

## Borges's Postmodern Landscape

Mario Vrbančić  
*University of Zadar*

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## Recommended Citation

Vrbančić, Mario. "Borges's Postmodern Landscape." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.4 (2015): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2831>>

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**Volume 17 Issue 4 (December 2015) Article 5**  
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**"Borges's Postmodern Landscape"**

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss4/5>>

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.4 (2015)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss4/>>

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**Abstract:** In his article "Borges's Postmodern Landscape" Mario Vrbančić examines specific constructs of space -- among them heterotopia (Michel Foucault) and hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard) -- and applies them to narration and narrative strategies in Jorge Luis Borges's texts. Vrbančić posits that postmodern mapping undermines our known familiar geography and that authors like Borges who experimented with different spaces and connections in their texts, represent postmodernism *avant la lettre*.

## Mario VRBANČIĆ

### Borges's Postmodern Landscape

"The universe (which others call library)," writes Jorge Luis Borges in his story "The Library of Babel," "is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (112). From those galleries of seemingly endless self-referentiality, an artificial universe of letters and papers, springs a metaphoric force that inspired many postmodern literary productions and concepts, for instance that of heterotopia (Michel Foucault) and simulacrum (Jean Baudrillard). Rodrigo Quiroga in his *Borges and Memory: Encounters with the Human Brain* points out the importance of an intertextual view of reality, the fact that cross-disciplinary dialogue in conducting research is unavoidable. This is the case since "we may be little more than an assemblage of the various beliefs, anxieties and obsessions that gripped generations prior to our own," as Nick Kankahainen puts it (65). Quiroga points out that Borges "grew up reading the books in his father's library, a room that during his childhood appeared almost infinitely large and whose glass-lined shelves contained thousands of volumes", and later he worked in the National Library, "where he was appointed director in 1955, ironically the year in which his blindness advanced to the point that he could never read or write again" (24). Books and libraries were of enormous importance to Borges and perhaps they triggered ideas for his stories.

Foucault and Baudrillard draw ideas from Borges's "The Library of Babel" to develop and illustrate important segments of their theory. Hexagonal galleries, labyrinths of paper, endless rows of books, bookshelves, and corridors inspire these theoreticians' different discursive practices of defining, describing, and mapping the world. Foucault uses Borges's fable to disentangle the subtle and rhizoid movements of power and the construction of subjectivity and Baudrillard illustrates his "postmodern desert," the effacing of the metaphysics of representation and the cruising through the hyperreal by inverting Borges's parabola. The shelves in "The Library of Babel" are arranged in an indefinite, perhaps infinite, number of hexagonal galleries and these are reflected in a mirror by the entrance, which in turn only increases the sense of vertigo by insinuating that the library might indeed be both limitless and periodic. Books and mirrors are also conjoined in Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" where an elusive entry in the Anglo-American Cyclopaedia is first discovered upon, as Borges writes, "the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia" (68). Borges's library is endowed with characteristics of heterotopia and hyperreality. Heterotopia, the idea of a space of otherness, applies to Borges's story because the library is a sphere whose center is any hexagon and thus it undermines unity and turns everything into endless intertextual dispersion. The library is also hyperreal because it mirrors other texts rather than a stable external reality. Hence the decentering, destabilizing powers of mirrors facing other mirrors drive us into a hyperreal or heterotopic space. These two concepts, the hyperreal and the heterotopic, might serve as an itinerary for a journey through the two short stories "Tlön" and "The Aleph." While Borges's notion of the Aleph in his story mirrors the impossible unity of diversity through a mystic object and that may be read as heterotopia, "Tlön" indicates the gradual emerging of hyperreality.

The term heterotopia that was originally used in anatomy to refer to parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra, or, like tumors, alien, first appears in a new context in the preface to Foucault's *The Order of Things*. Foucault begins with the following observation: "This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought -- our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography -- breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed ... threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the same and the Other" (xv). The passage in question, Foucault recalls, was drawn from Borges's "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," a tale involving a rather bizarre taxonomy of animals. The animals are classified in a seemingly random order, without any logic, according to absurd attributes into "animals ... (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies" (xv). The system appears ostensibly to be no system at all, as if to suggest the absurdity of all classification in the age of the postmodern condition. However, Borges's parable throws us into the realm of what Foucault called heterotopia. With its hybridizing impossibility of world building and its perplexing juxtapositions, heterotopia seems to describe the unstable postmodern universe challenging the way we think and the possibility of thinking at all like the mysterious Aleph that can mirror our world. In Borges's story, the Aleph is a small mysterious object, a microcosmic speculation, described as "one of the points in space that contains all points" (280) or the place where, "without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist" (283) found in the cellar of the house of Carlos Argentino Daneri. In the postscript to his story, Borges catalogues the list of objects that could contain this "inconceivable universe": "the mirror attributed in the East to Iskandar dhu-al-Qarnayn, or Alexander the Great of Macedonia" in which "the entire universe was reflected" ("The Aleph" 285). Borges writes later that "the mirror that Tariq ibn-Zyda found in a tower (*1001 Nights* 272), the mirror that Lucian of Samosata examined on the moon (*True History* 1 26), the specular spear attributed by the first book of Capella's *Satyricon* to Jupiter, Merlin's "universal mirror" ("The Aleph" 285). In Borges's story, Carlos Argentino Daneri, an untalented poet draws his raw material from the Aleph to cover the whole planet with his dreary boring verses. "La Tierra," a poem to end all poems, a total representation of reality, is related to the miraculous Aleph and the Aleph itself, the little nutshell of microcosms and universe, in one way might be the exotic equivalent of the Library of Babel as the sum of all possible visual representations of the universe, from all possible camera angles, from all possible snapshots.

The Aleph reveals the endless play of meanings trying to give enclosure or structure to its impossible spatial quality. Especially inspiring is its cross-over from the pre-linguistic, mystic, non-verbal sphere to the verbal sphere, to the arbitrary sign, a text with its specific organizing quality. Hence, there are numerous meanings which we may attribute to the Aleph. On the one hand, the Aleph may be a type of mirror and thus a physical object. On the other hand, there are indications that the origin of the Aleph might be a mystical experience, for example Simurgh, a Persian mystic bird that contains all birds or certain spheres described by medieval French theologian and poet Alain de Lille, spheres whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere (on Simurgh and the "conference of birds" see, e.g., Yaghoobi). The Aleph can also be associated with Ezekiel, an angel with four faces directed to all sides of the world simultaneously. Edna Aizenberg argues that Borges made the Aleph the center of the story to emphasize the importance of the cabalistic symbol in the shaping of his world and she highlights that Borges has "given the name El Aleph -- not Labyrinths -- to the entire volume" (89). Like rebellious Jewish mystics who created a *corpus symbolicum*, a body of irrational images that can hint at enigmatic workings of god more effectively than any direct formulation, Borges uses mythopoeitics to describe the indescribable, or to express the inexpressible. According to Aizenberg "God as the infinite, hidden Source, the primordial Point that sustains all points, all of creation, was suggested by the motif of the *En-sof* ("endless") (87). This same aspect of the Divinity was also intimated by the Aleph, the first symbol in the sacred Hebrew script" (Aizenberg 87). Through the ancient Hebraic-scriptural tradition of addressing problems by metaphors, Borges creates his own *corpus symbolicum*. In *Fictional Worlds* Thomas G. Pavel posits that "The Aleph," like many other stories by Borges, expands our perception of fictional possibilities and he classifies the Aleph under the rubric of an impossible fictional being: "The Aleph is a mystic object about which one can neither speak properly nor keep silent: it belongs to the infinite class of ultra-Meinongian objects that not only do not exist in any current sense of the verb 'to exist' but cannot be adequately described in any conceivable language" (96). In contrast to Pavel's tracing of the Aleph to the border of "non-man's land" where language touches the silence of the inexpressible, Allen Thiher interprets the Aleph as a vertiginous whirlpool of language. In fact, in his *Words in Reflection*, Thiher reads all of Borges's works as an endless play, *ars combinatorica*, in accordance with modern theories of games and languages based on Wittgenstein's philosophy.

Despite these readings that understand Borges's mystical object as a reference to the play of arbitrary signs, there are also attempts to satisfy the "yearning for the signified." Floyd Merrel, for example, tries to resolve the paradoxes of the Aleph by using modern mathematics and physics and invokes the notions of infinity and finitude, time and timelessness, continuity and discontinuity, the One and the Many. He claims that the vision of the Aleph is impossible to realize in three-dimensional space. Hence, to perceive everything simultaneously, we must move to the fourth dimension. What becomes clear from these diverse interpretations is that the Aleph can refer to a wide range of things and concepts: god, various kinds of mystical experience, language games, panoramic visions induced by opium, and so on. And yet all these attributions and interpretations are equally legitimate interpretations and do not exclude each other. They are itself heterotopia, like myriad, infinite numbers of images enclosed in the Aleph. It is impossible to enumerate all the meanings which seem to be enfolded in this concept much like cinematic juxtapositions, cuts, and montage (Borges was a film critic in the 1930s). Taken together, these many interpretations postulate a reality more extensive and complicated than any thinkable representation: "here it is where writer's helplessness begins" ("The Aleph" 282). The enumeration is an epic resource whose effect aimed at exhausting reality. For instance, the list of things and personnel that Homer describes in the *Iliad* as the "Catalogue of Ships" gives the reader the illusion that all items have been included and that reality has been fully encompassed. In the case of the Aleph, like our present, this attempt is absurd, obsolete. We lost, as Foucault would say, the "tabula" theory that would enable such a tedious and miraculous task (see "Of Other").

Further, despite vertigo, metaphorically speaking, the impossibility of "getting out" once one finds oneself in the midst of the whirlpool of language, the reader can trace remnants, signals of the narrative that lead out of this enclosure. "I ... saw her violent hair, her haughty body, saw a cancer in her breast ... obscene, incredible, detailed letters that Beatriz had sent Carlos Argentino ... saw my face and my viscera, saw your face" ("The Aleph" 283-84). A flow of kaleidoscopic patterns and a long sentence of seemingly endless enumeration culminate in the narrator's revelation of "the horrendous remains of what had once, deliciously, been Beatriz Viterbo" and the illusion of the permanence of human existence ("The Aleph" 283). Thus these scattered fragments lead us to the beginning of the narrative, the death of Beatriz Viterbo with whom the narrator had been passionately in love. Her death triggers the narrator's metaphysical speculation about the meaning of life, about a fixed point in which we can anchor meaning, and he states defiantly that "The universe may change, but I shall not" ("The Aleph" 274). In his pathetic attempt to freeze the flow of time he dedicates his life to the memories of the beloved one, visiting for years her house on her birthday. The photos in Beatriz's department show her at early adolescence, at the time of her marriage; different poses and roles fracture her unique and stable identity posing the question which Beatriz the narrator will keep in his memory, and which Beatriz is real. The impossibility of such an effort is symbolized by the narrator's encounter with the chaos of the Aleph.

After four years of his "vainly erotic anniversaries" (139), the narrator is taken into the confidence of Carlos Argentino Daneri. The poet is a grotesque character who admires science and newly emerged gadgets: telephones, phonographs, the motion picture because they enable the modern age to have simultaneous insight into and control of the whole globe. His belief in modernity's ability to perceive and absorb the whole of reality -- he refers to glossaries, timetables, gazetteers, bulletins and to the ability to re-express reality -- parallels his attempt to cover the whole globe with his verses. Thus Daneri becomes a parody of Dante and his poem "La Tierra" (The Earth) a parody of the

*Divina Commedia*. His enterprise to versify the entire planet begins by buying diverse properties, diverse and disconnected like the Aleph itself: "by 1941 he had already dispatched several hectares of the state of north of Queensland, more than a kilometer of the course of the Ob, a gasworks north of Veracruz, the leading commercial establishments in the parish of Concepcion, Marian Cambaceres de Alvear's villa on Calle Once de Setiembre in Belgrano, and a Turkish bath not far from the famed Brighton Aquarium. He read me certain laborious passages from the Australian region of his poem" (277). The allusion to the *Divina Commedia* emphasizes the grotesqueness of Daneri's endeavor, an endeavor that classifies, measures, and simultaneously disenchanting any poetic impulses that might be hidden to penetrating scientific gaze. A comic interlude of Daneri's "Tierra" interacts in the story itself with the implicit reference to the *Divina Commedia* on one side and with the Aleph-vision on the other. The source of his poetic inspiration is the Aleph, but instead of giving us a divine, meaningful, allegorical vision of the world beyond, Daneri gives us a trivial vision of the world seen from the outside in terms of mere appearances and objects. On the other hand, the Aleph also gives us a "true" vision of this world since it reveals to its beholder the inside and the hidden, as when the narrator recalls seeing "the circulation of my dark blood" (283). The Aleph reveals in all its unbearable meaningfulness the horrors and the impossibility of holistic representation and thereby it contrasts both with Dante's god-inspired order and Daneri's neutral, documentary observation. If Daneri is a parody of Dante, in some sense anti-Dante, then Beatrice is anti-Beatrice. While Dante's Beatrice symbolizes a beatific vision, purity of poetry and love, the narrator experiences a chaotic and kaleidoscopic mass within Aleph as the narrator beholds the aforementioned "horrendous remains of what had once, deliciously, been Beatriz Viterbo" (283). Here the comparison with Dante's medieval allegory ends since there is no Virgil to guide the narrator through "the hell of the Aleph" and the reminiscence of Beatrice gradually vanishes.

The equilibrium between an individual narrator's experience and a totalizing global vision of the world is encapsulated in the moment when the narrator apprehends the Aleph: "and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has ever truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe" (284). The encounter with the Aleph can be read as the story of an isolated, fantastic event in the privacy of an attic, a story that reverberates with adventure with the thrill a child might feel in the midst of some daydream phantasm. This first part of the sentence leads us to stories of Poe, Chesterton, or Hawthorne (authors in Borges's library) and to classify it under the fantastic genre. On the other hand, allusions to the *Divina Commedia* give us some deeper insights into this "impossible world" and generate new readings. I posit that the Aleph's chaotic cubist universe relates to Borges's essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" which in turn inspired Foucault's idea of heterotopia. Similarly, in the context of social totality, Edward Soja reads the Aleph as the possibility of mapping the impossible, as the *telos* of postmodern geography, comparing the Aleph's inconceivable universe with the city of Los Angeles. However, it seems that Dante's *Divina Commedia* presents an opposite world to this chaotic postmodern landscape. The *Divina Commedia*, an ultimate map of medieval soul space divided into Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise embraces all known celestial, physical, and spiritual space. Every nook and cranny of the space, the whole medieval universe is illuminated by God's presence. His presence imbues the space with a sense of moral gravitation: good is represented as an intrinsic direction up, while sin pulls the unfortunate deceased down. With heaven at the top of the universe and Hell at the bottom, this internal logic doesn't seem to allow any fissure, any hole, any unpredictability of both physics and morality. Despite this constructed system, Hugh J. Silverman sees the *Divine Commedia*, particularly Purgatory, as heterotopic space. He defines heterotopia as a space "in between" on a vertical axis with utopia above and dystopia below, while "here and now" at degree zero, the horizontal axis can be described as heterotopian. Hence heterotopia is situated between two "nowheres" -- (*ou topos*) -- a place that does not exist. Whereas utopia is a "good place (*eu topos*)," "dystopia" is the negation of an ideal place. This assumption begs the question whether heterotopias are atemporal ahistorical entities floating between utopia and dystopia. In Silverman's classification there is no place for a dilemma: "The Divine Comedy is a portrait of a degenerate dystopia and a degenerate utopia, and hence an account of a thirteenth-century heterotopia" (180).

Can there really be a thirteenth-century heterotopia? Jacques Le Goff describes this complex web of morality and zeitgeist binding together the living and the dead, angels, and celestial spheres as a real one (181). Narratives about journeys to and from the realm of the dead were considered to be "real by the men of the Middle Ages, even if they depicted dreams" (Wertheim 71). Hence in a set of heavenly spheres or a hellish chasm inside the earth there cannot be a bizarre juxtaposition of desperate entities (heterotopia) not illuminated by divine providence. According to Foucault such a place would not be possible in medieval time since the relation between signs and things were stable within a theological frame. Similarly, Borges sees chaotic movements within the confines of his Aleph related to the twentieth century and its technological boom. The inception of this kaleidoscopic relativism is diagnosed to be in the internal rupture and fragmentation of Pax Americana, glorified by Carlos Argentino Daneri as "an apologia for modern man" (276). To usher us into the world where signs and codes proliferate and where the proliferation of images and information overshadows reality, Baudrillard uses Borges's parabola from the story "Museum, on Exactitude in Science." In this story, the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory it presents, is for Baudrillard, "the finest allegory of simulation" (1). Because the distinction between the real and its representation begins to be effaced, Baudrillard reads the fable and inverts the process depicted. "Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the territory. A referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory -- precession of simulacra -- it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the

fable today it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own" (2). Borges's tale serves Baudrillard with his interest in high-tech to map his vision of the postmodern world, "our deserts" at the fin-de-millennium. He claims we live in a hyper-reality of simulations in which images, spectacles, and the play of signs replace the old-fashioned factory and sweat on the brow, all production, as well as class conflict as key constituents of contemporary societies. This supremacy of the map over the territory did not happen overnight, but as a gradual process as Baudrillard argues by documenting a history of reproducibility from the Renaissance until now. Nick Perry in his *Hyperreality and Global Culture* proposes that Borges's story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is as a better allegory for simulation that culminates in the third order of simulacrum, hyper-reality: "the implication, which grows throughout the story, is, of course, that Tlön is the (hyperreal) world which we (erratically) inhabit and which (erratically) inhabits us. As such, it goes beyond that territory/map Borgesian fable on which Baudrillard had drawn. For the Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius story does not presume the hyperreal as given, but rather it allegorizes the pattern of its expansion" (99). The question which arises here is if such a reading of the story justifiable. Are there any hidden clues in the text that can direct the reading toward our postmodern condition? As with many of Borges's stories, we can read the text as if it were an instance of detective fiction although a detective plot is absent. As the narrator continues his investigation through a labyrinth of paper, libraries, and encyclopedias for hidden clues and remnants of the unknown territory that has never been mapped, they are entangled in other texts, into seemingly endless intertextuality, until one of the characters concludes to be "weary of those 'subordinated drudgeries of detective natures'" ("Tlön" 72), to reconstruct the missing volumes of encyclopedias, in other words, to invent what has been mysteriously dispersed. The detective-narrator in Borges's story is a person who both reviews someone else's text and investigates the origin of the text, resembling a machine whose sole purpose is to elicit hypotheses. This is why he registers an "astonished sense of dizziness that I shall not describe, since this is the story not of my emotions" ("Tlön" 71). The hypotheses about what is real and what is not go so far that one might wonder if he, the narrator, or even the reader invented the "hyperreal."

"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is divided into three sections -- I, II, and the Postscript 1947 -- each of which corresponds to a different genre: the first part is a librarian-detective's investigation into an encyclopedia-induced mystery, the second part elaborates on the mystery that expands into metaphysical speculation, and in the Postscript the strange world of Tlön transforms or intrudes into "our" history and reality. From the discussion between the unidentified first-person narrator (presumably Borges himself) and his friend Bioy Casares, the reader learns that "a few of the book's readers -- a very few -- might divine the horrifying or banal truth" (68). The presence of a mirror at the end of a corridor leads to a discussion about quotations: "Mirrors and copulation are abominable, for they multiply the number of mankind" (68). This simple quotation becomes the narrative drive which initiates a quest through all the libraries of Europe and the two Americas as the story gradually adds information on Tlön. In the first four additional pages in Volume XLVI of the "Anglo-American Cyclopaedia" found by Bioy (which are, in turn, reprints of the tenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*) the narrator and his friend read that the literature of the imaginary country Uqbar "never refers to reality but rather to two imaginary realms of Mle'khans and Tlön" (69). That portends further proliferation of information about the hidden imaginary. Despite the narrator's and Bioy's determination to reach the next, more mysterious level by poring over atlases, catalogs, indices, memoirs, and encyclopedias, their pursuit remains unfruitful. It is only when the narrator discovers a copy of Volume XI in the bar of a hotel, where it was left by Herbert Ashe, an English engineer with a taste for unusual number systems, that the narrative leads to the description of a new territory, that of Tlön. Contrary to a pirated encyclopedia that contains a brief description of a false country, the narrator encounters the entire history of an unknown planet, and, through encyclopedic data, articles, and taxonomies, he familiarizes himself with Tlön's mythologies, tongues, seas, minerals, birds, fish, as well as with its theological and metaphysical controversies, in short, the whole philosophical world of Tlön (71). The maker of this world is not some mighty, obscure Leibniz, but a host of secret societies: astronomers, engineers, metaphysicians, poets and so on. The numerous intertextual plays with different discourses, ideas, and hypotheses illustrate the idealism of Tlön's nations: the languages of the southern hemisphere are a network of verbs, nouns are excluded: "for example there is no noun that corresponds to our word "moon," but there is a verb which in English would be "to moonate" or "to moon" (73); on the other hand, for the languages of the northern hemisphere the primary unit is not the verb but monosyllabic adjectives strung together. Some of the disparate discourses at issue here are that poets create and dissolve the ideal object with their verses, that the classical culture of Tlön is composed of a single discipline, namely psychology, that monism or idealism renders science null, and that the number of systems and philosophies is as many as nouns in the language. Volume XI of the *Cyclopaedia* ends with a description of the systematic production of "hronir," a mysterious object that would erratically and gradually intrude into the world outside letters, encyclopedias, and articles; into the world that is supposed to be our own, familiar world.

The last section is titled "Postscript - 1947" (the story was first published in 1940). It informs us of a letter that supposedly explains the mystery: it was a hoax perpetrated by still existing secret societies inaugurated in the seventeenth century with the purpose of inventing a country. And since the plotters soon realized that one generation would not suffice for their task, they selected disciples to carry on the work. After two hundred years the persecuted fraternity escaped to the U.S. to continue their conspiracy, now joined by a millionaire, Ezra Buckley who enlarged the task by wishing to create a whole planet. About 1944, the forty volumes of the First *Encyclopedia of Tlön* were discovered and objects from Tlön began to appear in our world. The narrator predicts that in a hundred years our world will be completely replaced by Tlön. Yet he seems indifferent to this destiny continuing with a

perhaps futile literary translation. Indeed, the reader within the text and the reader of the story experience a labyrinth that delays or misdirects the quest for "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Readers have to counterpose to this textual labyrinth their own imaginary one, which is another text made up of the conjectures about different constructions of reality. Following the clues which invite us to read "Tlön" with reference to hyperreality, I argue that we should more closely analyze the transition when of Tlön's abstract world intrudes into the base narrative. What is important in this transition is the design, that is, the multiplication and profusion of things. The "map that precedes the territory" can instead be seen as an interplay between mirrors and encyclopedias which ultimately threatens our familiar world. Then the text of "Tlön" itself might be the conspiracy of esoteric secret societies, of many authors or one hidden narrator behind these narrators. Finally, since these secret societies and their conspiracy invaded the world, our known history, could we say that the deceiving narrator is culture itself, or some elements of culture that transmit a hyperreal expansion of reality?

In *Simulation* Baudrillard traces the changing concept of the sign from the Renaissance to the present. One can see arguments which Foucault makes about the power of discourses in *The Order of Things* as an inversion of the Borges's idea of the hyperreal. In contrast to Foucault, Borges was not focused on theoretical modes of production, but on modes of simulation, orders of simulacra or forms in which objects are reproduced. Orders of simulacra correspond to particular assumptions about the relationship between objects and signs, about the nature of reality and the signifiers that represent it. Each order of simulacrum is based upon a medium, or technique of reproduction such as maps, musical recordings, or digital codes. Baudrillard conceives each medium as a principle that shapes the meaning of social reality in a particular era. The first order of simulacrum is that of counterfeit; it dominated during the classical period from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution. Any objects that were reproduced were viewed as counterfeit copies of a unique original. This form of reproduction corresponded to an assumption that there was a detectable difference between semblance and reality, and between objects and their signifiers. The mirror and its reflection or a map and a territory were not confused with each other. The second order of simulacra, which dominated during the industrial era, transforms the status of objects: instead of being viewed as a copy of an original, objects are conceived as equivalent elements in a series of two or more identical objects. Objects become undefined simulacra, or reproductions of each other. The relation between objects and signs is no longer that of an original to its counterfeit, but of equivalence. The principle of mechanical reproduction introduced a new stage of development, because the reproduction of equivalent objects in a series replaced the reproduction of a counterfeit from its original. Simulation, the current order of the simulacrum is based upon the reproducibility of the objects according to a binary model, the digital code read by computers that translates everything into a binary opposition of zero and one. As simulations proliferate they come to refer only to themselves: a labyrinth of mirrors reflecting images projected from other mirrors onto an omnipresent television screen, which in turn refers to the image or encyclopedic data also produced by mirroring each other. The sign substituted for the real and thus hyperreality occurs.

According to Baudrillard, the story of the "conjunction of mirror and encyclopedia" (68) can be read as an odyssey of the sign on its way to hyperreality is the Encyclopedia Britannica, although it is just an arbitrary and incomplete taxonomy of the universe. Its reproductions are almost similar and just one of them contains a brief article on Uqbar. The same duplication is repeated with Volume XI of the encyclopedia entitled "Orbis Tertius." The name "third world" refers to a world that is tertiary in so far as it is the projection of a projection, the imaginary realm of the imaginary realm of Uqbar. The scattered signs of hyperreality are discovered in encyclopedias in different locations around the globe: one volume left by Herbert Ashe in Argentina; the second copy turns up later in a library in Memphis, Tennessee, where a complete set of the encyclopedia has been unearthed. Ashe's copy of Volume XI contains additional information as does Bioy's. Developing the theme of duplication even further, idealism, the reigning philosophy in Tlön, makes it possible to duplicate lost objects. The encyclopedias in Borges's story constitute an attempt at full representation of reality. However, at the same time, the narrative complicates its verifiability by an elaborate chain of duplications, counterfeits, symmetries, and small variations. But sometimes these very minute variations and forgeries (noticed only by kabbalistic librarian-detectives) can trigger changes in other texts and finally stir things outside the encyclopedias: "In the most ancient regions of Tlön one may, not infrequently, observe the duplication of lost objects: Two persons are looking for a pencil; the first person finds it, but says nothing; the second finds a second pencil, no less real, but more in keeping with his expectations. These secondary objects are called hronir, and they are, though awkwardly so, slightly longer ... It is hard to believe that they have been systematically produced for only about a hundred years, but that is what Volume XI tells us" ("Tlön" 77).

In its very nature as an augmented copy, Ashe's version of the encyclopedia is itself a hron, a secondary and more satisfactory object than the hronir, and this hron is itself a replica of an earlier one, the Encyclopaedia Britannica. So we have two hronirs which are literary texts, together with the story's own example of a hron, a pencil, which is the instrument texts may be written with. The quotation of one of Uqbar's heretics: "mirrors and copulation are abominable because they multiply the number of men" (68) appears to have been a misquotation. As such, a misquotation, it takes its place in a long line of other errors and counterfeits that transformed into simulations. Simulation, for Baudrillard, is not just to feigned presence, simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false," between "real" and "imaginary": the simulator produces "true" symptoms of illness that might confuse Cartesian clarities. The biggest simulation is that of religious icons which not only represent the divine visually, but simulate divinity and ultimately suggest that that god may be a simulacrum as well. In other words, simulation invoked in the articles of encyclopedias invaded our world and signs of the real are substituted for the real itself: what hronir produced in one medium continue their multiplica-

tion through other media in alchemy or scientific simulation.

The story of the conjunction between mirror and encyclopedia ends with a conspiracy in which abstract things of Tlön invade the known world. This silent invasion is terrifying. It is terrifying because the secret transformation is constant, inevitable, and perhaps irreversible; furthermore, it may lead to the uncritical acceptance of any system that gives the "appearance of order -- dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism" (81). Or it may lead beyond these threats to the banal: the order of simulacrum and hyperreality which reflects the postmodern condition. Or reality may change even beyond our expectations, since Tlön's objects will be spreading around the world according to an unknown plan. In any case, the disintegration of the narrator's world is inevitable and irreversible: "if my projections are correct, a hundred years from now someone will discover the hundred volumes of The Second Encyclopedia of Tlön. At that, French and English and mere Spanish will disappear from the earth. The world will be Tlön" (81). Tlön's object will rule. In this sense, Borges's story is comparable to the bizarre metaphysical scenario Baudrillard's describes in *Fatal Strategies* according to which objects triumph over subjects within an obscene proliferation of things. Based upon his analysis of consumer society in which advertising, display, fashion, mass media, and the proliferation of commodities transform use and exchange-value into what he calls sign-value, Baudrillard melancholically describes an existence among numerous objects: "we live according to their rhythm and according to their incessant succession. It is objects which today observe our being born, which accompany our death ... and which survive us" (Baudrillard qtd. in Kellner 4). Thus both Borges and Baudrillard, although in different discourses, envisioned a new metaphysics of the object and the defeat of the subject. Douglas Kellner argues Baudrillard anticipates the possible future by exaggerating present tendencies and thus provides early warnings about what might happen if present trends continue. Similar allusions may be read into Borges' narrative, although we will never be sure whether the dystopian future has anything to do with Tlön's objects.

Tlön's world, however strange, is ordered; it seems to be an anti-Aleph. Aleph itself, a little mystical object, is chaotic, non-orderly, simultaneous, and unpredictable, a mixture of horror and wonder. To understand this little space and its enclosed whirlpool of flashes, energy, and chaos would be similar to the lines with which Stephen Hawking closes his *Brief History of Time*: "it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason -- for then we will know the mind of God" (193). We can also read the Aleph as the manifestation of postmodernist relativism, a relativism that far from providing a unified equation of the universe causes a vertigo of assumptions and projections. In this gloomy future we are lost in postmodern relativism, language games, and a social milieu that resembles the description of Tlön where "a system is nothing but subordination of all the aspects of the universe to one of those aspects of the universe -- any one of them" (74). In other words, heterotopia -- a juxtaposition of disparate concepts, ideas, and things that are under the constant threat of suddenly caving in -- may ultimately lead to eternal Hobbesian confusion. Unlike chaotic Aleph, the Tlön intrusion disguised by the appearance of order like the grand narratives of modernism ("dialectical materialism, anti-Semitism, Nazism") follows the "rigor of the chess masters, not of angels" (81). Its prophecy is both terrifying and revealing: terrifying because of an undercurrent of conspiracy, and quieting because it satisfied the yearning for order. Tlön might end up in a postmodern universe of hyperreality in which entertainment, information, simulation, and remnants of the subject surrender to an overwhelming flux of images. Heterotopia and hyperreality are either the result of rupture, a radical break from modernity or a continuation of modernism that develops into a new dimension. However, both heterotopia and hyperreality cause confusion and disorientation and lead to a world where the simulated reality of Disneyland stands side by side with a hyperreal tour offered by the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC during which visitors receive a card that matches their "age and gender to the name of a real Holocaust victim or survivor" (Appignanisi, Garratt, Sardar, Curry 122). I conclude with a quote by Fredric Jameson who, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, calls for at least a glimpse into "the unknown" (51). Looking ahead, Jameson hopes for a new mapping and remapping in order to "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (51).

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- Author's profile: Mario Vrbančić teaches literature and film at the University of Zadar. His interests in scholarship include postmodern literature and culture. Vrbančić's recent publications include the single-authored book *The Lacanian Thing: Psychoanalysis, Postmodern Culture, and Cinema* (2011) and the articles "Glitch in the Machine: Theatrical Presentations of Auschwitz," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* (2010) and "European Cultural Contesting Identities," *Linguistic Diversity in Europe* (Ed. Patrick Studer and Iwar Werlen, 2012).  
E-mail: <[mavrbanci@unizd.hr](mailto:mavrbanci@unizd.hr)>