he never asks where from and where to. Borges's writing overcomes the theory of similitude and Foucault's *différance*, by obliterating them both: what remains is the rhizome and the simulation.

Notes

1. The 'metatextual' level we are referring to, corresponds to the *mise en abyme* in the double meaning assigned to it by Gide, that is, first as a thematization of the organization of diegesis, and then as allegory of literary narrative techniques. Finally, Borges's metatextual narrative techniques correspond to the utilization that the authors of the *nouveau roman*, of the *nouveau nouveau roman* make of these narrative techniques and to those of the *Tel Quel* group of the 1950s and 1960s, that is as a deconstruction of the semantic field and of the literary genres.
2. Borges writes in the Prologue to *Ficciones*:
'Desvario laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario. Así procedió Carlyle en *Sartor Resartus*; así Butler en *The Fair Haven*; obras que tienen la imperfección de ser libros también, no menos tautológicos que los otros. Más razonable, más inepto, más haragán, he preferido la escritura de notas sobre libros imaginarios. Estas son *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* y el *Examen de la Obra de Herbert Quain*'. (Borges 1989/96: 1.429)
3. This is why I do not share Jauss's opinion that Borges foretold the Reception Theory of the Konstanz School (1987: 30ss.).
4. See Jakobson regarding realism and fantastic literature (1971: 373-391); also Höfner (1980); Wünsch (1991: 17ss.); Thomsen and Fischer (1985) and Penning (1985: 37-38, 50).
5. Borges (1989/96: 1.444-450, 2.45-47, and 2.177): 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', 'Magias parciales del Quijote' and 'Parábola de Cervantes y el Quijote'.
6. Baudrillard considers Borges's writing as a simulation of a second degree. I have pointed out elsewhere the Baudrillard is mistaken on this issue since Borges's writing is a simulation in itself; cf. A. de Toro 1992, 1994a, 1995.
7. I have dealt with the notion that Borges's writing is 'beyond literature' in A. de Toro (1999a: 137-162, 1999b: 129-153).
8. This is discussed by Hugo within his historical-cultural theory in *Préface de Cromwell* (1971).
9. de Toro (1992, 1994a, 1995). I am referring to the following text of Borges y Foucault: 'El idioma analítico de John Wilkins' (Borges 1989/96: 2.86): 'En sus remotas páginas está escrito que los animales se dividen en (a) pertenecientes al Emperador, (b) embalsamados, (c) amaestrados, (d) lechones, (e) sirenas, (f) fabulosos, (g) perros sueltos, (h) incluidos en esta clasificación, (i) que se agitan como locos, (j) innumerables, (k) dibujados con un pincel finísimo de pelo de camello, (l) etcétera, (m) que acaban de romper el jarrón, (n) que de lejos parecen moscas'.

Foucault (1966: 7): 'Dans l'émerveillement de cette taxinomie [d'une certaine encyclopédie chinoise citée par Borges], ce qu'on rejoint d'un bond, ce qui, à la faveur de l'apologue, nous est indiqué: l'impossibilité nue de penser cela. ... La monstruosité ici n'altère aucun corps réel, ne modifie en rien le bestiaire de l'imagination; elle ne se cache dans la profondeur d'aucune pouvoir étrange. ... Ce qui transgresse toute imagination, toute pensée possible, c'est simplement la série alphabétique (a, b, c, d) qui lie à toutes les autres chacune de ces catégories. ... La monstruosité que Borges fait circuler dans son énumération consiste au contraire en ceci que l'échappée commune des rencontres s'y trouve lui-même ruiné. Ce qui est impossible, ce n'est pas le voisinage des choses, c'est le site lui-même où elles pourraient voisiner. Les animaux ... où

pourraient-ils jamais se rencontrer, sauf dans la page qui la transcrit? Où peuvent-ils se juxtaposer sinon dans le non-lieu du langage? mais celui-ci, en les déployant, n'ouvre jamais qu'un espace impensable'.

10. Cf. 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius': 'Los metafísicos de Tlön no buscan la verdad ni siquiera la verosimilitud: buscan el asombro. Juzgan que la metafísica es una rama de la literatura fantástica' (Borges 1989/96: 1.436).

Borges repite esta fórmula en una entrevista (1985: 23): 'Son el ápice de la literatura fantástica. El Dios de Spinoza, por ejemplo, supera a todo lo inventado por Kafka o Poe. Y no lo digo contra la teología o filosofía, al contrario, es una exaltación de ellas. Una obra como la *Ética* de Spinoza o *El mundo como voluntad y representación*, de Schopenhauer, o el sistema del Buda son obras maestras de la imaginación, sí'.

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Alfonso de Toro (b. 1955) is Chair at the Institute of Romance Languages and Literatures for French, Spanish, Latin-American, and Portuguese Studies, and Professor at the University of Leipzig <detro@rz.uni-leipzig.de>. His principal research interests include literary theory, theory of culture, semiotics, postmodernity, and postcoloniality. His major publications include *Los laberintos del tiempo. Temporalidad y narración en la novela contemporánea* (1992 [2d ed. 2002]), *Cambio de paradigma en el pensamiento latinoamericano, El debate del postcolonialismo en diálogo con Latinoamérica* (ed. with F. de Toro, 1999), *The Thought and the Knowledge in the Twentieth Century* (with F. de Toro, 1999), and *El siglo de Borges Literatura – Ciencia – Filosofía* (ed. with S. Regazzoni, 2000).

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Special Issue

Jorge Luis Borges: The praise of signs

Guest Editor:

LISA BLOCK DE BEHAR

Contents/Sommaire

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Lisa Block de Behar</i> | |
| Preface | 1 |
| <i>Iván Almeida</i> | |
| Borges and Peirce, on abduction and maps | 13 |
| <i>Jean Bessière</i> | |
| Beyond solipsism: The function of literary imagination in Borges's narratives and criticism | 33 |
| <i>Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron</i> | |
| The feeling of strangeness and the 'unknown relation' | 49 |
| <i>Alfonso de Toro</i> | |
| The foundation of western thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: The postmodern and the postcolonial discourse in Jorge Luis Borges | 67 |
| <i>Claudia González Costanzo</i> | |
| A garden for ideoscopy | 95 |
| <i>Jorge Medina Vidal</i> | |
| Partial approaches to truth through 'legitimization' and 'sight' | 109 |
| <i>Floyd Merrell</i> | |
| Borges's realities and Peirce's semiosis: Our world as factfablefiction | 117 |
| <i>Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu</i> | |
| Pure line: An essay in Borgermeneutics | 141 |
| <i>Susan Petrilli</i> | |
| Text metempsychosis and the racing tortoise: Borges and translation | 153 |
| <i>Augusto Ponzio</i> | |
| Reading and translation in Borges's <i>Autobiographical Essay</i> | 169 |
| <i>Luz Rodríguez Carranza</i> | |
| Dissenting mildly: A teacher as a popular journalist | 181 |

vi *Contents/Sommaire*

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| <i>László Scholz</i> | |
| Artifices | 197 |
| <i>Noemi Ulla</i> | |
| Poems written to poets | 207 |