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## How European is it?

[William Rowe](#)

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*Un hombre puede ser enemigo de otros hombres [ . . . ] pero no de un país*

(Jorge Luis Borges)

*A man can be the enemy of other men [ . . . ] but not of a country*

*El éxtasis no repite sus símbolos* (Jorge Luis Borges)

*Ecstasy does not repeat its symbols*

### 1. Frontiers

I begin with a piece of writing from 1924:

The Rhine is still the Rhine, the great divider. You feel it as you cross. The flat, frozen, watery places. Then the cold and curving river. Then the other side, seeming so cold, so empty, so frozen, so forsaken. The train stands and steams fiercely. Then it draws through the flat Rhine plain, past frozen pools of flood-water, and frozen fields, in the emptiness of this bit of occupied territory.

Immediately you are over the Rhine, the spirit of place has changed. There is no more attempt at the bluff of geniality. The marshy places are frozen. The fields are vacant. There seems nobody in the world.

It is as if the life had retreated eastwards. As if the Germanic life were slowly ebbing away from contact with western Europe, ebbing to the deserts of the east.

This is part of 'A Letter from Germany', written by D.H. Lawrence in 1924 and published posthumously in 1934. To read it in 1996, from inside the current boundaries of the European Community, is to be made aware of how the frontier between inside and outside has moved eastwards and southwards. What is called 'European' has expanded - however one draws the boundary - but if Europe is the EC it is becoming increasingly difficult for people from outside to get in. All immigration is now subject to a single computer archive. Europe has been and is a concern with frontiers, keeping those who are not 'ready' - formerly the 'barbarians', to use one word for many - outside. But is the EC Europe? Where - an old topic for lapidary phrases - does Europe end? How European is it? And what happens if one were to read Lawrence's haunting statement from the work of Borges?

Let me be clear: that would not mean reading an English writer through an Argentinian one. The boundaries called up in the words *English* and *Argentinian* would spoil the pleasure of reading, one form of which is Borges's anarchic utopia in which all books are imagined as written by a single author - a complete deterritorialization of reading. Those adjectives, *English* and *Argentinian*, make a territory national and a nation territorial, and their literatures an expression of those fantastic wholes. Literary nationalism has the ground taken from under it in Borges's essay 'El escritor argentino y la tradición' or in the place called Tlön (in the story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius') whose literature has no nouns - and therefore no territorial adjectives derived from them. Placing Borges alongside Lawrence helps to reveal how radical Borges's handling of frontiers is.

To read across frontiers, which in different ways is the invitation of all of the *Ficciones* stories, includes doubting whether everything inside a country can be an expression of it:

Pensé que un hombre puede ser enemigo de otros hombres, de otros momentos de otros hombres, pero no de un país: no de luciérnagas, palabras, jardines, cursos de agua, ponientes. (F, 103)

I thought that a man can be the enemy of other men, of other moments of other men, but not of a country: not of fireflies, words, gardens, streams, sunsets.

The thought belongs to Yu Tsun, who, in 'The Garden of Forking Paths', is a Chinese, spying for the Germans against the British in the First World War. Most of the stories in *Fictions* were written during the Second World War, a time of exacerbation of frontiers and bloodshed for territory. But how inescapable is that lining up of territory, culture and language as identity - of nation and State as Fatherland? For the present, I would like to suggest that those concentric symmetries depend on a particular unification of time. Later, I will point to how the materials of *Fictions* include the formation of the Argentinian State, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But for the moment I want to return to the question: what happens if one reads the terms of European frontier-making from Borges's work?

## **2. Residue or Sacrifice**

Yu Tsun's narrative - and Borges's text, whose title, 'The Garden of Forking Paths', is also the title of the first half of *Fictions* - ends with an incompatibility: the Chinaman has managed to send a message to his German chief (Viktor Runeberg, a name that piles up victory / sacred signs / mountain / a well-known German protestant hymn, in different combinations of nouns and adjectives) by sacrificing a human being for his name:

El Jefe [. . .] sabe que mi problema era indicar [. . .] la ciudad que se llama Albert y que no hallé otro medio que matar a una persona de ese nombre. (F, 111)

The Chief [. . .] knows my problem was to indicate [. . .]the city called Albert, and that I found no other means to do so than to kill a man of that name.

But his final statement is: 'No sabe (nadie puede saber) mi innumerable contrición y cansancio.' (F, 111; 'He does not know (no one can know) my innumerable contrition and weariness.') The innumerable, the unnarratable: how to reconcile this with the success of the secret message? Contrition and weariness become the latter's residue.

It is possible to read the incompatibility of message and residue as a subject for Literary Theory, which would amount to putting a particular boundary on how the story is to be read. But what happens if one reads this story from other Borges stories? Say from 'The God's Writing', in the collection *El aleph*, much of which was also written during the Second World War. The narrator is a Maya priest, held in captivity by a pyramid-burning Spanish conquistador. The priest's concern is to discover a magic statement ('una sentencia mágica') written by the native god on the first day of creation, because this statement is capable of undoing present misfortune ('apta para conjurar esos males'). He does not know where the god's statement is to be found or what material and what signs it is made of (a mountain might be the god's word), but it occurs to him that if a voice or word ('voz') is articulated by a god, it cannot be 'inferior al universo o menos que la suma del tiempo' (EA, 119; 'inferior to the universe or less than the sum of time'). Which actually makes it a message without a residue, that is, the Word. At that point he becomes dizzy ('me infundió una especie de vértigo').

He then experiences - that is, the text produces - two configurations: the first suffocating, the second releasing. The first is a succession of infinitely concentric dreams. The endless circles inside each other - configuring the desire for, or addiction to, totality that the word 'universe' conjures - he discovers to be worse than the prison of stone he is confined in. The second offers a different type of space-time, bordered but infinitely expansive:

Yo vi una Rueda altísima, que no estaba delante de mis ojos, ni detrás, ni a los lados, sino en todas partes, a un tiempo. Esa Rueda estaba hecha de agua, pero también de fuego, y era (aunque se veía el borde) infinita. Entretejidas, la formaban todas las cosas que serán, que son y que fueron. (EA, 121)

I saw an exceedingly high Wheel, which was not before my eyes, nor behind me, nor to the sides, but in every place at one time. That Wheel was made of water, but also of fire, and it was (though its edge could be seen) infinite. Interwoven, all things that are, were and shall be formed it.

The ability to understand everything ('entendiéndolo todo') makes him capable also of understanding the god's writing. But, at this point or threshold, he decides not to use the fourteen-word formula.

Quien ha entrevisto el universo, quien ha entrevisto los ardientes designios del universo, no puede pensar en un hombre, en sus triviales dichas o desventuras, aunque ese hombre sea él. Ese hombre *ha sido él* y ahora no le importa. Qué le importa la suerte de aquel otro, qué le importa la nación de aquel otro, si él, ahora es nadie. (EA, 121)

Whoever has seen the universe, whoever has beheld the fiery design of the universe, cannot think in terms of one man, of that man's trivial fortunes or misfortunes, though he be that very man. That man *has been he* and now matters no more to him. What is the life of that other to him, the nation of that other to him, if he, now, is no one?

The priest has been split into two men: the one who is now nobody, without nation or identity, and doesn't care about those things, and the other who has been subsumed into a totalitarian scheme, in other words, has been sacrificed. The first man, the one who now speaks, has become a mere residue to the splendour he has seen. The god's writing, for its part, is precisely a message without a residue, a language that leaves nothing out, like the language of angels, who, as Borges writes, 'speak through intelligible species, that is through direct representations and without any verbal mystery.' A language without leakage or ambiguities is the property of transcendent beings - or the desire of human beings who claim to be the agents of some transcendent principle that demands sacrifice from other people - the most notorious twentieth-century example being the idea of bloodshed and sacrifice (of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals . . .) in order to make Europe 'whole'. Less openly, such a language, and the power it conjures, expresses the desires of bureaucratic control

Rather than that, the man (not a priest any more) in Borges's story prefers to be a residue. That way he sees things as unlimited multiplicities: which is what writing is - not the god's but Borges's. The working of Borges's writing, with its exposure of that desire for totality, may be contrasted with Protestant justification and Hegelian dialectic, which are both revealed as particularly German forms of sacrificial thinking in the story 'Deutsches requiem', whose protagonist writes 'Nadie puede ser [. . .] nadie puede probar una copa de agua o partir un trozo de pan, sin justificación.' (EA 84; 'No-one can exist [. . .] no-one can put a glass of water to his mouth or break a piece of bread, without justificación.') But, to quote Walter Abish's title, 'How German is it'?

### 3. Interstices or Encirclement

The Maya priest's visionary wheel - a multiple space available as simultaneity - resembles the Aleph in the story of that name (dated 1943). The Aleph cannot be narrated: the 'unresolvable' problem is 'la enumeración siquiera parcial, de un conjunto infinito' (EA, 167; 'the enumeration, albeit partial, of an infinite set'). All that can be done is to 'transcribe' it partially ('algo'). But this is precisely what its owner - a spectacularly bad poet in Buenos Aires - has been doing, in order to write a turgid epic poem. The poet in question is called Carlos Argentino Daneri: once again the territorial adjective, here as Christian name; the State baptizing its sons with appropriately prestigious inheritances (the Argentinian Dante or Charles Darwin, the latter become, after the age of thirty, in his own words, 'a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts' and incapable of reading 'a line of poetry').

But the Aleph, endlessly multiple, is incompatible with the epic story of the nation as a timeless splendour. It institutes an anti-epic time, a time with endless residues, like William Empson's 'missing dates' in the poem of that title, written in the 1930s, whose repeated chorus runs 'The waste remains, the waste remains and kills' - no immortality there! In 'The Garden of Forking Paths', any potential for epic narrative offered by events of the First World War is undone by their porousness to multiple interstices. The story is framed as a gloss on page 22 of Liddell Hart's standard History of the War, but the frame is exceeded by the gloss - the diegesis makes a residue that is incommensurable with history. The sub-plot (Yu Tsun's machinations) not only introduces into the plot an interstice that becomes an abyss, a hole which cannot be closed; it also includes a further - redundant - sub-plot which is an endlessly bifurcating novel. Such an arrangement is inadmissible in historiography, where time is an explanatory, or at least accumulative, process. In that Chinese novel, every event has several outcomes: enemies become friends and vice versa, the lines cannot be drawn and human beings, objects and territories still less, therefore, lined up. The sequence of sub-plots, each inside its predecessor, is potentially endless; topologically, each successive inside becomes an outside, turning the Mayan priest's concentric circles inside out and making a machine that works in an opposite way to Darwin's, in that it permits no general laws.

The unlimited bifurcations may be taken as a modelling of time: the bifurcating novel of the sub-sub plot, whose title is the title of the whole text, is 'un invisible laberinto de tiempo' (F, 105; 'an invisible labyrinth of time'). This is not the absolute, uniform time of Newton, or of the Universal History proposed by the Enlightenment or positivism, modls for the histories of the new nations of emancipated Latin America. Its proximity produces a particular sensation in Yu Tsun:

Sentí a mi alrededor y en mi oscuro cuerpo una invisible, intangible pululación. No la pululación de los divergentes, paralelos y finalmente coalescentes ejércitos, sino una agitación más inaccesible, más íntima y que ellos de algún modo prefiguraban. (F, 108)

I felt about me and in my dark body an invisible, intangible swarming. Not the swarming of the divergent, parallel and finally coalescent armies [the Chinese novel describes the movements of Chinese armies], but a more inaccessible, more intimate agitation that they in some manner prefigured.

The term 'pululación' could equally well be translated as 'spawning'. The Spanish Academy's *Diccionario Manual* gives as definitions 'empezar a brotar [. . .] vástagos un vegetal; abundar, multiplicarse en un paraje los insectos y sabandijas'. The references to vegetation and insects introduce a somewhat less human, or less mammalian, implication than Corominas's derivation of 'pulular' from the Latin *pullus* = 'cría de animal' giving the meaning 'aparecer en abundancia'.

Yu Tsun's narrative continues:

Volví a sentir esa pululación [. . .] Me pareció que el húmedo jardín que rodeaba la casa estaba saturado hasta lo infinito de invisibles personas. (F, 110)

Once again I felt the swarming sensation of which I have spoken [. . .] It seemed to me that the humid garden that surrounded the house was infinitely saturated with invisible persons.

This teeming or seething is, because of its infinity of dimensions, not just incompatible with history - with grand narratives, or even with any accumulation in time - but ultimately with any narrative: the text ends, a few sentences further on, with the innumerable.

The final paragraph speaks of the residue: of what is left over after the Chinaman has succeeded in sending his message - in adding his invisible sentence, his redundant writing to the History of the War. 'Lo demás es irreal, insignificante' (F, 111; 'the rest is unreal, insignificant'), he declares, and finally speaks of his 'innumerable contrición y cansancio' ('innumerable contrition and weariness'). As last words, these recall (Shakespeare's) Hamlet's. If taken as a model of reading, the text displays a huge porosity to European literature. It approximates to Borges's ideal horizon of reading all books as if written by a single author. There are various ways of considering this aspect of Borges's writing. The one most commonly discussed is intertextuality. I prefer to suggest another one: the fact that this complexity of association implies particular memory structures.

Crucial in all this is how form and material, signs and their material supports, continually change places, which is to run against one of the central lines of continental European thought, hylomorphism, and to move into unlimited empiricism. For example, the sub-plots of 'The Garden of Forking Paths' can be taken as form or information: as formal interpolations of narrative sequences or as interpolations in the sense of an archive of glosses, but glosses which in turn become interstices in the formal organisation of the story. As bifurcations they

make nonsense of any *relato de identidad* (story of identity), just as porosity undermines the physical frontiers that defend national territories.

The huge range of textual echoes can be read as erudition, as an example of T S Eliot's idea of tradition (the whole of European literature since Homer), that is, a stable inheritance, as in the Classical idea of a fixed stack of *topoi*, which add up to an organized space or fixed spatialization of memory. 'The Library of Babel' offers an explosive parody of such an attitude: the stacked cells that the librarians live inside of only *seem* to guarantee the order (authority) the institution promises. And Borges's parodic handling of the fixity inherent in the notion of Archive is well known. A prime example is the so-called 'Chinese encyclopedia', mentioned above, which appears in the *Manual de zoología fantástica* (as well as in 'John Wilkins's Analytic language'). There is also the remark Borges made in a lecture, that 'it would be fair to say that Western culture is not pure in the sense that it is only partially Western' ('cabría decir que la cultura occidental es impura en el sentido de que sólo es a medias occidental').

#### 4. The State, Monuments and Chaos

How and where does the anarchic instability arise? If the material of the interpolations or bifurcations consists mainly in texts written in Europe (even the Chinese armies have come via there), their form - in this story once again there is a 'pululación' or swarming effect - is time. But time is not formal but material. Time enters Borges's texts not as the uniformly measured mathematical time of Newton but as the innumerable time of John Locke - or of Ireneo Funes, one of the most interesting actions of the story 'Funes the Memorious' being the way in which it unleashes inside the art of memory the incessant movement of time: an invaded or invasive archive.

'Funes the Memorious', dated 1942, locates the story it tells in the 1880s. Funes the character's brief life spans 1868 to 1889. Described as a Uruguayan with characteristics of the 'orillero antiguo' (old-time inhabitant of the suburbs), the first feature which takes him out of the ordinary - which individuates - is his sense of absolute time: he knows the time to the minute, 'sin consultar el cielo' (F 118; 'without consulting the sky') - no gaucho he! The final image given is that of Funes's face at dawn, aged 19: 'me pareció monumental, como el bronce, más antiguo que Egipto, anterior a las profecías y a las pirámides' (F, 127; 'he seemed to me monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids').

That statement, which in an immediate sense belongs to the narrator of the story, includes several voices, one of them that of the biographer as maker of public monuments. Where is that voice coming from? What society, what enunciative field makes it possible? Because apart from the Romantic style - appropriate to



the 1880s in that that period may be taken, in terms of literary history, as a fulfillment in positivist monumentality of Sarmiento's romantic epic - there are specific issues about the field it emerges from and speaks of ('between the lines').

The 1880s are a key decade in the consolidation of the modern Argentinian State. Technological modernization (centred on beef and railways) and rationalization of the public sphere, converged with a new politics and logistics of territory: the Conquest of the Desert, against the Indians to the South, conducted through new high-speed technologies (electric telegraph and Remington repeater rifle), had been accomplished by General Julio Argentino Roca, who became president in 1880. The old, rural Argentina became, increasingly, a memory. The old, porous, frontier became a logistical and ideological wall. The State was now able to give material fulfilment to that discourse of monumentality which it was supposed to embody.

The connections between industrial technology as discipline or training and the internalization of clock time are well known: Funes does not consult the sky, marker of preindustrial time as opposed to what, in Britain, used to be called railway time because the uniform time of rail timetables did not coincide with the time of sundials. Less easy to document are the alterations in the modes of memory storage, though the general sense is clear: a shift towards writing and reading as both site and modelling of memory. Funes, who learns Latin by reading Pliny's *Natural History*, exists between two epochs or in both at once: if Pliny's chaotic collection of data represents a 'pre'-modern episteme, Funes's perception of time - as a single and absolute series dependent on clocks - is modern. Yet the epochally disparate attributes of his mentality cannot be read homogeneously, since they model the act of reading differently and speak of different types of mental training: on the one hand the archaic and non-classified and on the other the modern, classified and tabulated; the one can be read from the other, in either direction.

Of course, the label 'mentality' applied to Funes is problematic, because it depends on his being the subject of a biography, and biography sculpts an identity which is incommensurable with micro perception. The incommensurabilities of the story can be taken as a collision of epochs (archaic and modern) and of spaces (urban and rural). Yet to organize one's reading in this particular way is to organize it sociologically, that is along precisely those lines of rational organisation which were made possible by modernity: it is precisely such acts of classification that become untenable if read from Funes's 'mind'. Because it is not just that Funes's perceptions are chaotic, they are also perfectly ordered:

Nosotros, de un vistazo, percibimos tres copas en una mesa; Funes, todos los vástagos y racimos y frutos que comprende una parra. Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y

dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que había mirado una vez y con las líneas de la espuma que un remo levantó en el Río Negro en la acción del Quebracho. (F, 123)

We, in one glance, can perceive three cups on a table; Funes, all the leaves and tendrils and fruit that make up a vine. He knew the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on the thirtieth of April eighteen eighty two and he could compare them in his memory with the whirls on a book bound in Spanish leather that he had looked at once and with the lines of foam raised by an oar in the Rio Negro during the battle of Quebracho.

The battle referred to occurred in 1825 and was, in the words of a note in an English edition of *Ficciones*, 'a landmark in Uruguayan history'. Yet what are vast constructs such as 'Uruguay' and 'history' beside Funes's perceptions? The infinity of particulars would make them untenable; they are the province of the narrator, who introduces a number of references to the establishment of Uruguay as an independent territory. In this sense, the text produces an emergence of chaos inside those large orders of space and time. But it is not just a question of chaos arising inside order; order also emerges inside chaos, in that everything, for Funes, is capable of becoming a form. Funes's perceptions can be read in two directions which cannot be synthesized: everything becomes form / all forms dissolve. Chaos arises inside order and order inside chaos, endlessly, as in chaos theory, or as in Heraclitan fire or Dionysian ecstasy. Why do critics tend to ignore this dimension of Borges's writing? This happens, I suggest, because because literary criticism tends to work from inherited assumptions about the stability of texts, assumptions which depend upon the stabilities provided by institutions.

This therefore is a text that offers not just a historicization of the act of reading but a radical disturbance of it, that is a disturbance of the training which has taught one to extract recognizable patterns. It proposes a poetics that cannot be contained inside a sociology of knowledge. Writing/reading is placed at a threshold of emergence, just as Mallarmé in his epochal poem 'Un coup de dés', invented ways of thinking 'le hazard', in other words of producing becoming, without recourse to gods, including the 'mortal god' of the State and its bureaucratic organisation. Where Mallarmé uses an imagery of shipwreck, that is, of the collapse of the most advanced technology of the time (1897), Borges stages a shipwreck of European knowledge and of the Latin American invention of nations.

Funes sees everything minutely:

Refiere Swift que el emperador de Lilliput discernía el movimiento del minuterero; Funes discernía continuamente los tranquilos avances de la corrupción, de las caries, de la fatiga. (F, 125-126)

Swift relates that the emperor of Lilliput could discern the movement of the minute hand; Funes could continuously discern the tranquil advance of corruption, of decay, of fatigue.

That capacity implies, in the social use of technology, the possibility of total surveillance via total registration (writing), something only the State as bureaucratic machine that produces classification, archives, files, can promise. But Funes's capability also displays the impossibility of total storage: he remembers everything but it takes him a day to assemble the memories of a previous day. The problem is time. Or, more precisely, time-space.

There are different ways of responding to this problem - different places it can be read from. But before considering these I would like to mention a related issue.

#### **4. Reading Machine/Hole Machine**

European culture enters the text of 'Funes' through a multitude of references, some named and some not. They include - to mention just a few - Plato, Kant, early church history, Locke, Pliny, Linnaeus and Swift. But *reference* is not an adequate term. Because Borges's text is over-glossed - over-determined - in a kind of unboundaried heteroglossia. In other words, there is here the proposal of an endlessly porous operation of reading. That porousness does not, however, entail passivity. The text is a reading machine, that produces readings of other texts, readings of other readings, including itself.

How does the machine work? Better, what is the work it does? Funes's world - in fact the wrong word because sensations, perceptions and memories are the same for him so that there is not yet a world, or what Wittgenstein, in the first sentence of the *Tractatus*, calls 'the case' for him. But, if 'world' is used as shorthand, Funes's world is innumerable - and this is the case whether numbers are taken as signs or as underlying ratios. The reading actions that the text displays occur at a particular intersection: between the innumerable and the archive (most, though by no means all of which is European). The term 'cultural code', used by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, is not appropriate to the memory-stores of written texts that are implicated, because the effect of the intersection between the archive and the innumerable is not a codification but an instability.

According to Beatriz Sarlo,

'Funes the Memorious' can be understood as a fictional *mise-en-scène* of the enslavement of a discourse by direct experience. Funes has an infinite memory but is incapable, Borges asserts, of thinking: 'To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence.' Literature is precisely (and

specifically), a symbolic practice that breaks with the immediacy of memory, perception and repetition. Literature works with the heterogeneous, it cuts, pastes, skips over things, mixes: operations which Funes cannot carry out with his perceptions, nor, as a result, with his memories.

But from where, and according to what organising principles does literature carry out its cutting, pasting and skipping over? Sarlo associates Funes, as 'doomed to remain in thrall to the material of his experience', with Argentina as 'peripheral' to the 'centre', which is the 'advanced' countries that dominate in the production of wealth and knowledge. The implication seems to be that Argentina - unlike Europe - only becomes readable from the outside, Funes representing the River Plate area without literature.

This can be checked with an experiment. The idea would be to test what happens when 'Funes' is read alongside two texts that it is the 'precursor' of in Borges's sense of that word - that is, texts that select it - one by Juan José Saer (born in 1937 in the Province of Santa Fe, north of Buenos Aires) and the other by Paul Celan (Rumania 1920 - Paris 1970). In Saer's novel, *Nadie nada nunca* (1980), whose events occur during the recent military dictatorship, a character referred to as 'el Bañero' enters a process similar to Funes's:

su universo conocido perdía cohesión, pulverizándose, transformándose en un torbellino de corpúsculos sin forma, y tal vez sin fondo, donde ya no era tan fácil buscar un punto en el cual hacer pie [ . . . ]

una muchedumbre de imágenes, de latidos, de pulsaciones lo atraviesan, continuos, como una piedra que cuando se la da vuelta deja ver el grumo efervescente de un hormiguero.

his known universe lost coherence, became pulverized, turning into a whirlwind of corpuscles without form, and perhaps without background, where it was no longer easy to find a place to stand [ . . . ]

a multitude of images, vibrations, pulsations pass through him, continuous, like a stone that when turned over reveals the effervescent mass of an anthill.

One of the most interesting things in Saer's novel, which uses Heraclitus's Fragment 30 as an epigraph, is the effect of reading these passages upon one's sense of time, and of that on what is taken to be history (specifically upon the history of 'el proceso', the period of military rule). Reading them can also put a different inflection upon Sarlo's assumption that 'Funes' is 'a *conte philosophique* on literary theory [which] can be understood as a parable dealing with the possibilities and impossibilities of representation'; 'a hyperbolic image of the devastating effects of an absolute and naive realism which trusts the "natural" force of perceptions and events.' Because read from Saer, Funes's 'world' emerges clearly as a dramatization of pure becoming, the becoming that precedes 'experience' and that needs to be stabilized before historiography can

organise time. And, with its mentions of the history of the foundation of Uruguay as nation-state, the text can be read as a machine that makes holes in the imaginary unity of that history. Or, perhaps more accurately, 'Funes' can be read as displaying a reading action that makes holes in the making of that nation-state, and by implication, of that other one called Argentina. And the interstices occurring in that way of reading arise not just between entities (Argentina / Europe, country / city, etc.) but inside entities. This is where the apparent paradox of a space that is bordered but expansive becomes particularly interesting. A space that has borders but the multiple inside it sloughs off any single definition ( or predication) like 'English' or 'Argentinian' or 'Chinese' or 'German'. Deterritorialization does not mean having no borders.

Once one starts to read 'Funes the Memorious' non-allegorically, Funes the character begins to resemble what Borges in 1952 said about Macedonio Fernández at the latter's graveside:

Filósofo es, entre nosotros, el hombre versado en la historia de la filosofía, en la cronología de los debates y en las bifurcaciones de las escuelas. [. . .] A Macedonio, en cambio [. . .] las circunstancias y las fechas de la filosofía no le importaron, pero sí la filosofía.

A philosopher, among us [between ourselves], is the man who is versed in the history of philosophy, in the chronology of debates, and in the bifurcations of the schools. [. . .] What was important to Macedonio, however [. . .] was not the circumstances and dates of philosophy, but philosophy itself.

Paul Celan, born into a Jewish family in Romania, in a poem published in the book *Nomansrose* in 1963, writes in German:

There was earth inside them, and

they dug.

They dug and they dug, so their day

went by for them, their night. And they did not praise God,

who, so they heard, wanted all this

[. . .]

They dug and heard nothing more;

they did not grow wise, invented no song,

thought up for themselves no language.

The poem places pure materiality - the non-coded - on the inside: earth without inscription. 'Funes', if placed alongside that proposal, may be read not as an allegory of realism failing but as an exploration of an extreme, high-energy collision between language as inherited meanings - which shape memory and perception and thus make experience possible - and the force of the non-signifying.

Sarlo points out that Borges locates the scene of his writing as 'las orillas', that is at an in-between space where city and country, modernized present and rural past meet. And that from this space he generates intersections - mixtures - between Argentinian and European literature. What is the effect of the intersections? In 'History of the Warrior and the Captive', the place in between cultures - between the savage (Indian) and the civilized (Argentinian) - is 'dizzy': the collision of mutually incompatible codings takes us to something that is not coded, to a zone that is a threshold of ecstasy (Borges uses that word). Not the savage outside, as in Kavafy's 'The Barbarians', nor the savage inside, as in Freud or Jung, but an indiscernible or multiple in-between.

In 'Funes the Memorious', the possibility of the ecstatic is continually pulled back into the narrator's archival, Romantic and monumental sensibility: his language enlists the rhetoric of official biographies, placing Funes inside the museum of national biography.

A recent book, *The Politics of Time*, by Peter Osborne, states the following:

Modernity is our primary secular category of historical totalization. But what justifies this totalization of history, theoretically, if such an operation of necessity homogenizes and represses, reduces or forgets, certain forms of difference?

In 'Funes the Memorious', Borges writes:

Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el aborrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos. (F, 126)

To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate [in their presence].

'Almost' is a key word in this passage and some of its force is taken away by the addition of 'in their presence' in the English translation. If the details in Funes's world were entirely immediate there would, in the strict sense, be no mediation (for example by the concept of 'presence'), that is, no intervention of any sign structures at all and thus, for example, no language. The 'almost' places Funes at a threshold, facing two ways, like the Yahoos in 'Doctor Brodie's Report' who can be read as simultaneously inside and outside language and culture. One can experiment with reading the two sentences just quoted in different directions. The second read from the first makes Funes's world a representation of incapacity due to lack of training - a lack of preparation which, read in the context of State imperatives in 1880s Argentina, looks like an incapacity for primary

accumulation, a notorious defect of the semi-nomadic gaucho who, by the 1880s, had disappeared. But read from the second sentence, the first, lapidary sentence - Kant spoken by the monumental voice of La Patria - starts to sound hollow - like a need to sound monumental - and Funes's world can be read as the 'pre'-modern, like one of those general stores that has a bit of everything (*tienda de abarrotes*), like Pliny as opposed to Linnaeus, like pre-national literature as opposed to national literature, like time in Locke and Hume as opposed to time as told in the nineteenth century epic of progress which was emulated by the Argentine state bureaucracy. These are some of the places from which Borges's text produces readings of modernity.

So it is a question of what is possible between the innumerable and the monumental in the reading machine. One reads the one from the other, in both directions, but in a condition of permanent non-completion. Holes are made in the compacted, monumental text of history, while the innumerable is made readable (writable), when read from a training in stable categories. Holes are then produced and make movement possible. Instead of interpretation as selection that produces wholes, which is the model of reading proposed by Sarlo and practised by the narrator of the story, reading as a hole machine, producing endless interstices.

## **Conclusion**

After this, is there a home base to come back to? What Borges leaves one with is not precisely a place from which to read. The endlessly in-between is not a place, whether place is a question of cultural geography or of concepts. As Proust wrote, 'We find that our wisdom begins where the author's ends; we would like him to give us answers, when all he can do is give us desires.' If Borges displays, among other things, the effects of the state upon reading, that is where our wisdom has to begin. And the desires he leaves us with? They include, I suggest, a non-sacrificial relationship with language.