

SYMMETRY OF DEATH



Adrian Gargett

In “Death and the Compass” Borges presciently anticipates developments in contemporary physics and scientific thought, constructing a literary environment that systemically gives the lie to the dream of rational determinism, suggesting instead something like a “primordial disorder” out of which the shifting, provisional orders of culture and science emerge.

In constructing a subtle and complex argument via the parallel interactions of a Deleuzo-guattarian mechanism, this project artfully attempts to weave the principal discursive strands into an animated investigative framework.

The first strand is a close analysis of sections from “Death and the Compass”. The second is the articulation of the critical concepts from the Deleuzo-guattarian scheme. The third is the embedding of the issues of chance and causality within the work of Borges.

J (NORTH)

The first murder occurred in the Hotel du Nord – that tall prism which dominates the estuary whose waters are the colour of the desert. To that tower (which quite glaringly unifies the hateful whiteness of a hospital, the numbered divisibility of a jail and the general

appearance of a bordello) there came on the third day of December the delegate from Podolsk to the Third Talmudic Congress, Doctor Marcel Yarmolinsky, a grey-bearded man with grey eyes. (*Labyrinths* 106)

Deleuze and Guattari cast literature as an exemplary mode to demonstrate systems of machinic functioning; how literature/books/writing operates in terms of such functioning – in terms of a “rhizomatic” analysis as presented in “A Thousand Plateaus”.¹

Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic conceptual vehicle maps a schizoanalytic application to Borges disseminating literary texts. The question becomes not what that rhizome means or whether it is a united form, but how it functions and where it goes. When examining a Borges text in terms of its active functioning – in terms of its desiring-production – the Deleuzo-guattarian mechanism treats it as Borges’s writing machine (a rhizomatic machine – a typically Deleuzo-guattarian conjunction of the natural and artificial) whose components come equally/indifferently from art and life, and whose operation consists of a perpetual construction of machinic arrangements – collections of heterogeneous elements that somehow function together.

From the rhizomatic perspective, the book has neither subject nor object, constituted only by lines of articulation (segmentar-

¹ The system called rhizome is the production of the multiple, a production occurring not by adding a further dimension, but alternatively, in the simplest way possible, by force of moderation, at the level of the dimensions available, always “n” minus one – it is only in this manner that one forms part of the multiple, though being always subtracted. Deleuze and Guattari’s key term is “plateau” – a plateau is always in the middle not a beginning or an end. A rhizome is made of plateaus. Deleuze and Guattari define their use of plateau as “every multiplicity connectable with others by superficial underground stems, in such a way as to form and extend a rhizome (ATP). The multiple demands a method which actually creates it. Deleuze and Guattari use words which function as plateaux – “Rhizomatics = Schizoanalysis = Pragmatics = Micro-Politics”. These words are concepts, but concepts as lines, that is number systems attached to a particular dimension of multiplicities. This sums up the strategic options which Deleuze and Guattari have in the rhizomatic project – each term serves as one of many modes of approach to produce assemblages, strata/molecular chains/lines of flight, which themselves constitute diverse plateaux that frequently overlap at various points of the assemblage.

ity/strata/territorialities) on one hand, and, on the other, by lines of flight (movements of deterritorialization) and destratification) These lines and their “measurable speeds” constitute a “machine assemblage” orientated to those “strata” which inevitable make it into a kind of organism/a signifying totality/ a determination attributable to a subject, and equally orientated towards a “body without organs” which infinitely breaks down the organism, frees/circulates a-signifying particles, pure intensities and creates subjects to whom it allows no more than a name, as the trace of an intensity.

In the Deleuzo-guattarian program Borges’s works/writing is an example of the book as “assemblage” – a connection with other assemblages in relation to other bodies without organs existing by virtue of what is outside and beyond it. In addition through his invention of writing as a projection of paradoxes, as a broken chain of affects, with “variable speeds”, precipitations and transformations, always in relation to the exterior, Borges’s writing is opposed to classical/traditional books constituted by the interiority of a substance or subject and exist as the book as a “war machine”, against the book as “State apparatus”.²

In “Death and the Compass” the Deleuzo-guattarian mechanism traces multiple paths of desire, their openings, short-circuits, ziz-zags, blockages and metamorphoses. Borges is an experimenter who manipulates the elements of the social machine and sets them into a delirious overload. This line of flight branches out and produces multiple series and rhizomic connections. Borges’s stories work as open-ended machines, which execute a perpetual deterritorialization by detailing the machinic arrangements of a bureaucratic, law-enforcing, judicial, economic and political Eros. In Borges’s stories

² Deleuze and Guattari suggest a “Nomadology” and in this regard South American literature forms a specific case through revealing a “tree-domination” and a search for roots. Latin America is rhizomatic, with its Indians without genealogy, its ever fleeing limit, its creeping frontiers, the search for a recoding with Europe, the overcoding of the Spanish influence/colonization, the capitalist decoding of that historical movement, but the role of the “magical” the “fantastic” as a line of flight that links dream, madness, the Indian mental and perceptual instability, the shifting borders, the “rhizome”. Latin American writers form a “cartography” in their style, making a map which directly connects with the “real” social movements criss-crossing the continent.

one discovers “machinic arrangements”, complex, functioning machines whose operation is precisely delineated.

The process/function of such complex machines may be illustrated through a consideration of “Death and the Compass”. In this work Borges’s purpose is to extract from social representations the arrangements of enunciation, and the machinic arrangements, and to dismantle these arrangements. Borges’s aim is not a representation of an inner state or the social world *per se*, but an experimentation, one that is critical, but not in the ordinary sense of the word – in Borges’s stories, the dismantling of arrangements makes the social representation flee, in a much more effective manner than a “critique”, and effects a deterritorialization of the world that is itself political. Such is a method of active dismantling.

(...) does not move by way of a critique, which still belongs to representation. It consists rather of prolonging, of accelerating an entire movement that already traverses the social field: it operates in a virtual realm, already real without being actual (the diabolic powers of the future which, for the moment, are only knocking at the door). (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 88-89)

Among the diabolic powers according to Deleuze and Guattari are the state machine, the bureaucratic machine and the capitalist technocratic machine. The framework of these machines, extracted from the decaying Buenos Aires regime is set functioning and taken apart in “Death and the Compass”. Borges nearly always begins his narratives in very concrete settings; however, the more words he devotes to creating these settings the less concrete they become.

Borges’s essential themes and essential techniques of construction contain the enigmatic nature of the world, of knowledge, of time, of the self. In Borges’s narratives the traditional division between form and content virtually disappears, as does that between the world of the text and the world of the reader.

“Death and Compass” concentrates upon hopelessness and pessimism the impossibility of change or escape, the inevitable nature of fate and meaningless violence.

of the many problems which exercised the reckless discernment of Lönnrot, none was so strange – so rigorously strange, shall we say –

as the periodic series of bloody events which culminated at the Villa of Triste-le-Roy, amid the ceaseless aroma of the eucalypti. It is true that Erik Lönnrot failed to prevent the last murder, but that he foresaw it is indisputable. (*Labyrinths* 116)

Unexpected turns elude predictability; hidden realities are revealed through their diverse effects and derivations. Borges presents a dark setting for a tragedy of the human intellect.

The system of law seems to be an infinitely distant, mysterious and transcendent force in Borges's writing, and it is possible to interpret "Death and the Compass" in this light, arguing that Borges is an exponent of a negative theology/a theology of absence. In contrast to follow a Deleuzo-guattarian scheme we should not ask, "How does the law manifest itself?" but "How does Justice function?" tracing a line that suggests it functions not as law but as desire. The trail of letters, the geometric murder plan of the city, the mythology sequence combining text and chance, and Lönnrot's remark:

"Possibly, but not interesting", Lönnrot answered. "You'll reply that reality hasn't the least obligation to be interesting. And I'll answer you that reality may avoid that obligation but that hypotheses may not. In the hypothesis you propose, chance intervenes copiously. Here we have a dead rabbi; I would prefer a purely rabbinical explanation, not the imaginary mischances of an imaginary robber" (107)

all have a latent aesthetized content, as does Lönnrot's meeting with Scharlach, Scharlach's machinations "labyrinth" - "I have woven it and it is firm; the ingredients are a dead heresiologist, a compass, an eighteenth-century sect, a Greek word, a dagger, the diamonds of a paint shop" - which Lönnrot finds an inappropriate combination since ultimately they fail to cohere; "In your labyrinth there are three lines too many" - appear as an apt image as the system of Law as Chance, as ever mobile polyvocal desire. Law/Justice is never directly represented, never directly confronted but always a stage forward/backward/removed - ever distant. Borges suggests it is we who have dreamed our universe - reflectively consisting of the deliberately constructed interplay of the mirrors and mazes of this thought, difficult and always acute and laden with secrets. In all

Borges's writings we find roads that fork, corridors that lead nowhere, except to other corridors, and on as far as the vision can perceive – an immanent force rather than a transcendent presence.

There is a proliferation of doublings, deadly doppelgangers, dark coincidences formed out of chance/chaos, with symmetrical progressions formulated around Zeno's Achilles paradox, serving as connectors between sequences, offering new passages of movement, new lines of flight, combining and endless concatenation of cause and effects without ever exhausting infinity and human chance. Scharlach acts as the singular series of the criminal and a force of continuity exceeds all segments and puts all connections in motion. The architecture of the law/justice is a rhizomatic anti-structure, unlimited symbols and locations seemingly distant from one another, but connected by ritual and geometry in unexpected and apparently impossible ways. Everyone belongs to the labyrinth, Lönnrot, Scharlach, Treviranus, the murder victims, even the "two men of short stature, robust and ferocious" – everyone is part of the circuit of desire.

Justice functions as desire, but so also does power:

One would evidently be wrong here to take desire as a desire of power, a desire to oppress or even to be oppressed, a sadistic desire and a masochistic desire..... There is no desire of power, it is a power which is desire. Not a desire-lack, but a desire as plenitude, exercise and functioning. (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 52)

There are two co-existent states of desire in the labyrinthine machine of "Death and the Compass" which correspond with the molar-paranoiac and molecular-schizophrenic poles in "Anti-Oedipus" (Deleuze and Guattari. *Capitalism*). One state is the "transcendent paranoiac" law/justice which incessantly agitates a finite segment to make it a complete object, to crystallize it at a specific location/situation; the other state the "immanent schizod" law/justice functions on an anti-law, a process which dismantles the paranoiac law/justice in all its arrangements.

H (WEST)

The second murder occurred on the evening of the third of January, in the most deserted and empty corner of the capital's western suburbs. Towards dawn, one of the gendarmes who patrol those solitudes on horseback saw a man in a poncho, lying prone in the shadow of an old paint shop. The harsh features seemed to be masked in blood; a deep knife wound had split his breast. (*Labyrinths* 109)

Borges's fictions grow out of the intense confrontation between the text and an exterior narrative which is not only a central problem in literature but also in human experience – the problem of illusion and reality. We are concomitantly writers/readers/ protagonists in a continuous eternal narrative. We construct personal illusions, attempt to interpret the symbols around us, but ultimately find all efforts frustrated – and yet in this mournful defeat there can come a glimpse of a higher understanding that prevails at our expense.

Borges does speak of hierarchical powers infinitely removed which issue “laws” that are only enunciated via sentencing and punishment and that impute a universal guilt to their victims. In fact Borges structures a definite description of the power systems from which such laws emanate in “Death and Compass”, and there is no doubt that Scharlach's description of the infinite hierarchy of a symmetry of judicial revenge points to the existence of such a structure in a universal scheme. However in addition to such a power hierarchy, there is a symmetrical rhizome – the hierarchy and the rhizome being two manifestations of the same structure. (In “Death and the Compass” the double aspect of power is evident, Scharlach's scheme being an impossibility removed hierarchy which, however, contains a rhizomic sequence of incidents/ moments and is surrounded by similarly rhizomic events). The two means of interpreting Lönnrot's fate outlined at the narratives conclusion, ostensibly execution (death) and eternal recurrence (a definitive teleological endpoint being an unfeasible option) represent the appropriate expression of each of these power configurations. Borges's is a realm where fact and fiction, real and unreal, the whole and the part, the

highest and the lowest, are complementary aspects of the same continuous being. The world is a text and the text is a world, and both are labyrinthine and enclosed enigmas designed to be interpreted and participated in by humans. The synthesized intellectual unity is achieved precisely by the confrontation of opposites.

The total effect of such disparate imagery is symbolically heightened and when juxtaposed creates an oracular landscape where the lines of perspective become dissociated with the size of the inextricable and distorted symmetry. Two formulations of Zeno's Achilles paradox attacking the infinite divisibility of space and time relate directly to "Death and the Compass" acutely demonstrating, despair/ambiguity, the impossibility of escape, the inevitable conjunction of fate, inexplicable violence and the movement towards and from immortality becoming one single approximation of universal impersonality. These labyrinths continue to endure principally for their aesthetic compulsion; because this presents the eternal return. These "vertiginous symmetries", have a tragic beauty. The form is more important than the content. In his narrative Borges constructs a line of recursivity – an eternal recurrence cycle. This notion of circularity is personified in the actions that occur within the story itself. This insistence on the infinite is a typical motif which appears in most of his fiction, the infinite is manifested on a stylistic level as an insistent structure where composition permits us to recognise it as an operational mechanism.

The Nietzschean scheme is a play in the game of truth that is not an explanation of an entire complex, but a description of the dynamic network of the subjects shifting relationships to the process of interpretation. Nietzsche's flow of energy encompasses what Nietzsche views as the complex/world/"whole" – flow involves the dynamic and fluid nature of becoming, while energy implies a potentiality, an inherent capacity for manifestation and progression actuated by the will to power.

The will to power is not a universal law, but a functional imperative that operates autonomously from every position in the flow of energy, and interacts with its surroundings in unpredictable ways to produce an infinite complexity in which the subject is implicated.

Heraclitus says Nietzsche, conceived of the world as a world of unmediated becoming of “play as artists and children engaged in it”, exhibiting “coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying” as the “game of the world-child Zeus”. Two moments may be identified in the child’s play of artistic creative efforts – a moment of absorption in the game/creative activity and a moment of distanced contemplation of the game of creation. (Nietzsche *Philosophy* 57)

In “Nietzsche and Philosophy” Deleuze interprets the eternal return in terms of these two moments. An individual primarily engages in becoming, and therein affirms it, then recognises that all moments of the world are moments of becoming, that the essential being of the world is becoming and affirms the state that each instant is the return or coming anew of becoming. Therefore Deleuze suggests “return (revenir) is being of becoming (devenir) itself, being which affirms itself in becoming (Deleuze *Nietzsche* 39).

Deleuze locates a metaphysics of flux in the Nietzschean image of the game of chance. The world of becoming is a world of flux and multiplicity, but also one of chance and chaos, and the affirmation of the eternal return is determined by this aspect of becoming. To join in the play of the cosmos is, as Zarathustra says, to play, “dice with gods at the gods’ table, the earth”.

Nietzsche’s will to power is the differential element between quantities of force, and it is exactly the difference that constitutes forces in tension as active or reactive that is as qualities. The relation between forces is subject to chance. Every body is nothing but the arbitrary relation of force with force, everybody, every difference between forces, in Deleuzian terminology and every “will to power” in Nietzsche is chance and nothing but chance. In this sense existence should be understood, in the Deleuzian-Nietzschean scheme as radically innocent, a game of chance.

If existence is a game of chance, it is a serious game because it is a game of the necessity of chance.

Above all things stands the heaven of chance, the heaven of innocence, the heaven of accident, the heaven of wantonness....you are to me a dance floor for divine chances, that you are to me a gods’ table for divine dice and dicers!” (Nietzsche *Thus Spoke* 36)

Deleuze continues that chance is played out on two tables – on earth and in the heavens, yet there is only a single dice throw on each occasion. Each single dice throw is enacted on earth – as the affirmation of becoming – and also in the heavens – as the affirmation of the being of becoming. Each dice throw affirms chance, but the numbers on the dice affirm the necessity of chance of becoming. The necessity of chance is what constitutes its innocence – it releases all things from having a purpose. In this way the necessity of chance in the dice throw is an affirmation, and force should be understood as an affirmation and non-dialectical element. Only such an affirmation can create chance and multiplicity – the being of becoming – that is, there is only one way to combine being and becoming so as to have innocence/necessity/multiplicity instead of probability.

We have absolutely no experience of a cause. (...) We have combined our feeling of a will, our feeling of “freedom” our feeling of responsibility and our intention to perform an act, into the concept cause. (Nietzsche *Thus Spoke* 186)

Denying temporal succession, denying the self, denying the astronomical universe, are apparent desperations and secret consolations. Our destiny is not frightful by being unreal, it is frightful because it is irreversible and iron-clad. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger, it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real. I, unfortunately, am Borges. (Borges “A New Refutation of Time” *Labyrinths* 269)

For Deleuze and Guattari Borges enacts a new series of operational principles for literature: in Borges’s hands, literature refuses to play the game of “Literature”; for him literature becomes “experimental”; but in a new sense. It is the creation of a new regime of writing that enables us to account for what the writer currently apprehends as a situation of under- development with which he/she experiments as if it were an extreme solitude or desert. The Borges that Deleuze and Guattari give us is no longer a writer preoccupied with the question of deciding in which language to write, but rather

a writer who radically throws open the question of “literature” to the forces and the differences that run through it.

From such a perspective, writing quickly acquires a network of overcoding determinations that all prohibit the writer from ever assuming a pre-existing identity/language/subjectivity. For Deleuze and Guattari “minor literature” is “schizo” literature in its subatomic/anti-oedipal and self-deconstructing release of literary intensities – accounting for its particular aesthetic operations. A “minor” writer in the Deleuzoguattarian sense, based on Borges’s work, is not a simple aesthetic choice, but the result of an exigency – no longer seen as dependent on the mere will of a subject felt as transparent to itself, but on an existential situation. Having no standard/canonical means of expression – no abstract universal in the form of a single national language, a single ethnic affiliation, a single preconstructed cultural identity – this existential situation initiates a new economy of writing and reading. The other uniqueness of this situation is what shapes the principle characteristic that Deleuze and Guattari identify in what they include in the category of “minor literature”.

A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs in a major language. “The first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in its language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 203). This characterization describes the situation of a writer such as Borges, living in the flux and inconsistency of Argentinean society, witnessing the general crisis of that culture. Borges is sceptical about the ultimate “value” of ideas and literature, but he has striven to turn this scepticism into an ironic method, to make disbelief an aesthetic system, in which what is important is not the ideas as such, but their resonances and suggestions, the drama of their possibilities and impossibilities, the mobility and quintessence of the ideas as distilled at the centre of their opposing contradictions. Borges’s prose is difficult because of its constant creative deformations and artifice, writing with no other language than Spanish really available as a cultural medium, integrating a European texture into a Latinized Baroque. Hence the “impasses” – the series of “impossibilities” that he confronts: the

“impossibility” of not writing, the “impossibility” of writing other than in Spanish, the impossibility of writing in Spanish. Ultimately because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature.

The second characteristic of “minor literature” according to Deleuze and Guattari is that “everything in them is political” (*Kafka* 34). Everything in Borges is political – not in the sense that he speaks of nothing but politics (in the singular usage of the term), rather in the sense in which what occurs, takes precedence and conditions the economy of daily life is not a private affair but the concern of the political instance (*le politique*). The individual no longer appears as the product of a particular isolated consciousness, but rather as an arrangement of “n elements” – in other words, as a “desiring-machine” that functions only because it is always already connected to other “machines”. Principally these are stronger and more efficacious machines – both more efficient and productive – but also more “determinate”: commercial machines, economic machines, bureaucratic and judicial machines.³

The third characteristic of Deleuzoguattarian “minor literature” derived directly from the first two, “is that everything takes place on a collective value” (*Kafka* 109) indeed, because it is not the product of agents participating on a dominant aesthetic and feeling themselves to be part of an always/already constituted and transparent whole – because it results in a situation where there are only limited possibilities for individual enunciation – minor literature will appear as the literature in which every statement refers to a collectively/community that is no longer “actual”, but essentially “virtual”. It is this condition that engenders to minor literature its specific status.

For Deleuze and Guattari this is not simply a form of literary analysis, because

³ Deleuze and Guattari in establishing this problematic are influenced by Althusser’s work particularly his work on “ideological state apparatuses” (“Ideology and the State”) “It will be recalled that after revealing the effects of the mirror-structure of Ideology – whether “the interpolation of “individuals” as subjects, or “their subjection to the (Grand) Subject, or the “mutual recognition of subjects by themselves and by one another” or lastly “the absolute guarantee that all is well”.

lines of writing conjugate with other lines, life lines, lines of good and bad luck, lines which bring about the variation of the line of writing itself, lines which are between the lines written.....We want to show that the "nouvelle" is defined as a function of living "lines", lines of flesh. (Deleuze & Guattari *A Thousand* 200)

These are the lines which language must follow, lines on the hardest of which a signifier emerges and into the lowest of which the subject is born, lines "inscribed on a Body Without Organs, where everything is traced and flees, the abstract line itself, with neither imaginary figures nor symbolic functions: the real of the Body Without Organs. Schizoanalysis "has no other practical object (...) it elucidates lines which can be those of a life as well as those of a work of literature or art , of a society, depending on the particular system of co-ordinates retained" (Deleuze & Guattari *Thousand* 203).

In the narratives of Borges the private affairs of the individual merge with the social/political/immediate. In Borges's writing, if an individual concern is necessary, it is, above all, insofar as it is always another story, a much larger and complex one - the insight provided is essentially ironic: a painful sense of the inevitable limits that block total aspirations - all of the stories are vibrating within the private affair, which stems from them and is played out in them. The myths of the people, prophetism (reality within dream), the voyage of time (eternal return) and the double are the archaic obverse of capitalist violence, "as if the people were turning and increasing against themselves the violence that they suffer from somewhere else out of a need for idolization" (Deleuze *Cinema* 216-217). It is this violence that Borges mobilizes in his narratives, which he transforms into the grandest/baroque image of "agitprop", which is no longer a result of a becoming conscious, but consist of putting everything into a trance - writer, readers, protagonists (the story itself) pushing everything into a state of aberration, in order to communicate violence as well as to make private affairs pass into the political, and political matters into the private. For Borges it is not a question of invoking myth in order to discover their archaic sense and structure, "but of connecting archaic myth to the state of the drives in an absolutely contemporary society, hunger, thirst, sexuality, power, death, worship" (Deleuze & Guattari *Thousand* 31).

V (EAST)

The third murder occurred on the night of the third of February. A little before one o'clock, the telephone in Inspector Treviranus's office rang. In avid secretiveness, a man with a guttural voice spoke; he said his name was Ginsberg (or Ginsburg) and that he was prepared to communicate, for reasonable remuneration, the events surrounding the two sacrifices of Azevedo and Yarmolinsky. (*Labyrinths* 109)

In Borges structure is constantly being inverted. It is not a matter of opposing reality/realities to myth, but, on the contrary, given the existing circumstances, of extracting from the myth a "lived actual" that would make it possible to account for the "impossibility" of living in present conditions.

Working within a minor language, Borges exploits the deterritorializing tendencies of that language, tuning its processes of linguistic profusion or impoverishment into a source of creativity. Borges proceeding by exuberance and over-determination enriches Spanish artificially, inflating it with all the resources of symbolism, aneurysm esoteric meaning, hidden signifiers but also discovers an intensive use of language through a voluntary linguistic asceticism. What Borges demonstrates, in short, is the principle of a minor "usage" of language, one that ultimately is not dependent on the existence of a polyglot culture/social minority, but whose secret is that of being "like a foreigner in one's own language"⁴. In this minor use of Spanish, Borges resembles Kafka in German and also Artaud and Celine in French, Artaud with his language of "cries-whispers", and Celine with his intensive flux of the "exclamatory taken to the extreme" (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 16).

⁴ "To have a style is to manage to stammer - in one's own language. This is difficult, since there must be a necessity in such a stammering. Not to be a stammerer in one's speech, but to be a stammerer in relation to language itself. To be like a foreigner in one's own language. To create a line of flight. The most striking examples for me are Kafka, Berkett, Cherasim Luca, Godard..... We must be bilingual even in a single language, we must have a minor language inside our language, we must make a minor usage of our own language" (Deleuze & Parnet 10-11).

A minor use of language entails a linguistic deterritorialization, reversing the conventional relationship between dominant forms of content and dominated forms of expression. A minor literature breaks apart conventional content, and then re-assembles the fragments of that content in new ways: "expression must shatter forms, mark new ruptures and functions. Once form is shattered, the content, which will necessarily have broken with the order of things, must be reconstructed" (Deleuze and Guattari *Kafka* 52) The minor writer engages in a "machine of expression" capable of disorganizing its own forms, and of disorganizing its own forms of content, in order to liberate "pure" contents which mingle with the expression in a single "intense matter".

It would seem that the function of deterritorialization in Borges's writing is as an a-signifying disturbance that emerges in the language, a "local-catastrophe" that sets expression and content in resonating disequilibrium. An intensive centre of metamorphosis opens up, a process of "becoming-other" that functions as an active force of deformation and recombination within both the social representations of content and the linguistic forms of expression. An intrinsic logic of relations of sounds and representations suggests itself, and the composition takes form as the implications of these relations are developed and worked through. The finished composition may seem to represent institutions which resemble the complex Buenos Aires physical city - "The useless dawn finds me in a deserted street corner/ I offer you lean streets, desperate sunsets, the moon of the ragged suburbs" - or a nightmare image of a dystopian present, however such resemblances are not productive but produced, the effects of an intensive force traversing social representations rather than causes of artistic representation.

In Borges's Buenos Aires, detectives, gangsters, forgotten heroes and the very streets take on portentous significance, the central plaza in the city is "a leveller of souls, opening like death, like a dream". In "The Mystical Founding of Buenos Aires" Borges aims to give the city a mythology to supplement its history. When Borges writes of patios, corners, afternoons, barrios, cemeteries and especially labyrinths, he conjures the city of his youth and its ancestors, with its endless grid of crossroads, pink grocers' stores and seedy

tango bars. This Buenos Aires is a private city of the imagination, one that wraith-like, leaves spectral traces upon the present landscape.

The train stopped at a silent loading station. Lönnrot got off. It was one of those deserted afternoons that seem like dawns. The air of the turbid-puddled plain was damp and cold. (*Labyrinths* 113)

Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces belaboured by time, certain twilights and certain places try to tell us something, or have said something we should not have missed, or are about to say something, this imminence of a revelation which does not occur is, perhaps, the aesthetic phenomenon ("The Wall and the Books" *Labyrinths* 223)

Borges work is a series of tiny condensed narratives, where every phrase is dense with meaning, alive with ideas, labyrinths, libraries, transparent tigers, knife fights, encyclopaedias, dreams within dreams, mirrors. Borges's unique perception lies in the concept that these images are counterparts of each other. A library is a labyrinth, a mirror is an encyclopaedia, a fabulous creature is a book, a dream is a tiger, and a knife fight is a mirror. This is the ritual played out in "Death and the Compass", the detection as a labyrinth/symmetry, where the protagonist is self-annihilating.

I sent the equilateral triangle to Treviranus. I foresaw that you would add the missing point. The point which would form a perfect tomb, the point which fixes in advance where a punctual death awaits you. I have premeditated everything, Erik Lönnrot, in order to attract you to the solitudes of Triste-le-Roy. (*Labyrinths* 117)

In effect Borges suggests a progressive movement towards absolute deterritorialization.

One is no more than an abstract lines, like an arrow crossing through emptiness...(...) One has become like everybody, but in a way in which no one can become like everybody. One has painted the world on him/herself, not him/herself on the world...One has entered into animal - becomings, molecular becomings, finally imperceptible - becomings. (Deleuze and Guattari *Thousand* 272-275)

For Deleuze and Guattari, Borges's experimentation in writings seeks a "site" then locates "allies", then after progressively renounc-

ing interpretation, “to construct flow by flow and segment by segment the lines of experimentation, of becoming-animal, becoming-molecular, etc. For the Body Without Organs is all that: necessarily a Site, necessarily a Plane, necessarily a Collective (assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, men, powers, fragments all of that because there is no “my” body without organs, but “me” on it, what remains of me, is alterable and changing forms, crossing thresholds)” (*A Thousand* 203). “Death and the Compass” offers an example of the liberation of lines of flight, of flows and unleashing continuous intensities on the Body Without Organs, while distinguishing the “island” of the tonal (organism, significance, the subject, God, and his/her judgement, stratification) and the “nagual” (the freeing of flows of intensity on the Body Without Organs, of animal-and molecular – becoming, destratification).

Deleuze and Guattari are ultimately much less interested in the problems of reading than those of writing. This is a Nietzschean inspired aesthetic – to approach art from the perspective of artistic production rather than critical reception. Throughout this analysis the emphasis is on Borges as the writer and his strategies for dismantling social realities/forms, exploiting a line of flight, perpetuating the operation of his writing machine.

H (SOUTH)

He moved back a few steps. Then, very carefully, he fired. (*Labyrinths* 117)

The “limited” dimension of Borges’s prose style hardly admits any direct emotion. In fact, his work is filled with a deep apprehension, all of his characters are doomed in some way. Lönnrot is fated to enter Scharlach’s infernal symmetrical design, to meet his destiny wondering forever through some infinite eternal landscape, trapped in the labyrinth of Borges’s imagination. And yet Borges’s conundrum is a liberating experience, even when we realise that Lönnrot rather than being empowered by his intelligence is actually constricted by it. This liberation resides in the ideas Borges presents, from their dark weight, the treasured unfolding of their expression. “Uncountable ashes, unfathomable air”. Against the sorrows of the

world Borges sets the power of the imagination. He activates the heart, through the mind, through the game of shifting mirrors.

It is venturesome to think that a co-ordination of words (philosophies are nothing more than that) can resemble the universe very much. It is also venturesome to think that of all these illustrious co-ordinations, one of them – at least in an infinitesimal way – does not resemble the universe a bit more than the others. (“The Avatars of the Tortoise” *Labyrinths* 231)

The Deleuzo-guattarian enterprise takes Borges’s characteristic elements and pushes them to an extreme. Ascribing a postmodern attitude towards language, an avant-garde politics aimed at a creative subversion of social representations, and an impersonal Nietzschean humour that transforms grotesque absurdity into affirmation through the productive activity of writing.

Borges’s fiction, what is it? It’s the infinite book, the world of compossibilities. The idea of the Chinese philosopher being involved with the labyrinth as in “The Garden of Forking Paths” is an idea of Leibniz and his contemporaries appearing in the mid-17th century. There is a famous text by Malebranche that is a discussion with the Chinese philosopher. Leibniz is fascinated by the Orient and often cites Confucius. Borges’s traced lines from Leibniz’s thought but with an essential difference: for Leibniz, all the different worlds that might encompass an Adam sinning in a particular way/an Adam sinning in some other way/an Adam not sinning at all – he excludes all this infinity of worlds from each other, they are incompatible with each other, such that he conserves a very classical principle of disjunction: it’s either this world or some other one. Borges in contrast places all these incompatible series in the same world, allowing a multiplication of effects. Borges’s image is of an infinite universe of the eternal return. Instances are unintelligible, events thrown together by chance, or perversely repeated, but sometimes in this labyrinth construct, a reasonable/intelligible sequence is found. Such are the laws of this universe, moments of regularity in a chaotic world.

*Adrian Gargett
West Midlands*

WORKS CITED

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and the State". *On Ideology*. London: Verso, 1984.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths*. Ed Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol. 2*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles & Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. Paris: Flammarion, 1977.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Vol. 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane, New York: Viking, 1977.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time - Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York: Columbia UP, 1983.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Trans. Marianne Cowan. Washington D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1987.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1968.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin, 1961.