

RECIPE FOR THE [HISTORICAL] PUBLIC SPHERE
THE BORGESIAN CATALOGUE



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The Borgesian Catalogue is an apparent mish-moshing; it is *pastiche* to the highest order. A sprits of order and a dash of randomness season the well-cooked lists of Borges. His recipes rely on this element of unpredictability. It is here that we encounter the great paradox in the writings of the revered Argentinean writer, Jorge Luis Borges. His unpredictability is already accounted for. What appears to be unlimited is contained by the statement *unlimited but periodic*.

This paper is an inquiry into this paradox. Employing some of the same techniques as the great *Bricoleur* (Borges), I want to study his efforts by smattering the elements that come from his work. I see three themes coming out of Borges' most ambitious catalogue, *The Library of Babel: Mirrors vs. Windows, History and the Public Sphere*, and the List or Catalogue, itself. When examined and pieced together *The Library of Babel* becomes a meditation on private parts that make a public whole, where both order and possibility coexist.

MIRRORS VS. WINDOWS

In order to make either a window or a mirror, a *book of sand* (silicon dioxide) is needed. Those tiny, seemingly infinite particles (silicon dioxide) are never described like snowflakes (i.e., "every one is

unique"). They are described by their plenitude. Their plenitude is difficult to hold onto—the individual pieces even more so: "Oh God, how can I grasp them with a tighter clasp? / Oh God, how can I save, one, from the pitiless waves?" (Edgar Allan Poe "A Dream Within a Dream"). In their molten state they have the potential for a unifying identity. When they are then cooled off, they become a *super-saturated liquid*—they become solid glass.

In making glass, individual *sand* particles disappear into a *sea* of exteriority; interiority is destroyed when subjectivity becomes *inter*-subjectivity. As sand particles merge with other sand particles, there is a loss of individual identity. This intersubjectivity is precipitated by an increase of motion, not disorder. Motion blurs the boundaries of what constitutes an individual, what constitutes subjectivity as opposed to intersubjectivity.

In making a mirror, individual *sand* particles disappear into a *sea* of exteriority; the mirror enables *individuals* to develop a deep interiority. Lacan points to the mirror as constitutional to the formation of an "I," via a necessary misrecognition. There is a stringent line between subjectivity and intersubjectivity exhibited in the mirror, between reflection and multiplicity.

An examination of this sea of exteriority that I mentioned above will prove quite helpful. To aid us, I will analyze a photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson, called "Trastevere, Rome, Italy, 1959." In this photograph, a girl frolics in, presumably, her neighborhood (Clair 84).

It is easy to infer that the action is taking place in a courtyard. Whether the space is really confined on all four sides or not, does not matter. The courtyard becomes a public space, contained; meant for the inhabitants of the surrounding buildings, the space works like a Foucauldian Panopticon¹. Although this child appears to be alone, she is the object of not just the viewer's gaze, but the object of the gaze of probably one, or both, of her parents and or neighbors,

¹ In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault describes the prisons of the 19th Century. Foucault takes a singular model, known as the Panopticon—a model where guards were able to view all of the inmates all of the time—and applies it generally to the 19th Century prisons. Foucault concludes that the Panopticon served as a model for the surveillance and regimentation of the Body.

who are looking out of their own windows. This idea is highlighted by her position in the light. This quadrilateral ray envelops her movement. Obviously, the highlighted area could come from light shining through a window. Her actions, those in front of this “window,” are for public consumption.

Thus her actions, which in part produce her interiority, are shared. There is little, if any, boundary between herself and those around her. There is nothing that she can hold onto herself, that nobody else can claim a part of. Whoever roams in this panoptic space shares this same lack of interiority. Thus the window, or glass, induces a dissolution into a transparent solvent where the interiority of these individual particles becomes impossible because of the particle's newfound transparency. This intersubjectivity that I am describing can exhibit properties of disorder, but it is not defined by them. I used the word motion because with an increase of movement comes an increase of available windows to peer through. The more windows that are looked through, the greater this sea of exteriority becomes. Or rather, the more individuals who become the object of others' gazes, the more dense this sea becomes. And with an increase of density, it is more likely that individual particles, who are struggling anyway with their own identity, will crash into other like particles. It is easy to see the danger, then.

If, in fact, this girl was connected to the image of a mirror, there would be an implicit interiority. The object is not visible for others, just as it is visible to her. Although, there are benefits to this interiority, there is something dangerous about this as well. (This paper, however, will not go into this aspect as it has less to do with *The Library of Babel*.)

This photograph serves as an important segue to textuality. Here we have “read” a window, and the contents contained in it. The window, unlike the mirror, opens an individual identity to the world. The fixed individual in the window becomes the object of infinite gazes, but also of fluid possibilities. Just as the child *plays* in the sunlight and is surrounded by shadows, there is a ‘play’ between ominous and possibility in this photograph. The same tension and play characterizes *The Library of Babel*.



I hereby state that it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite. Those who believe it to have limits hypothesize that in some remote place or places the corridors and staircases and hexagons may, inconceivably, end – which is absurd. And yet those who picture the world as unlimited forget that the number of possible books is *not*. I will be bold enough to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: *The library is unlimited but periodic*. If an eternal traveller should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder – which, repeated, becomes order: the Order. My solitude is cheered by that elegant hope. (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 36)

The conceptualization of the mirror, the latter product, as argued by Gerry O’Sullivan, lends much insight to Borges’ *Library of Babel*. O’Sullivan, in his essay “Intertextuality in Borges and Foucault,” suggests a Borgesian library or a Foucauldian archive where, “When texts mirror other texts rather than a stable and external reality, the effect is heterotopic, to use Foucault’s language, and the mimetic relationship between text and world is radically altered” (O’Sullivan 118). Foucault’s “heterotopia” is a realm where grammar itself is thrown into question, where the order formed in utopias is lacking (O’Sullivan 110).

O’Sullivan falls short of explicitly positing that the books in the Library of Babel are mirrors themselves. However, because of his constant associations between books and mirrors, one can jump to that conclusion oneself. Continuing with this line of reasoning, we get to the crux of O’Sullivan’s essay:

Mirrors are, and remain, real objects that merely suggest representation, and this leads Foucault to draw a parallel between the incessant doubling offered by polished surfaces and the self-representation of language in writing, which drives us into the virtual “space” of reduplication and repetition. (118)

Mirrors mimic language in writing. Mirrors and language offer a tool for mimicry. Both cannot avoid the mimetic, the repetitious, the infinite. They constitute that which must be doomed to repetition *ad infinitum*. However, the representation the two offer is characteristically fallacious. For example, Lacan explains that the “I” is developed only after a misrecognition. The young viewer who looks into the mirror mistakenly ‘sees’ an individual subject, separate from his

or her milieu, when, in fact, the “I” does not deserve such a separate demarcation.

O’Sullivan takes the idea of the mirror and introduces the reader to new possibilities by presenting to us facing mirrors: “The mirror, and very often facing mirrors, betokens infinity while undermining representation” (O’Sullivan 118). The two mirrors, now, introduce an intertextuality, a referentiality based upon a repetition. The books, the mirrors, sit in row after row, shelf after shelf, room after room, reflecting each and every way. The infinities that are created with facing mirrors increase exponentially when the book is envisioned as a mirror. The Library of Babel is “composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries” (Borges 19). Infinite infinities are created between every book, within and between hexagonal galleries. The *real* mirror that already exists in every hexagonal gallery only increases the dizziness. But for Borges, there is an order inherent to this madness, this infinity, that harkens back to Borges’ line, “The library is unlimited but periodic.”¹

This reading, however, starts to fall apart, if only slightly, through the work of another scholar who writes about Borges and his mirrors. Christine de Lailhacar, in her essay, “The Mirror and the Encyclopedia” makes the following argument after she has likened the Derridian/Platonic *pharmakon* to mirrors, hallucinatory substances and books:

The Borgesian/Babylonian notion of the library as labyrinth is concretely actualized in the Benedictine library...It is a “net...or *meander*...whose main feature is that every point can be connected with every other point, and when the connections are not yet designed, they are, however, conceivable [possible worlds]. A net is an unlimited territory...*it has neither center nor outside.*” This is strangely reminiscent of “a sphere whose center is...” (168)

¹ It is quite appropriate here, where the tension between order and disorder emerges, to mention the tension within Borges’ own position between modernism and post-modernism. Borges exhibits both the modern transcendent author/artist and the postmodern slipperiness of signification and inevitability of disorder. There is a perfection that he tries to constantly attain, but in that perfection there is always a hint of the deconstructed.

It has neither center nor outside. They are, however, conceivable possible worlds. Are we still examining the same mirror? There was no mention of “possible worlds” from O’Sullivan.

“Possible worlds” sound, in fact, rather Deleuzian. Is Deleuzian rhizomatics how we are to understand Borges’ writings, though? We cannot stray from the text. However much we might want to imagine a library where anything is possible, Borges’ writing is dark and focuses on the limits and will not quite allow for that reading. I will refer to it again: “the library is unlimited but periodic.” Borges is clearly not suggesting the openness of Deleuzian rhizomatics. But the mirror clearly contains some contradictions. What then, are we to do with *The Mirror*? Are there other possibilities that can reconcile the contradictions of periodic and conceivable possible worlds better than a mirror?

The conceptualization of the book as a mirror is invaluable. It provides a tangible object to relay the idea of repetition and its literal and figurative associations with infinity render the mirror a great starting point for understanding the Borgesian library, or Borgesian book. However, it does fall short in some other areas not previously mentioned: namely, when examining subjectivity and the public sphere (libraries, after all, are many times public institutions). O’Sullivan does not ask questions such as how does an individual form a subjectivity under the gaze of a public? who constitutes the public? is the public made up of individual subjectivities? can subjectivities be found in the public sphere? or are subjectivities located somewhere else? O’Sullivan does come close at times to addressing these issues. O’Sullivan invokes the Foucauldian principle of exteriority and the death of the “author-function,” but stops short taking a closer look at subjectivity, especially in this lens of the public sphere. Examining Thomas Keenan’s article, “Windows: of vulnerability,” found in Bruce Robbins’ *The Phantom Public Sphere* might elicit some useful tools for understanding the Borgesian book/library.

Let us reexamine the window and the mirror. The mirror allows for the development of a deep interiority to take place. But just as the physical makeup of the mirror—the solid reflective metal that produces the image of the self—is very thin and rests on a tenuous *liquid* layer, the makeup of the subject is tenuous. On the other hand,

glass is just as slippery as the question that it begs: "Does a window belong to the inside or the outside?" (Keenan 130).

Although Keenan may never answer this question, four points that grow out of one another spring from this question. These are the effects of the window. 1) The opening that a window represents risks a more cataclysmic rupture of the distinction between inside and outside, public and private, and self and other (124). 2) The window, with a resistance to knowledge and representation that is remarkable, violently rips open the "protection" that is the human subject (127). 3) The publicity that a window provides denies the security of the individual gaze, destroying the interior; interiority, however, is only possible through a breach of the intersubjectivity afforded by the window that is open to everyone's gaze (133-4). 4) The window is "structured like a language" – it "gives no stable ground to humanity, [it] makes no room for our signs and representations." "Language intervenes in the lives of those who seek to use it with a force and a violence that can only be compared to...light, to the tear of the blinding, inhuman, and uncontrollable light that come through a window – something soft, that breaks" (136, 138).

It is easy to see how a mirror's base is glass. In envisioning both the mirror and the window, we must concern ourselves with questions of gaze and representation. But the commentary that comes from the discussion of the window speaks more about the subject, via the discussion of the public – of liquid margins between the private and public, the self and the other. What does this all do for *The Library of Babel* then?

If the books are imagined, not as mirrors, but as Thomas Keenan's *windows: of vulnerability*, then this new reading of the *book* suggests that what one may see/read in an entire library as envisioned by O'Sullivan, may be seen in one book – for one may see the same thing out of one window-book as a row or window-books. Regardless of what is on the page, each glimpse becomes infinite, so that every book becomes the same book; every book becomes the Book of Sand². Only one book is needed to "betoken infinity."

² "The Book of Sand" is a short story by Borges where a door-to-door bible salesman sells the narrator an infinite book. This book appears to be the size of a normal book,

Because the Library of Babel consists of infinite windows, the inhabitants of the Library experience only an intersubjectivity. All inhabitants have the same desire: to find a book in which they can interiorize the contents—which will mean something unique to that individual—in order to develop an interior. They dream of a breach. One book that is particularly elusive is the book that contains an inhabitant's entire life story. *The Library of Babel*, then, is a story that explores the fear of being in the public sphere; the horror of true intersubjectivity. There are two possible readings. Rather than the horror presented by O'Sullivan, I read possibility, danger and intersubjectivity as presented by Keenan in Borges' story.

We may have figured out the emotional gist with the window, but the physical form of the library should still be under question. Let us step back and remind ourselves of what we know so far. 1) Borges: "The library is unlimited but periodic." 2) O'Sullivan: "The mirror, and very often facing mirrors, betokens infinity while undermining representation." 3) Keenan's windows: If you can see through one, you can see through them all so that one book becomes all books (one book "betokens infinity"). O'Sullivan's mirrors and Keenan's windows echo Borges.

THE END OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

Dr. Francis Fukayama—the venerable scholar whose famous 1989 paper, "The End of History?" sent shock waves through academia, particularly in the field of political science—recently spoke at a Symposium at The George Washington University called "Western Society and the Changing World." His basic thesis—which is an extension of Hegel's idea that capital "H" History ended once Napoleon was defeated in 1806 and the principles of peace, love and democracy were established—posits that once these principles were firmly established after the Cold War, History, for all intensive purposes, becomes static. The whole world generally moves toward unilinear progress that ends, ultimately, with an ideal—with global capitalism and liberal democracy—and basically nothing has or will

but its pages are both random and seemingly infinite. One can never find the first page of the book or the last page of the book. One can never even find the same page twice.

constitute a significant change from that (even the events of September 11th).

It is easy to be taken aback by his apparent conservatism, by his triumphing a less than perfect system. But the more that one thinks about it, his thesis can, in fact, fit together quite nicely with even some theses from the most radical thinkers. I am thinking primarily of two theorists: Manuel De Landa and Antonio Benítez-Rojo. In *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* De Landa argues that there has never been different stages of development, that reality is much like a rock which has developed by the sedimentation of elements of homogeneous hierarchies and heterogeneous meshworks. He believes that history is constantly bifurcating and for almost completely irreducible reasons, one path was chosen (but it was not the only path that could have been chosen). For example, one of his main arguments is that capitalism could have developed first in China (who exhibited an inventive prowess) or the Islamic world (which developed credit), but the conditions were just right in Europe for capitalism and that China and the Islamic world had opportunities but missed their chance. De Landa's understanding of the world views the present as one of the many possible paths. Benítez-Rojo presents a somewhat different view, as we have seen earlier in the paper. In *The Repeating Islands* Benítez-Rojo reads the history of the Caribbean through the lens of Chaos theory suggesting that (dis)order always repeats itself. The history of the Caribbean is just the repeated history of violence, Benítez-Rojo says.

While Fukayama still views a linear history that has come to an end and De Landa puts forward a nonlinear history and Benítez-Rojo develops a cyclical history, it seems safe to say that History, for all three has come to an end. Maybe the only big difference is that History died as soon as it was created for De Landa and Benítez-Rojo, in that all matter moves essentially through hierarchy and meshwork and encourages the flow of biomass (in the form of energy, genes or knowledge) for De Landa and once the cycle of violence started in the Caribbean, even though the polyrhythms might be unique on each island, each island repeats the history of a non-central island. Now, of course, there are many major points of contention that I concede I will not be able to reconcile: for Fukayama, History is closed, while for De Landa and Benítez-Rojo, it is full of

possibility. But History—for Fukayama, De Landa and Benítez-Rojo—may have very well ended (or ended when it began) for all three.

It would be useful, however, if we look through another lens, to yield a very similar, but possibly more cogent physical structure/map. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, in his book *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, examines the Caribbean culture. He does so through the lens of Chaos theory. Benítez-Rojo makes the following point to explain Chaos and begin his discussion of the Caribbean Islands: “within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states of regularities that repeat themselves globally” (2). Chaos may reveal particularly little in our study if we did not allow Benítez-Rojo to explain:

...within the sociocultural fluidity that the Caribbean archipelago presents, within its historiographic turbulence and its ethnological and linguistic clamor, within its generalized instability of vertigo and hurricane, one can sense the features of an island that “repeats” itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. (3)

Here Chaos presents a repeatable model. Benítez-Rojo focuses on the island. In the Caribbean, he formulates the model as the island. Within this island there are “unexpected designs” that create unpredictable paths. These paths, however varied and infinite, do not depart from the island model. The island model accounts for the unpredictability. In this sense, the island model is the repetition of disorder and, only because this disorder is repetitious, is there an overall order. Applying Chaos to *The Library of Babel* we see the randomness repeated. Disorder becomes order.

Chaos, then, solves our contradiction of periodic and conceivable possible worlds. Thus, what is repeating are the keywords of the above quote: fluidity, instability, unfolding, bifurcating, multidisciplinary maps, unexpected. Instead of a hopelessly limited map repeating, our new reading finds an answer to “the ancient problem” that accounts for chaos: *whole possible worlds are periodic*.

Our book of sand cannot be grasped. The super-saturated liquid resists all form. Sand moves into a sea where it dissolves to become

indistinguishable from its milieu. What hopes to be seen needs only to be seen once.

I started this section playfully titled “The End of the Public Sphere?” by introducing the original soundbite and reconciling the general idea of it with other thinkers more in line and constituting my theoretical frame. Now I must ask the following question that will beget a number of subsequent questions: what is the difference between the non-Fukayaman history and the public sphere? Other ways to ask the same question are is what is at stake in History the same thing as what is at stake in the public sphere? are the products of History and the public sphere the same? and do the same things create/constitute both History and the public sphere?

History may be thought of as the consolidation of memes—“units of cultural information”³—into a single body known as “the past.” Every person comes into contact with memes. These memes are intersubjective, flowing in and out of different subjectivities. Not all memes flow at all times through all bodies, though. The memes seem to flow in chunks, or like meteors that crash into other meteors, either smashing both parts into a million pieces or combing the two parts into a bigger meteor (but always with the loss of some fragmentary pieces).

What then is the public sphere? Is it not made up of the same collection of memes that form the collective “we”? Is it not different for everybody? Does the public sphere not move like a meteor, too? Does history and the public sphere move like De Landa’s biomass? Do the memes of history and the public sphere bifurcate, never moving toward a single path, but one of the many possible paths? Do these memes all move at the same speed? in all locations? through all people? Are other people or events no more than memes to us? Isn’t our reality a fragmented collection of memes? *Isn’t the*

⁴ The “meme” was first coined in 1976 in *The Selfish Gene*, written by British zoologist Richard Dawkins. Botanist Michael Pollan, in his book *The Botany of Desire*, explains the meme succinctly: “A meme is simply a unit of memorable cultural information. It can be as small as a tune or a metaphor, as big as a philosophy or religious concept. Hell is a meme; so are the Pythagorean theorem, *A Hard Day’s Night*, the wheel, *Hamlet*, pragmatism, harmony, ‘Where’s the beef?’ and of course the notion of the meme itself. Dawkins’s theory is that memes are to cultural evolution what genes are to biological evolution” (148).

public sphere, then, just like History, all of the memes that can potentially be shared by everyone (as opposed to the memes that are contained, which constitute the private sphere and interiority)?

My answer is yes.

Their oneness is confirmed. Are they not preoccupied with the same questions? Are their primary concerns both not who gets counted and who does not?

Let us turn to a famous conception of the Public Sphere to help our further our discussion. In her famous essay, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," found in Bruce Robbins' *The Phantom Public Sphere*, Nancy Fraser reverses four points of contention in Habermas' conception of the Public Sphere. These are the four assumptions that she reverses (and I quote):

1. the assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate "as if" they were social equals; the assumption, therefore, that societal equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy;
2. the assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics;
3. the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of "private interests" and "private issues" is always undesirable;
4. the assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state. (9)

Fraser's Utopic Public Sphere is one of multiplicity. She champions social equality, the proliferation of many publics and discourses and that which binds civil society to the state.

I want to make it clear that in no way am I trying to dismantle Fraser's project. I am tremendously sympathetic with her vision. Though I find her Public Sphere a major contribution to Public Sphere studies and critical theory as a whole, my critique with her project is her neglect of time and History. Fraser, indeed, wants to look ahead to find a different way to desire, but since I feel that History and the public sphere are essentially one, she does not look

back in order to look ahead. Utopias never actualize because their creators do not heed the words of Foucault: everything comes from *within* society. If you want to change society, you must work with what society has to offer; and what is society (the public sphere) but History? Unlike Fukayama who wants the end of History—wants his reading to wrap History into one complete ball—I believe that the theorists aforementioned and *The Library of Babel* may be suggesting an end to Fraser's Utopian Public Sphere, not a public sphere that is in the process of change.

Looking at Fraser's Public Sphere, which like Fukayama's History is a basic unilinear movement towards an ideal (in this case, the ideal of multiplicity), we see that—if we can accept the fact that history and the public sphere are one—Fraser's Public Sphere has ended. The only difference between Fukayama's History and Fraser's Utopian Public Sphere is the actual ideal (which is very dissimilar).

The difference between the two ideals is a good example of the difference between Modernist utopias and Postmodernist heterotopias. Tom Siebers, the Editor of *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic*, goes into detail about this difference. In short, he concludes that, as opposed to modernist utopias that try to "homogenize difference," postmodernist heterotopias "desire to put things together that do not belong together" (4).

Tom Siebers acknowledges, however, that postmodernist heterotopias are fundamentally utopias: "Utopian desire is the desire to desire differently, which includes the desire to abandon such desire...postmodernism, like all utopian thinking, is concerned with what lies beyond the present moment, perhaps beyond any present moment" (3). It is here that Sieber's heterotopia breaks with the heterotopia of Foucault: though both desire to desire differently, Siebers' utopia (postmodernism) is only forward looking.

Foucault's heterotopia is decidedly not utopic. Utopias console. Heterotopias disturb. Utopias encourage fables and discourse. Heterotopias "desiccate speech". Heterotopias undermine language in a way that syntax is destroyed—that the syntax that "holds together" is dismantled—making it, now, impossible to *name* (xviii). Foucault specifically points to Borges for having heterotopias throughout his work, for Borges' works embody "the disorder in which fragments

of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclitite*" (xvii). Foucault points to the Borgesian cataloguing practices as fundamentally heteroclitic. Borges' Chinese encyclopedia breaks up ordered surfaces (xv). The same happens in the lists of books in *The Library of Babel*. The catalogues are arbitrarily random, but pull bits of order together at uneven intervals. Within Borges' random lists, there will be pockets of order (this will be discussed in much more detail in the next section). When examined, these pockets of order—in seeming disorder—help explain the statement *whole possible worlds are periodic*. Analyzing parts of a whole reveals a public whole where both order and possibility coexist.

Foucault's heterotopias neglect to acknowledge time—there is no mention of a time frame. It is difficult to say whether Foucault left it out on purpose, whether he did not think of it, or whether he felt it simply was not relevant to what he was writing about. Whether or not Foucault wanted us to consider time, Borges certainly does. Borges' heterotopias are not concerned with only the future, they are concerned with the present and past as well.

Thus Fraser's public sphere, although incorporating the credo of Foucault's heterotopia (that which is exhibited by the heteroclitic), is intrinsically a utopia, for her world of multiplicities only looks forward. Her public sphere cannot exist because she fails to see that there is no difference between the public sphere and History.

Nancy Fraser's public sphere (or Fukayma's History, for that matter) is like that of the Aramis project, presented in Bruno Latour's book, *Aramis, or the Love of Technology*. Latour examined why the high tech, personal rapid transit system project, Aramis, died before being implemented in Paris. Latour's concluded that the transportation project died because,

Aramis had not incorporated any of the transformations of its environment. It had remained purely an object, a pure object. Remote from the social arena, remote from history; intact. (280)

Aramis remained an ideal, partly because it was never allowed to be real. Latour described this failure as a result of a love of technology and a dislike for research. If the engineers, scientists, politicians, etc. would have embraced research (letting Aramis grow and become), Aramis might well be alive and materially real today. But all

of the sides could not agree. The Aramis envisioned by the engineers at the beginning of the seventeen year project was the same as was envisioned at the end and the politicians and business people wanted a production-line Aramis before it was ever ready. The Aramis project died when it began, because the project never really began: Aramis was not allowed to leave its dream existence and become-Aramis; Aramis was told who Aramis was, not the other way around. So too is Fraser's Public Sphere. Fraser's Public Sphere died before it ever began, just like the Aramis project. The engineer's love of technology and Fraser's love of the public sphere are one. Fukayama's History, no doubt, suffers from the same love: they want Aramis, but will not let Aramis become *Aramis*.

Thus I have a tenuous alliance with Fraser. For although I agree that multiplicity is beneficial, Fraser's utopic writing hinders that multiplicity. Let me wrap up this section labeled "The End of the Public Sphere?" – which derived its name from Fukayama's "The End of History" – with a quite relevant critique of utopias:

(...) utopia, like the dialectic itself, is commonly fantasized as the end of time, *the end of history* [my emphasis], the moment of resolution of past problems. (Grosz 138)

Fraser creates a blueprint for a world where a blueprint would destroy the ideals of this future world. Fraser's future History, future Public Sphere, future Utopia has already been delineated, and therefore, it has already ended. There is no future for here Public Sphere. Fraser "produce[s] the future on the model of the (limited and usually self-serving) ideals of the present" (Grosz 139).

The question is now ready to be asked: have we seen the end of the Utopian Public Sphere? Or will the public sphere continue, being a result of bifurcations and conditions that are just right for the public sphere to exist? Is the result a repeating island? I will not try to answer. I have no right to even attempt an answer.

I will, however, suggest even one more *possibility*: will Borges' *Library of Babel* provide a representation of the end of History/Utopic Public Sphere? Is the infinite library the repository of the public sphere? Is the Library of Babel the consolidation of all possible memes? Is Borges' heterotopic Library of Babel the historical (past, present and future) public sphere? This last question will be the mo-

tivation behind my textual analysis of *The Library of Babel* in the next section.

THE LIBRARY OF BABEL AS EIFFEL TOWER

The Eiffel Tower may be the world's most famous monument. This may be because it is a synthesis—a hybrid—of many other famous monuments. Its curved, pyramidal structure stretches and bends the form of the Great Pyramids and the many Mayan pyramids. Its expanded base skews the invocation of the Egyptian obelisks that sit on the Hippodrome in Istanbul; or the Washington Monument that sits proudly (or arrogantly) on The National Mall in Washington, DC; or Big Ben that majestically rises above the River Thames. Its base provides the same arches to walk under as the Arch of Triumph—only it has four of them. Topped with a flag, the Eiffel Tower may be the property of France, but it has also become the intellectual property of millions of humans across the world.

The Eiffel Tower has one other quality as a monument worth mentioning: it has a function. The Eiffel Tower is not just an object to be looked at; it moves, interacts, and provides for humans. It is an observation tower, but also the house for a museum, a gift shop and a restaurant. Besides being the object of a gaze, it gazes out at the world. It situates itself at the center of the world, much like the Prime Meridian in Greenwich. Its visitors gaze from the tower to the outside world from an *observation* room that instructs its guests where to look, giving them the tools (information) to gaze at one city or country or another. The world is divided into four quadrants (unlike Greenwich's two). All major cities in the world lie within one of these quadrants, with its distance from the Eiffel Tower noted.

Those who look in, look out from the same window: *from* the rest of the world, *to* the rest of the world. To whom, then, does the Eiffel Tower belong to? To the property of France? To the taxpayers of France? To the tourists? To the homeless? Paraphrasing the question posed by Thomas Keenan, does the Eiffel Tower belong to the inside or the outside? Or more importantly to this paper, does the window, that is the Eiffel Tower, liquefy the margins between what is public and private, what is the self and Other? Does the window-like quality expose the fragile separation between the memes that can be

shared in a public sphere and those that are contained in a private one? How does the Eiffel Tower lend insight to *The Library of Babel* and, ultimately, what similarities do the Eiffel Tower and the Library of Babel share?

I will take a quite lengthy detour through the work of three artists to answer the first questions, leaving the last question ready to be answered after a closer textual analysis of Borges' *The Library of Babel*.

In the Tate Modern in London, there is an exhibit entitled The Grid. Upon entering the exhibit, one reads the following: "The grid is one of the most ubiquitous symbols of the modern world, a design that appears in science and mathematics, in architecture and urban planning." Walking further into the exhibit, one will find him or herself in the Piet Mondrian and De Stijl Room. Mondrian's "Compositions" fill the room.

Anyone in academia has probably encountered Mondrian many times before, but the exhibit forces the viewer to think about Mondrian's work in terms of the capital "g" Grid. Lines and corners at perfect ninety degree angles define his work. Mondrian is, pardon my speech, the quintessential modernist artist. His work was nothing else but utopic and essentialist: for the modernists the Grid encapsulated all truths.

It was with these paintings in mind that I will examine Hungarian-born photographer, André Kertész's photograph, *Paris, 1933* (Borhan 109).

The Grid is evident. The horizontal and vertical lines cut through space in varying shades of gray. Even the cinder blocks whose sides face us, display a fine mixture of perpendicular lines. Ninety degree angles abound in this cinder block tower.

Behind the cinder blocks, the Eiffel Tower jettisons upwards. When pitted against the cinder blocks in the foreground, a grid pattern in the Eiffel Tower becomes apparent as well. Composed of dark, shadowy lines, the architectural schema of the tower appears much more complex than the haphazard layering of the cinder blocks. The Diagonal cuts across negative space. However, the negative space in the backdrop is light, while the negative space in the cinder blocks is black. Either the cinder block tower is the negative space of the Eiffel Tower or the Eiffel Tower is the negative space of the cinder blocks. Either way, the grids are linked.

Separated by the Seine River, the cinder block tower examines the Eiffel Tower in the distance. Or does the view that the observation room afford allow the observer to see the details of the blocks? Who is looking at the Eiffel Tower from the cinder blocks? And who is looking at the cinder blocks from the Eiffel Tower? Because the Eiffel Tower is shadowy in the background, is the Eiffel Tower inaccessible to the viewer standing with the blocks? Is the costly lift to the observation room, gift shop and restaurant unaffordable to this viewer? Is that public monument lingering in a private shadow for this viewer? Or rather, is the private space of the blocks coming into focal clarity for the public monument? Is it the public's turn to gaze back at those elements of society that seem unworthy of our glance?

I tend to go with the latter reading because I view the imperfections in the cinder blocks as Kertész's way of presenting the Grid deconstructed. The Grid is a symbol of perfection and unity. Individual pieces come together (and are lost) in order to form a more perfect whole. Especially with the case of cinder blocks, whose sole function is to come together to form a more complex whole (i.e., a building), the exposure of individual pieces can only deconstruct the ideal piece which is used to form the ideal whole. Each cinder block may be examined. Each of its infinite differences may be noted. Although each cinder block was modeled to be exactly the same as the next, the viewer can see that in reality the blocks vary in color, angles, and physical imperfections. But when all of the cinder blocks are pieced together, the Eiffel Tower is created—a hulking figure of perfect lines. It is inconceivable that the Eiffel Tower was built with anything but perfect, ideal cinder blocks. Kertész's exposure of the individual blocks suggests otherwise.

To help us along with this line of thinking, it may be helpful to bring René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (*This is not a pipe*) into our exploration. For this analysis I will rely solely on Michel Foucault's brilliant reading of Magritte's drawing in Foucault's book, *This Is Not a Pipe*. There are three main ways to view this drawing. 1) The pipe depicted in this drawing is not a pipe in reality (for who can say that a drawing of a pipe is actually a pipe). 2) The "this" in *This is not a pipe* is not referring to the pipe in the drawing. 3) The entire drawing, *This is not a pipe*, clearly does not constitute a pipe (Foucault, *Pipe* 26-9). Thus for Foucault, the many discourses (seven

by Foucault's count) that can spring from this one statement—this is not a pipe—is “more than enough to demolish the fortress where similitude was held prisoner to the assertion of resemblance” (49). Leave it to Foucault to explain things clearly. What I believe Foucault means is this: any assertion of resemblance will be inherently flawed, for this assertion relies on a resemblance to a Platonic ideal, which Foucault and countless others find more than suspect. Magritte exposes one pipe to destroy the idea of what a capital “p” Pipe is. As Foucault suggests, objects can only exhibit a similitude. They are never copies, but only likenesses.

If we use this discourse to examine *Paris, 1933*, the photograph really explodes with new meaning. The multitude of cinder blocks destroy the Cinder Block used to build the Eiffel Tower. The idea of the Cinder Block is possessed by all of the public. Individual cinder blocks are not a part of this public. Thus, Kertész's cinder blocks, as opposed to Cinder Blocks, are suggested to constitute the Eiffel Tower. The private cinder blocks, which are unknowable to the public, are the objects of the photograph. They all exhibit a similitude to one another.

The cinder blocks also serve another function. They tell the history of the Eiffel Tower. By examining its parts, the consolidation of these parts will be better understood. What is possible to know, becomes what is. The Eiffel Tower is a part of the public's history—it comprises the public sphere—because “The Eiffel Tower” is accessible to all. Everyone knows that cinder blocks, or whatever building material is used, comprise the Eiffel Tower. But the individual cinder blocks have no history and are not known to the public sphere because they are hidden, conglomerated into a whole that, if we examine more closely (as we have just done), is anything but Grid-like. The best we can say is that the Eiffel Tower is a similitude of The Eiffel Tower. Kertész's *Paris, 1933*, then, is a meditation on private parts that make a public whole.

The Eiffel Tower can thus represent—just like the Library of Babel—the historical public sphere. These Public Spheres/Histories are consolidations of all possible (public and private) memes. Like Kertész, who has exposed the private memes (the cinder blocks) that constitute the public Eiffel Tower, Borges, as we will come to see,

has exposed the private memes (the books) that constitute a public library.

BOOKS, WINDOWS, CHAOS THEORY, THE EIFFEL TOWER, THE END OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE?: THE PRIVATE CATALOGUE

All—the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalog of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogs, the proof of the falsity of those catalogs, a proof of the falsity of the *true* catalog, the gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary upon that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all books, the treatise Bede could have written (but did not) on the mythology of the Saxon people, the lost books of Tacitus. (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 23)

The random list has order, does it not? The Library of Babel is as complex as the human mind. In fact, it should be noted that the Library that we know is quite dependant on the human mind. Humans view the books in the Library through a human alphabet. Thus, the Library's structure is as structured (to us) as our own mind. Therefore, when we examine Borges' list, we are examining the structure of the Library as only humans can view it (and thus the human brain).

The work of Tacitus and lines concerning catalogues are found within the same list. Whereas a book by Tacitus is next to the book Bede could have written appears to lack order, the careful declension of the catalogue appears to exhibit quite a lot of it. We can not know why Borges (or rather, the narrator) chose which "books" to include in this list and in what order they would appear. At the same time, however, it is impossible to know why the Library is organized like it is organized (although there must be a book that explains it, as well).

Both the Library and the human mind operate in a set manner. The library consists of hexagonal rooms where,

...each hexagon is furnished with five bookshelves; each bookshelf holds thirty-two books identical in format; each book contains four hundred ten pages; each page, forty lines; each line, approximately eighty black letters. (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 20)

The Library does not deviate from these rules. They are operational rules. In the same manner, the human mind works by its own operational rules. Both the Library and the human mind, however, share the same language. Or do they?

Who is to say that the letters have anything to do with what the book says or does not say? The words in the books are indeed *unlimited but periodic*. But who says we are supposed to be looking at the words? Since when has human language been the language of nature?

These questions are worthy of being answered, but answering these questions is not the aim of this paper. These questions only re-submerge us in the idea of Chaos. What Chaos can lend to this discussion is vital. Order or disorder is repeated, if one understands Chaos theory correctly. But just because two books might be exactly the same, it does not mean that they are anyway alike. Let me explain.

The narrator makes it clear that all possible books exist. Books exist “that differ by no more than a single letter, or comma” (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 29). A book that contains only the letter “g” on the 317th page can be sitting next to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and next to a book of “four hundred and ten pages of unvarying MCV’s” (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 22). After a lengthy exposition about its infinite properties and discussion of the discourse surrounding the Library, the narrator concludes that “*the library is unlimited but periodic.*” But the narrator goes on:

If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that same volumes are repeated in the same disorder—which repeated, becomes order: the Order. (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 36)

At first glance, this is the order of the mirror discussed by O’Sullivan. However, this cannot be further from the truth.

Let us return to the Eiffel Tower to help explain. For all intensive purposes the physical Eiffel Tower is the same today as it was in 1889 (ignoring the restaurants and gift shops, and the general wear and tear caused by the elements). However, the Eiffel Tower of 1889 and the Eiffel Tower of 2002 are completely different towers. Let us turn to another example to help explain.

Paula Treichler, in her famous book, *How to have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*, lucidly demonstrates that although the AIDS virus today is—again, for all intensive purposes—the same virus that it was in 1980, AIDS in these eras are totally different beings. In 1980 it was “A gay plague probably emanating from San Fransisco” (Treichler 12), while in 2002 it is *Acquired immune deficiency syndrome*. They constitute different realities.

Turning back to the Eiffel Tower, what was the Eiffel Tower in 1889?:

Sunday March 31st 1889 at 1.30 p.m., Gustave Eiffel showed some of the famous personalities of the day around what was then the tallest tower in the world. On this inauguration day, Eiffel climbed the 1710 steps leading to the third level of the tower before unfurling the French flag and hearing the 21 canon salute marking the occasion. Eiffel later inscribed these words in a woman’s fan : “ the French flag is the only one with a 300 meter pole.” The Eiffel Tower remained the highest monument in the world until the construction of New York’s Chrysler Building in 1930. (The Official Site of the Eiffel Tower, A Century Ago)

In 1889, the Eiffel Tower was a symbol of French achievement. This was its dominant meaning at the time. It was the tallest building in the world acting as the biggest flag pole in the world. What was the Eiffel Tower but a means to display rampant French nationalism. Today,

With 2 million visitors the first year and almost 6 million people a year today, the Eiffel Tower is a real crowd pleaser. At the crossroads of the entire world, 170 million visitors have come since its construction.

It’s not surprising when you consider the Eiffel Tower is the monument that best symbolizes Europe. It’s also the one tourists prefer. (Official Site of the Eiffel Tower, Facts and Figures)

The Eiffel Tower represents Europe and is the marketing symbol to tourists all over the world to come to Europe (France). Tourism, then, occupies a large part of its dominant meaning. These documents testify to the Eiffel Tower’s changing reality. Over the course of more than a century, tourism has worked its way into the history of the Eiffel Tower and a shifting nationalism, from France to Europe, marked the Eiffel Tower as commanding a larger audience.

Never will the same Eiffel Tower be the same reality twice. It is important to note that, like De Landa's sedimentation theory and the theories of Treichler, who I am currently invoking, dominant meanings can, and do, have real effects. I, by no means, want to critique this idea. I believe, however, that Borges suggests a method to deconstruct dominant meanings by looking at parts in a 'conglomerated' whole. It is only when the individual memes that construct a larger dominant meaning are evaluated, can dominant meanings be changed and/or destroyed.

The exact same thing can be said of the Library of Babel as the Eiffel Tower. The eternal traveler who views the "same" book (in contents) a second time, will read it entirely different than the first time. The book will present him or her with an entirely different reality because the reality of the eternal traveler has changed since he or she last viewed the same contents. This is why the book cannot be a mirror. It is true—History is bound to repeat itself—but it never repeats itself in the same way. This is because History and the public sphere (or the historical public sphere) change.

The traveler who views the identical book a second time will possess an entirely different set of memes than upon the first viewing. Many new memes will be acquired, but at the same time, many old memes have either been forgotten or suppressed. The reality, History, public has changed for the traveler. For example, just knowing that this is their second viewing makes the experience unique. Even if it was the travelers 87th time coming across an identical book, it would matter that the traveler saw it 86 times before.

We are not dealing with only one traveler, or one book. What, then, does all of this mean?

Let us return to the windows: of vulnerability. Windows provide only a physical border between two objects, two subjects, or an object and a subject. They provide no method of concealment. Thus, whatever is in a window is up for display to whomever can view the window. If everything can be viewed (in front of a window), everything constitutes the public, for the public is the consolidation of knowable memes. But what happens when every pair of eyes cannot view every window—meme? What happens when the windows are too infinite to all be viewed? Does not selection have to take place? Is it not impossible that any two people would gaze

through all of the exact same windows? Are objects and subjects behind windows hidden just because they have not been viewed?

Let us not forget the words of a famous group of scholars: “I’m looking through you, where did you go?” (Beatles *I’m Looking Through You*). The Beatles understood that transparency equals loss, or at least an irrevocable diffusion. The scattering of memes throughout the Library of Babel ensures that what is public, is private; and what is private, is public. Therefore, those in this great Library are constantly battling for a solid state. Their identities, themselves, are in veritable flux. The public and History that they know changes just as much. And even though there are a set, though almost infinite, number of memes, the history of who knew what memes is important.

Whole possible worlds are periodic. Even though the physicality of these worlds is virtually the same, the current historical public spheres portray these worlds in a very different light. Thus, there may be only one *Don Quixote*⁴, but the *Don Quixote* that a 17th Century Spaniard read was in no way the *Don Quixote* that a 21st Century Postcolonial Literature student reads. Though the physicality of the world may not change, and thus capital “h” History may have ended (or not yet begun), our historical public sphere is only adding layer upon layer to itself, infinitely expanding (while fragmenting and peeling at the same time).

“The Library of Babel”, then, is a meditation on who constitutes the public, what constitutes history (which as we have come to see are really one in the same), and how individuals exist in this public. The conflicting elements of hope and anxiety present in the text only reinforce the notion that Borges is experimenting with what happens when—in an environment where the consolidations of all possible memes is possible—private memes are helplessly exposed to the public’s gaze. When every element of society becomes as transparent as a book in a public library, Borges suggests that people’s

⁵ Borges played around with this idea in his short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. In this story, Borges presents an “author” who will write *Don Quixote*, not from the point of view of Miguel Cervantes, but from his own. Even though both copies are absolutely identical (Cervantes’ and Menard’s), the narrator notes the tremendous differences in the text. This is a witty meditation on how culture affects reality.

only healthy response is to turn to an *elegant hope* (Borges, *The Library of Babel* 36). It may be too late for the Eiffel Tower, but the Library, and ultimately people's minds, may one day embody "the surprise, the multiplexity, the sea-changing rhythm of...history" (Albee 67).

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