HEINRy SUSSMAN

The Writing of the System: Borges’s Library and Calvino’s Traffic

Systemic Parodists

In its most strident clarity, the rapport to philosophical systems maintained by the writing of Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, and we could mention with them Umberto Eco, Franz Kafka, and Maurice Blanchot, is at best murky and ambiguous. Any of us who have ever taken Borges’s guided tour through the maniacally symmetrical hexagonal galleries of the Babel Library, bearing important similarities, by the way, to the monastery library in Eco’s *The Name of the Rose,* or have ever negotiated the traffic patterns that Calvino elaborates with philosophical rigor in “The Chase,” or have contemplated business with the bureaucracy of Kafka’s Castle knows that systematic presumptions and processes are at the heart of these writers’ fictive experiments and games. Their fictive productions, as cultural artifacts, almost plead to be written off as systematic parodies. The latest, still-influential nineteenth-century projects of philosophical system-making, so this narrative runs, generated an aesthetics of systematic parody. In different pretexts and under different guises, writers as diverse as Kafka, Bataille, Artaud, and Beckett, not to mention Borges and Calvino, rush in to give the lie to systems that, however meticulously they accounted for the torque and distortions exerted by their representational and nonrepresentational linguistic media, ultimately privilege determination and repetition over linguistic allegory and play.

This scenario—of Borges, Calvino, and their ilk as systemic parodists—is a compelling one, and I have already submitted to its full sway in my efforts to formulate the aesthetic contracts prevailing in modernism and postmodernism.¹ Certain aesthetic subcontracts to modernism,² such as futurist or dadaist manifestoes, the elaborate overdetermination in the structuration of the different segments comprising Joyce’s *Ulysses,* or the fragmentations of cubism, import systematic dimensions, patterns, and pretensions wholesale, which they then joyfully demolish in explicit fashion. The aesthetic experi-
ments of postmodernism, according to this scenario, elide the systems that may have been their occasion and deposit on the public docket of art the material residues of system-confounding strategems. These remains may well include Thomas Bernhard's endlessly self-referential and correcting sentences, the musical minimalism of Glass or Reich, or closer to home, Calvino's image of the “soft moon,” a lunar body whose vertical elevation and separation dissolve into the consistency of Cheese Whiz.

As philosophical discourse, in its circumspection and innovation, moves toward the consideration of writers such as Borges, Calvino, and Eco, language peels off of the scaffolding of conceptual systematization and metamorphoses itself into a radically different, more disruptive and intransigent sort of stuff. Borges, Calvino, and, closely allied to them, Blanchot, become philosophers of a writing, which, in the wake of deconstruction, allegorizes the freedom that systems delineate but cannot contain. The semantic, conceptual, and even physical play evidenced by Borges's and Calvino's systematic parodies may be interpreted as escapes, or at least interludes away from systematic control. I could launch, just at this point, a reasonable overview of parodic, self-questioning systems in Borges's and Calvino's fiction that would be more or less compelling, and that might convince a certain number of us that we had not egregiously misspent our time in hearing out the enumeration.

What Are Systems?

But this approach to Borges and Calvino, at a rare philosophical forum devoted to their importance, begs at least two pivotal questions: what, after all, are systems? And isn't the relation to conceptual systems by asystematic art and aesthetics more nuanced than one of simple one-upmanship or unmasking? If conceptual systems, by virtue of their architecture, or their perdurance, or their iterability, always exert some sort of repressive gravitational force, then the artifacts of structured language playing off of systems are always oppositional, extending the avant garde still current in Borges and Calvino far backward in the histories of literature and art.

We need furthermore consider the question of complicity. What if systematic parodies, such as reach a high degree of hilarity in Borges's image of brumis, units of mimesis and derivation on Tlön, or in Calvino's fifteen-page recapitulation and expansion of Dumas' The Count of Monte-Cristo, evidence a higher degree of collaboration with the matrix of control than we, under the Western conventions of aesthetic disinterest and freeplay, are wont to allow? In terms of one of Borges’s Ficciones, the hero, at least the thinking man's hero, or thinker, in a situation of war or other sociopolitical polarization, is the likeliest suspect to become a traitor, for aesthetic creativity acknowledges a labyrinthine proliferation of viable avenues of action, among them the renunciation of “true” belief. The cultural audience that equated aesthetic play and systematic opposition with liberal political values was infuriated by his decoration, at the end of his career, by Chile's General Augusto Pinochet. At the same time, Borges's later ficciones, such as comprise Doctor Brodie's Report, abound with ethical images of the lamentable after-effects of extremism, in situations of professional competitiveness, sexual jealousy, and even nationalistic pride.

What if the lesson we draw from Borges's and Calvino's fiction is as much of the complicity between parodies and the systems they play off of as of the opposition? This collaboration might complexify, in a salutary fashion, our notions of the language justifying the sense of Borges, Calvino, Blanchot, Benjamin, and Derrida as philosophers of language. In a world of collusion between repressive—because structured, repetitive, and ultimately deterministic—systems, even the language of parody is inflected by what might be called the style or tonality of a system, or its shadow, as in Wittgenstein's early turn of phrase, “the shadow of a fact.” As I hope to suggest below, in Borges and Calvino, and the demonstration may well extend to others, the parodic bad-boys of philosophical systematization may derive much in tone, style, and imagery from the conceptual machines from which they presumably part company.

The law of genre may also be germane to the complex rhythm of opposition and complexity most likely prevailing between conceptual systems and their parodic renderings. However brilliantly Borges and Calvino occasionally mock the dimensions, processes, and tonalities accruing from the systematic works of Kant and Hegel, there is no reason why systematic discourse should rest solely in the hands of artists, literary or otherwise. The positionality of Borges and Calvino, as putative philosophers of writing, may be more akin to that of Fichte, who taught knowledge literally between the systematic lineaments of Kant and Hegel, and of Kierkegaard, who organized a literal shutdown of Hegelian dialectics, than that of literary system-makers, whether Dickens or Eliot, Mann or Pynchon.

Twelve Ways of Looking at a System

So what are systems? However diverse their forms and manifestations, they, along with their aspirations, have occupied a pivotal place in culture for a long time. And if we attempt to know them from their actions rather than their essence, what do systems do?

In a Borgesian Chinese encyclopedia, this is how conceptual systems might fare:

1. A system is an interactive language tool such that certain elements predicate others, whose value and function through this process become
of science fiction and fantastic literature. What is so inventive and brilliant about this brief work is how systematically it sets out the conditions of an alternate universe whose features correspond to those of Western metaphysics, but in an a priori state of deconstruction (if one be permitted to coin this phrase). The traits of this imaginary world (or rather uncannily related subworlds) are not merely set in relief against the Western philosophical conventions that they challenge. They are products, as poetic constructions, of positive imaging. It is in this context that knowledge and thought on Tłön attain a systematic coherence. “The metaphysicians of Tłön seek not truth, or even plausibility—they seek to amaze, astound” (CF, p. 74). By the same token, mathematical values are relative rather than precise. “Visual geometry is based on the surface, not the point” (CF, p. 76). “Books are rarely signed, nor does the concept of plagiarism exist: It has been decided that all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous” (CF, pp. 76-77). “Their fiction has but a single plot, with every imaginable permutation” (CF, p. 77). “All nouns . . . have only metaphoric value” (CF, p. 75). The philosophy, mathematics, literature, and religion of this imaginary domain, like Borges’s most significant literary and philosophical models, subjugate Being, essence, identity, truth, and rectitude to the dynamics of language itself. “Their language and those things derived from their language—religion, literature, metaphysics—presuppose idealism” (CF, p. 72). The extreme idealism that is perhaps Borges’s ultimate caption for this world in a preexistent state of deconstruction is a condition in which figments of language influence reality and vice versa. There is no more fanciful talisman of this threshold at which textuality, as a modern-day monadology, reconfigures the protocols and expectations of established philosophical systems than the brōmir, units of originality, derivation, and duplication that operate in no knoable sequence or determinable pattern.

I shall not dwell on “Tłön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” on this occasion, having belabored its compression, expansiveness, and extreme idealism elsewhere. But I mention it as I set out on a survey of Borges as an asystematic writer because it perfectly defines and dramatizes the relation between the Borgesian ficcion and that aspect of philosophical work purporting to systematic dimensions. “Tłön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” does not simply substitute whimsy or playfulness for the Western manias for directionality in time, precision in mathematical value, decisiveness in juridical procedure, linearity in literary plot, and uniqueness in questions of identity and creative originality. It verges on the limits of systematic aspirations and dimensions by imposing systematic protocols on itself. “Tłön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” must be accorded every seriousness as the blueprint for a nonexistent universe at the same time that its prevailing notions of time, space, quality, quantity, duration, and succession are foils to their counterparts as they could derive from the encyclopedias of Western philosophy.

Borges: An Asystematic Writer

Page for page, “Tłön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” is the most intense, fully and successfully designed work of asystematic writing in a nonphilosophical mode that I have ever encountered. It is the first of Borges’s Ficciones. Like the other ficiones, it is in part a miniaturized recapitulation and extension of the conventions

11. The disclaimers or at least allowances that systems make for their claims, whether of comprehensiveness, consistency, self-reflexivity, or whatever, are as pervasive as their magnitude and seriousness of purpose. Systems are instruments of language guaranteeing their own falsification as inevitably as new machinery comes fitted out with its own warrant. A work with systematic pretensions apologizes for itself even while it presses its claim. This foregone apology constitutes a rhetorical subgenre; affectively, this admission amounts to existentialist bad faith. Systematic work would hope that giving the lie, in advance, to the force and dimension of its design excuses it of its shortcomings and excesses. In an offhand manner, then, a philosophical system and its literary simulacrum, as opposed to the poem and the fragment, is an instrument of language distinguished by being always already equipped with its own bad-faith excuse. The systematic disclaimer disarms the aggression that might be directed toward the systematic claim.

12. Systematic writing therefore maintains a privileged rapport to its own destruction. The story, the poem, the argument, the critique as such make a certain offer. There is an inherent finitude to their claim. The espousal of their limit serves as an insurance policy to their design. Imperfections, anomaly, inconsistency, and parallel traits are all protected under the aesthetic contract prevailing over modernity in the West. Systematic writing aspires to much more. In its multifaceted claim is the violation of each one of its features. The thrill of the system is that each one of its pretensions hovers on the shoal of its own dismemberment. The Kantian drama of the sublime has anticipated this thriller. The science fiction scientist, who is a close relative to the spectator of sublimity in Kant, fully anticipates the vengeful attack by the monster, the figuration of the Transcendental, that only he has managed to predicate and track.
The passage begins: "The essence of the concept of the 'library of Babel' is the idea of the infinite potentiality and the infinite diversity of knowledge. It is a universe of infinite books, each containing a different possible combination of the letters of the alphabet, and each containing a different possible combination of knowledge. The library is the ultimate expression of the idea of the infinite, and it is a place where the mind can explore the infinite possibilities of knowledge."

(P. 121)
The Library of Babel” or the Paris/Buenos Aires of “Death and the Compass,” but also in time. This utterly fantastic notion of a labyrinth in time is one of Borges’s most striking and original syntheses:

Unlike Newton and Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not believe in a uniform and absolute time; he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are simply unknown for centuries, contains all possibilities. In most of those times, we do not exist; in some, you exist but I do not; in others I do and you do not; in others still, we both do. (CF, p. 127)

Borges populates the landscape of his writing with inhuman and impersonal constructions whose features are a deliberate subset of linguistic functions in part so that he can trace out their absurdities or anomalies on a human scale. He introduces human considerations into his fictive settings in part as limiting cases of systematicity. He configures mock systems indistinguishable from their linguistic parameters so that he can lay them low with anomalies also corresponding to features of language, this time at the level of arbitrariness and singularity, the coordinate of the continuum merging on the parable. He traps his reader, and indeed his whole fictive world, in a feedback loop shuttling endlessly, but not infinitely, between the systematic parameters and the singularities within the linguistic medium. Toward the overdetermined and impersonal sweep of this trajectory, he lends efforts at system-making, whether on the part of Kant, Hegel, or Schopenhauer, more credence than we might initially allow. Yet he endlessly questions this gravitation toward systematization, one as inevitable as linguistic articulation itself, by staging the absurdities arising when system and intractable particular are set on a collision course. Asystematic writing, under Borges’s stewardship, is a release of the repression or constraint demanded by an inevitable positing of the universe as an expansive rhetorical figure.

This double act of construction, this parry-and-thrust, does much to illuminate the brief sections of “The Library of Babel” that we have begun to approach. For it turns out that the breathtaking universe of the Library is as sensible as it is fantastic and impossible. I speak here not only of the architectural acknowledgment of the “physical necessities.” Let us consider the unique volume that the narrator’s father, an earlier librarian, opening up the issue of intellectual as well as genetic patrimony, discovered “in a hexagon in circuit number 15-94.” The textual matter out of which the book’s single grammatically correct phrase emerges is not meaningless word-salad; it is a sememe consisting of the letters MCV repeated in innumerable times. MCV is also a Roman numeral amounting to 1105. (A dictionary of dates reveals that in 1105 C.E., Tancred defeated the Turks at Tizin; also, that Henry V of France was crowned at Chartres. Is this confusion of Henrys a historical correlative to the contingent generation of meaning in the Library?)

Even while the Library and the works comprising it push our standard notion of meaning to the extreme, they do not abolish it. There are epiphenomena of meaning everywhere, even in the constructed discourse designed to put this traditional notion to the extreme test. Borges’s demonstration is clear. The world of fiction, or of the “extreme idealism” pressing backward to the terrain at which, always mediated by language, ideas and things generate one another, retains the residue of the systematicity that fictive language might otherwise seem to negate. Fiction bears the trace of system to the same extent that system is already discommodified by the inherent play and radicality of the medium—language—making it up. This observation of my own is borne out by the phrase that emerges, as if by magic, out of the cacophony of the MCVs. It is “O Time thy pyramids,” a phrase presenting the enigma of time as the riddle of the sphynx. (The pyramids, of course, stand adjacent to the Egyptian Sphynx.) What interests me more about this phrase than its exotic (in an orientalist sense) provenance is the sublimity of its content and tone. The meaning that the absurd and inhuman system of the Library puts forth on a bad day, when mechanism gives way to sense, is sublime. Sublimity, of course, is the position that the Kantian speculations reach at the end of a long trajectory in which the Transcendental remains the bedrock and landmark of human culture and civilization, but only as deduced and evolved, in keeping with European emancipatory ideology, from human capability. The system eventuating in the Kantian sublime makes an accommodation for human traits and lineaments just as the innumerable hexagons of the Babel library contain commodes for fecal necessities.

The sublime, and a long chain of systematic works struggling to effect a synthesis between the transcendental basis of Western metaphysics and the modern, in Foucault’s sense, resuscitation of the human, not only Kant’s, thus leave their imprint on Borges’s fantastic, and I would add asystematic, counteruniverse. The interaction between systematic thought and the twentieth-century writers who set it in an abyss or parodied it is, alas, not simple. It is not the joyous and invariably uplifting struggle between Tom and Jerry and their many analogues. The system marks asystematic writing, even as the latter measures the claims and efficacies of systems. This standoff, as suggested above, may belong more to the suspended ambiguity of collision than to the edifying ethos of liberation.

Calvino’s “The Chase”

Whereas it likely constitutes an oversimplification to assert that Italo Calvino’s asystematic writing parts ways definitively from the modality of the sublime, I may not be entirely wrong in suggesting that Calvino, in comparison to Borges, leaves more room in his fiction for the everyday, and its
The moral or ethical issues of the "Chinese," "human," and "other" traditions have often been clouded by the prevailing philosophy of progress. This approach advocates the inevitability of the "better" and "higher" states of being, and the superior development of "higher" and "better" beings. The "higher" and "better" beings are those who, by virtue of their own "higher" conscious states, have achieved a profound sense of understanding and knowledge about the universe and the nature of existence. This approach emphasizes the importance of individual achievement and personal growth, and the belief that these achievements and growths are essential for the development of the "better" and "higher" states of being.

The moral or ethical issues of the "Chinese," "human," and "other" traditions have often been clouded by the prevailing philosophy of progress. This approach advocates the inevitability of the "better" and "higher" states of being, and the superior development of "higher" and "better" beings. The "higher" and "better" beings are those who, by virtue of their own "higher" conscious states, have achieved a profound sense of understanding and knowledge about the universe and the nature of existence. This approach emphasizes the importance of individual achievement and personal growth, and the belief that these achievements and growths are essential for the development of the "better" and "higher" states of being.
systematicity of the traffic flow and of the Master/Bondsman reversals in the
duel explicit, the story's rhetoric has hinted at this broader dimension or
register underlying the attention to the empirical data. The "calculations" in
which both pursuer and pursued are engaged (zs, pp. 115–116), the narrator's
exploration of "every hypothesis because the more details I can foresee the
more probabilities I have of saving myself" (zs, p. 117), conceding that his
driverly maneuvers "above all are not decided by us but dictated by the
traffic's general pace" (zs, p. 120) are all considerations intimating a specula-
tive, general, and systematic dimension to the situation, making it a philo-
sophical diorama or cloud-chamber. Traffic is an annoying aspect of
contemporary urban and suburban life that benights us. It is also an instance
of what Bergson or Merleau-Ponty might have called "the systematicity of
everyday life."18 the systematic analogen to Kant's deployment of consensus
regarding beauty as an everyday instance of judgment, and the immanent
conceptual operating system upon which it is based, in the ordinary lives of
ordinary people.

"The Chase" bears witness to the birth of a philosophical subspecializa-
tion that I hope will become prevalent throughout the discipline, namely, to
the philosophy of traffic.19 Once the systematic scope of traffic and the urban
plans that direct and control it opens up, there are no limits to the philo-
sophical concepts and traditions falling under its sway.

It is the bodies therefore that determine the surrounding space, and if this
affirmation seems to contradict both my experience and my pursuer's... it is
because we are dealing with a property not of single bodies but of the whole
complex of bodies in their reciprocal relationships, in their moments of
initiative and indecision, of starting the motor, in their flashing of lights and
honking and biting nails and constant angry shifts of gear: neutral, first,
second; neutral, first second, neutral...

Now that we have abolished the concept of space (I think my pursuer in
these periods of waiting must also have reached the same conclusions as I)
and now that the concept of motion no longer implies the continuous
passage of a body through a series of points but only disconnected and irreg-
ular displacements of bodies that occupy this point or that, perhaps I will
succeed in accepting more patiently the slowness of the line, because what
counts is the relative space that is defined and transformed around my car as
around every other car in this traffic jam. In short, each car is the center of a
system of relationships which in practice is the equivalent of another, that is,
the cars are interchangeable, I mean the cars each with its driver inside; each
driver could perfectly change places with another driver, I with my neighbors
and my pursuer with his. (zs, pp. 122–123)

So fundamental are these speculations eventually attaining systematic
proportions that they revert to an analytic of space and time, in which even
the dimensions of the body, and the possibility of corporeality itself, are up
for grabs. The gravitation away from the banalities of self-concern and petty
rivalry is also a momentum toward increasingly fundamental categories of
philosophical speculation, such as a body situated at the very coordinates of
space and time. This is no longer a body that in conventional fiction insinu-
ates itself into different sensual apotropaeoses; this is a body in the purest, in
the Kantian sense, form: a body that is a unit of space and time, an element of
movement, a shifter of identity and difference, sameness and reciprocity, a
body both epitomizing and parodying Cartesian space.20 So powerfully does
the traffic situation in which the pursuers are enmeshed assert itself on a
systematic level that one space is interchangeable with another, a body indis-
tinguishable from another. The dimension of systematicity abolishes spatial
and corporeal singularity just as it has mocked the melodrama of the life-and-
death chase experienced on the existential level.

Calvino's systematic fiction, like that of Borges, expands in the sense that
it uplifts beyond the constraints of circumstance and materiality. But where
the Borgesian ficción luxuriates in the arabesques of complication, labyrinths,
lotteries, and endlessly twisting plots, a modernist and postmodern embroi-
dery on possibilities latent in the Hegelian dialectic, Calvino's systematic
writing looks back over its shoulder at the pure elements of philosophical
speculation. Perhaps in a more Kantian fashion, Calvino reverses backward
toward the irreducible elements in the grammar of the intellectual operating
system of the universe, obscure but objectifiable. Both Borges and Calvino
adopt the features of their narrative to the point at which they articulate not
only the writing of one system or another, but the writing of the system, the
systematic parameters imprinted upon theoretically aware writing itself. It is
at this point where they leave us, and we leave them.

Notes

1. See Henry Sussman, Afterimages of Modernity: Structure and Indifference in Twen-
1–20, 161–205.
2. I develop my notion of the aesthetic contract in The Aesthetic Contract: Statutes of
Art and Intellectual Work in Modernity (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press,
3. See Thomas Bernhard, Correction, trans. Sophie Wilkins (Chicago: University of
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), pp. 3–13. All citations of Calvino in this essay
refer to this volume, henceforth abbreviated "zc."
5. This is an image from Jorge Luis Borges's story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in
6. Longer quotations from Borges in this essay refer to Collected Ficcions, trans.
Knowledge and Cognitive Practices in Eco's Labyrinths of Intertextuality

A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships.

—J. L. Borges

This essay deals with Umberto Eco's use of libraries, encyclopedias, intertextuality, and rhizomes as open epistemological systems. Eco's possible worlds of fiction can be viewed primarily as cognitive experiences through which narrators and readers arrive not at truth(s), but at a better understanding of semiotic practices and philosophical notions concerning a variety of topics such as perception, interpretation of signs, language, meaning, the relativism of truths, the diffusion of knowledge, cultural history, and the omnipotence of God. My references to thinkers such as Aristotle, Roger Bacon, Kant, Wittgenstein, Derrida, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Rorty, just as my mentioning of several authors ranging from Dante to Galileo and to Thomas Pynchon, are meant to illustrate Eco's notion that through intertextuality we can contextualize texts, culture, events, works, and universal philosophical issues. Although he entertains his readers with witty intricate stories, Eco seems to reiterate that today, in our postmodern ways, we discuss basically the same rhetorical, epistemological, and metaphysical concerns that assailed our forefathers.

The debates surrounding Aristotle, realism versus nominalism and idealism, order, God, or philosophy of language, narrated in The Name of the Rose, the cabalistic, alchemistic, and hermetic doctrines illustrated in Foucault's Pendulum, and the search for a universal (Adamic) language, the nature of imagination and metaphors, and various practices of cognition that we witness in The Island of the Day Before are all examples of these concerns cleverly narrated within their proper historical and cultural frame and at the same time presented as universal issues that we recognize as being pertinent to our times.
I shall add immediately that I will be speaking mainly about literature and knowledge and I will not be examining the questions about "Literature as, or, and, in, through Philosophy" so well argued in Deborah Knight's opening essay in this volume, especially in references to A. Danto's and P. Jones' views on the relationships between philosophy, art, and literature. These views, like others proposed by several scholars, for example, those in the collected essays edited by Cascardi, or by Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (1994), have certainly concerned Umberto Eco. I shall also point out a myriad of philosophical issues addressed by Eco. Nonetheless I feel that my colleagues from the philosophy department are much better qualified than I am to speak in depth about Eco's interpretation of philosophers such as Plato, Roger and Francis Bacon, Locke, Vico, Kant, or Wittgenstein.

Eco is well trained in philosophy and in his essays, as in his novels, he loves to recall his favorite thinkers whenever he theorizes on philosophy of language or when he emphasizes philosophical views about the ongoing debates on realism and idealism and on the relationships between language and reality, and concepts and the outside world. In his novels mimetic realism is used primarily for contextualizing the story and the intellectual debates. At times it may even appear to be subservient to the myriad of metatextual and philosophical discussions. Indeed, three key features of Eco's fiction are intertextuality, epistemological discourses, and an argumentative style called for by the investigative nature of his stories, all extremely rich with numerous discussions on language, knowledge, and power.

The relationship between knowledge and power is one of the many lessons that Adso of Melk learns from the protectors of the library and from his mentor William of Baskerville in *The Name of the Rose*. Similar lessons are learned by the main protagonists in *Foucault's Pendulum* and *The Island of the Day Before* where power is associated with knowledge of secrets, codes, plans, plots, and even of oneself. And we would easily agree that learning processes and the quest for knowledge are unquestionably central themes in all three novels. However, although in *The Name of the Rose* critics have appreciated the presence of several philosophers such as Aristotle, Bacon, Occam, Kant, and Wittgenstein, and in *Foucault’s Pendulum* critics have noticed the allusions to thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida, and Bloom, we are still waiting for analyses of *The Island of the Day Before* that examine the references to Locke, Hume, Wilkins, Kant, and Spinoza in relation to Eco's expositions on imagination, perception, categories, cognition, and God, as well as on the relationships between language and knowledge of the external world.

Eco's narrative is unquestionably populated by a variety of thinkers extending from Plato to our times. But does this make Eco's novels philosophical? And are they of philosophical importance? These are in fact some of the questions that come to mind when trying to define the genre within which Eco's fiction falls. The well-known Italian critic and semiotician Maria Corti, after the appearance of *Foucault's Pendulum*, affirmed that they are not really essay-novels and not quite detective or historical novels and that perhaps a new category must be found for Eco's fiction.

Throughout this essay I shall refer to Eco's intellectual narratives as encyclopedia superfluities. Also, keeping in mind Eco's fundamental belief that "a text is a machine for generating interpretations" (Eco, 1979, 1994) I shall treat Eco's cognitive value of literature, or better of his metafictional intertextual machines, as pretexts for accessing a myriad of other authors and texts used for generating more interpretations. Furthermore, my examples from Eco's work are meant to illustrate how our well-known semiotician, beginning with one of his major milestones, *The Open Work* (1984; trans. * OPERA APERTA*, 1962), has viewed libraries, encyclopedias, intertextuality, and the World Wide Web as cognitive tools that open up epistemological systems.

From the late 1960s to the present, and mainly in conjunction with the various debates on postmodernism, the issues surrounding the possibility or impossibility to exhaust literature have made John Barth one of the most frequently quoted authors of the last two decades. Barth, in his by now historical essays "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) and "The Literature of Replenishment" (1980), pays homage to one of his favorite postmodern writers, Jorge Luis Borges, as he discusses encyclopedias, labyrinths, and one of Borges's most anthologized stories, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." Perhaps a brief quotation from "A note on (toward) Bernard Shaw" can provide a good indication of why Barth was fascinated with the Argentinean writer:

[A] book is more than a verbal structure or series of verbal structures; it is the dialogue it establishes with its reader and the intonation it imposes upon his voice and the changing and durable images it leaves in his memory. . . . Literature is not exhaustible, for the sufficient and simple reason that no single book is. A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships. (Borges, *Labyrinths*, 1964, pp. 213–214)

This elucidating statement, as we shall see, is most pertinent to our discussions on Borges, Calvino, and Eco while it brings to mind Michael Bakhтин's notions of polyphony and intertextuality and Yuri Lotman's definition of a text: "A text is a mechanism constituting a system of heterogeneous semiotic spaces, in whose continuum the message . . . circulates . . . When a text interacts with a heterogeneous consciousness, new meanings are generated" (Lotman, 1994, pp. 377, 378). Bakhitin and Lotman, I must add, are two central figures of influence in Eco's writings.