

Borges and The Mapped View The Case of the Mysterious Traveler

A good investigator knows that the best insights come when they are least needed. When your mind is centered on a particularly excruciating problem, you more often than not suddenly have a penetrating insight on a thing that has absolutely no relevance to the issue at hand. I was sitting at my desk this morning, staring at an arbitrary point in space, when I found myself focusing on the office door. The inscription on the dirty glass said:

PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS

It occurred to me that there is nothing private about the investigations that most private eyes conduct. There is always a customer, usually a lot of questioning and discussion, and often even an advertisement or a mention in the press. But my investigations are genuinely private. No one asks me to conduct them. They are just questions that occur to me, and that I decide to pursue. I don't even go anywhere, except to the library, and I certainly don't talk about it to anyone, especially not to the newspapers.

Anyway, as agreeable as this insight felt, it really didn't help me much with the problem I was thinking about. The mystery had to do with the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. Someone mentioned in passing a fact about him that I couldn't make sense of, nor could I forget: that as he was aging and losing his sight, he started traveling extensively around the globe. This seemed completely enigmatic to me. Why would someone want to waste his time and money going to places he cannot see? I, who devoted my time to the adventure and danger of the exploration of mysteries, could not let this contradiction go unexplained. I decided to embark on the voyage into this new unknown, until I can detect some sort of coherence and reason in this strange riddle.



My first clue was a seemingly innocent passage in a *Chronology* printed on the back pages of the collection *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* by Borges. The passage said:

1984 *Atlas*, a collection of short texts by Borges that accompany photographs taken during their travels by companion Maria Kodama (256).

I gathered from this clue that Borges' mysterious travels had something to do with the act of producing texts and pictures. There was some significant relation suggested here between what there is to be seen and the way a person can describe or map it. This strange relationship appeared again in an Elegy printed only a few pages before the chronology:

Oh destiny of Borges
to have sailed across the diverse seas of the world
or across that single and solitary sea of diverse names...
to have questioned lithographs, encyclopedias, atlases,
to have seen the things that men see (251).

My professional experience told me that the double appearance of the word "atlas" was not a coincidence. Over the years I have learned the importance of words; there was always a reason why a certain word had been chosen over another. My next step had to be to investigate the nature and the significance of atlases. I grabbed my hat and my plain detective's coat (it is important not to be recognizable on a secret mission), and, armed with pen and paper, went to the library.



On a dusty forgotten shelf I found an esoteric magazine, Mapology. In issue number 14 there was a very intriguing review, by a certain professor Algernon, of a book by Denis Wood called The Power of Maps. I copied the interesting parts into my notebook:

a) From Professor Algernon's Review:

...The outrageous claims made by the virtually unknown author of this book would make every map-lover cringe. The modest author of these lines, who can pride himself with quite a few professional honors in the field of cartography, found them thoroughly unacceptable. Wood's treatise can be summed up in one simple and clearly false claim: maps do not tell the truth. In his own words: "maps construct—not reproduce—the world" (17).

How can anyone who knows anything about the hard work of observation, measurement and mathematical plotting involved in drawing a map arrive at such a ridiculous claim, is beyond me. Wood flippantly dismisses this meticulous process as the facade "of a disinterested science... [a] rhetorically orchestrated denial of rhetoric" (94). According to him, every map serves a certain interest, and thus shows not the objective truth but the version of it that would best serve

jective truth but the version of it that would best serve its author. What is more, the map, according to Wood, works to naturalize its own lie as Truth because “the map is powerful precisely to the extent that this author disappears” (70). Clearly, there is no need to even bother to refute this unashamedly cynical and skeptical nonsense.

But Wood does not restrict himself to vain declarations. In an effort to sound methodical and, dare I say, scientific, he tries to furnish empirical and historical proof. First, he analyzes the process of map-making. According to him, mapping entails a “selective, incomplete dividing of reality” (51); a “code between the object and its image” (54); and a “mathematical transformation of the object” which creates “distortion of scale and proportion” (56). Finally, he says, we get a picture of “a planet without night, without seasons” (63), in which the choice of features to be shown is based on such biased factors as “the permanence of the features, the cost of compiling the information, and map legibility” (81). If I may offer the humble opinion of the winner of the Culitzer Prize For the Study of Maps (Larnaka, 1963), I think that even to begin to argue with these “proofs” would be an insult to any hard-working cartographer.

The attempt to furnish historical evidence is even more scandalous. Wood tries to drag the beautifully pure occupation of map-making into the mire of political intrigue: “the state, in its pre-modern and modern forms, evolved together with the map as an instrument of polity... stability and longevity quickly became the primary task of each and every state... cartography was primarily a form of political discourse concerned with the acquisition and maintenance of power” (43). The association of map-making and political power is surely very hard to defend (how else can one explain the fact that a respected and well known cartographer, who is also the recipient of an internationally acclaimed prize, has repeatedly failed to win a desirable seat in the Council of the town of Lebanon, North Dakota?).

“Maps,” according to Wood, “work for the ceaseless reproduction of the culture that brings them into being. They make present—the accumulated thought and labor of the past” (1). If indeed this deplorable book is any example of the culture that our maps allegedly help to reproduce, it is clear that some self-scrutiny and reckoning are very much in order.



This clue was certainly very pertinent to my investigation, but I was still unsure as to how to read it. I remembered a term I first encountered in detective school, "the unreliable narrator". I wondered about the writer of this review. There was no choice but to get a second opinion. An essay entitled "Ways We Picture the World: The Mapped View and Scientific Linear Perspective" in the periodical ArtView seemed like the perfect place to go next.

b) The ArtView Article:

Critical writing in the late twentieth century is deeply concerned with how we perceive the world, and how we render our perception of it in texts and images. To borrow Karl Popper's terminology, thinking in this age is focused on objects from *world 3*: objective, real and public structures which are the products of the human mind interacting with the natural *world 1*. The contemporary intellectual field is engaged in "a debate concerning the relation between object and subject in image making and their foundations in epistemic structures" (Rogoff 15). This essay will focus on the way this debate has taken shape in the field of the visual arts. The visual discourse on this major post-structuralist polemic, namely the location of theories of cognition within the framework of ideological positions, juxtaposes two modes of perceiving and imaging the world: the tradition of scientific linear perspective, and mapping as an artistic form (Ibid.).

The first mode, the tradition of scientific linear perspective, is commonly associated with Alberti and the Italian Renaissance. This tradition, which is also related to Cartesian Rationalism, entails a sense of reality founded on a notion of objectivity and on the creation of distance between subject and object. It assumes an ordered external reality which can be viewed as such from the fixated, eternalized and disembodied point of view of the controlling ego. Accurate observation allows for a logocentric reconstruction of space, which could not be played out without the colonization and appropriation of that space and its insistent anchoring in the beholder—the humanistic rational self (Rogoff 16, Jay 6-7).

The second mode, the mapped view, has its roots in Dutch art of the seventeenth century and parallels the expansion of navigation and oceanic travel. In contrast to linear perspective, it rejects the privileged, constitutive role of the monocular subject, and emphasizes instead the prior existence of a world of objects indifferent to the beholder's position in front of it. The Dutch experience of "the other", connected to

colonial and mercantile contacts, ushered in a recognition of other cultures, other geographies, linguistic and economic possibilities. Thus we find at the center of the mapped view the concept of the unpositioned viewer which allows for a multiplicity of perspective modalities (Rogoff 16-18, Jay 12).

The model of scientific linear perspective has been the dominant visual model of the modern era (Jay 4). The mapped view, on the other hand, has served as a constant threat of subversion to the belief in the possibility of observing and imaging objective systems of order in the external world. Works of art in the tradition of the mapped view use diverse methods to undermine the objectivity and absoluteness that the scientific method attributes to products of human perception, and to "express the volatile undercurrents of subjectivity that lurk beneath the placid flow of objective reality" (McCormick 8). This subversion is especially poignant since the undercurrents of subjectivity are shown to penetrate what is commonly considered to be an example of precisely the possibility of objective knowledge, that is, the science of map-making. The mapped view is "defying the traditional view of cartography as the manifestation of increasing human control over the world through knowledge and articulation" (Rogoff 20).

Works in the tradition of the mapped view can be works of art that contain actual maps (accurate or altered or even distorted) within them, and thus are able to comment on the assumptions of the scientific tradition. Such are the works of the artists discussed by Smith (Jasper Johns, Nancy Graves, Roger Welch and Richard Long) and by Rogoff and McCormick (Joshua Neustein). They can also be paintings that employ traditional mapping conventions, such as the Dutch paintings that have arbitrary frames, are drawn from a bird's-eye view, contain no images of people, and use objects as landmark notations (Alpers 139-142). In both cases they employ various methods in order to subvert the perspectivalist belief in empirical observation and scientific measurements as the basis for plotting the map as a system of objective knowledge.

One important method employed by works in the tradition of the mapped view is the incorporation of multiple points of view. "Within their space the domination of a fixed position is abdicated" (18). They have "no set perspective" (McCormick 12), since "no single view dominates in the interest of this additive way of piecing together the world" (Alpers 163). The abdication of a single point of view creates a multiplicity of systems of knowledge: "such mapped images have a

potential flexibility in assembling different kinds of information about or knowledge of the world" (Alpers 139).

The mapped view also brings into the space of the work an element of time: "since these works are significations of certain, unspecified continuities of histories and legends, languages and images which together make up the global culture, the concept of maps as eternal and unchanging... is strongly protested" (Rogoff 23). In the works discussed by Smith, the kind of selection and focus employed in each map "reflects the gaps, vagaries and spotty vividness of memory" (16). Natural time is contrasted with human time also when the map offers the only lasting evidence for ephemeral actions and events (18).

The multiplicity of points of view and the dynamics of time create an openendedness and opacity which bring about a crisis of interpretation. The layered complexity, different kinds of focus, and leaps between times, disciplines and civilizations create "a disorienting loss of scale and a certain ambiguity about what is being depicted" (Smith 12-13). The maps "formulate an illusionary visual language of cartographic credibility and proceed to deploy it for purposes of critical obfuscation, rather than clarification... the interiors are fluid, open to limitless redefinition, suspending the rules and conventions of transmitting knowledge visually... strategic plays with the very concept of decoding are being set before us" (Rogoff 20-21). McCormick also describes "a text so totally open to interpretation that its points of reference provide complications rather than explanations" (8).

This crisis of interpretation opens a gap between the mapped view and the reality it is supposed to depict. What is put to question is the concept of representation itself: "normal codes of empirical verification are constantly spun around in an interior debate on the nature and validity of representation. We find... cartographic texts which in their very corporeality signal fundamental absences" (Rogoff 18). In the products of the mapped view, the depicted world itself is not present. "Is the map, we begin to wonder, information or imagination? There is so much fragmentation and simulation in this sign system that the creative distinction between appropriation, mediation, and invention is hopelessly blurred" (McCormick 8). The mapped view becomes a playful subversion not only of the premises of the scientific linear perspective, but also of its own function as representation: "considered as images these maps are inventive and even playful and as such are conscious of their craft" (Alpers 163).



The picture was gradually becoming clearer now. Professor Algernon's sense of urgency, even fear, in the face of Wood's subversive book started to seem more understandable. Obviously, I had stumbled upon some kind of a secret society, "the society of the mapped view", an underground operation whose task was to undermine the hegemony of the scientific linear perspective. I knew now that one of the sects in this society uses works of visual art as weapons. Could Borges have been part of this secret conspiracy, using instead the weapons of written texts? Could what look like the farewell travels of a blind, aging man have actually been a powerful last gesture of a guerrilla fighter? I felt my adrenaline level rising as the solution seemed closer than ever. But I remembered an important lesson from detective school: nothing beats a skillful close reading of the text. I checked my excitement and turned to the meticulous work of searching the scene of the crime for clues.

INVESTIGATION REPORT

Subject: the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges

Suspect: maps

Initial Hypothesis: the appearances of maps in the stories adhere to the principles of the mapped view

Corpus: *Labyrinths, The Aleph and Other Stories, Dreamtigers*

Findings:

1. Maps, or the idea of maps, appear in the following stories: "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"; "Death and the Compass"; "Deutsches Requiem"; "The God's Script"; "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal"; "Partial Magic in the Quixote"; "Kafka and his Precursors"; "Borges and I"; "The Aleph; On Rigor in Science".
2. Note: The number of stories under the heading 1 is ten.
3.
 - a. Maps appear as sources of knowledge about the world, an archive of information which is incomplete. Ex.: "The fruitless examination of one of Justus Perthes' atlases fortified my doubt" (*Tlön* 4).
 - b. Geography is characterized by vagueness and ambiguity ("*Tlön*", "Partial Magic").
 - c. There is a tension between the spatial order of maps and the temporal chaos of reality. A truthful map is impossi-

- ble, because infinite ("Tlön", "Compass", "God's Script", "Partial Magic", "Kafka", "Aleph", "Rigor").
- d. Maps construct, not reproduce, reality ("Tlön", "Compass", "Kafka").
 - e. Maps operate to naturalize their process of invention ("Tlön" 17).
 - f. Maps create a problem of decoding and interpretation: "a labyrinth devised by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men" ("Tlön 18", "Compass", "God's Script", "Sphere", "Aleph").
 - g. A map is a system of mirrors, self-reflexive, removed from reality ("Tlön", "Compass", "Requiem", "Kafka", "Aleph").
 - h. The signs that maps use are not self-evident but make sense only when functioning within a specific code ("Tlön", "Compass", "Borges and I").
 - i. Different readings serve different interests. Knowledge equals power ("Compass", "Requiem").
4. Note: the number of categories under the heading 3 (a-i) is nine. Ten followed by Nine is a pattern of order which excludes coincidence and suggests significance. Nine suggests infinity - verging on the round figure of ten, hinting at the destabilizing third term.

Conclusion: The initial hypothesis is correct, i.e.: Jorge Luis Borges is a member of the secret Society of the Mapped View.



*The air in the library suddenly felt dense and constrained. I found it hard to keep calm and to concentrate. I knew I was on the verge of a major discovery. What I needed now was to understand better the ideology and the mechanisms of this society. I still wasn't sure what it was exactly that they wanted to achieve. I decided to read some more. In a book entitled *Where We Think We Are*, by Linda Draftsman. I found a chapter called "He Came From the Border": *Space and Cognition in Borges*,*

c) From Draftsman's Chapter:

*Mapping is fundamental to the process
of lending order to the world.*

Robert Rundstrom

In Borges, reading a text is the same as traveling in space. In "The Garden of Forking Paths" the labyrinth, which everybody thinks is a physical place, turns out to be a book, where the readers lose their way in time. In "The Aleph" Carlos Argentino viewed modern man "'in his inner sanctum, as though in his castle tower, supplied with telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, wireless sets, motion-picture screens, slide projectors, glossaries, timetables, handbooks, bulletins..." He remarked that for a man so equipped, actual travel was superfluous" (17). In "Death and the Compass" as well, Lönnrot conducts a "sedentary investigation" (82). It is an investigation of texts—he reads books, draws maps—but it is also a very real journey towards his death. The narrator of "The God's Script" is also at one and the same time a reader and a traveler (170), and for him also, the discovery of meaning equals the final point in his itinerary, and the obliteration of the self. And of course, we have the Kafkaesque case of "some people who possess all manner of globes, atlases, railroad guides and trunks, but who die without ever having managed to leave their home town" (201).

The issue at the bottom of this equation of reading and traveling is an epistemological issue, a question of perception and knowledge. Michel Foucault in the preface to *The Order of Things* talks about our systems of knowledge as "our geography... the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things...[our] distinction between the Same and the Other" (xv). Our language, says Foucault, is the spatial coherence that we give to the picture of the world we are seeing (xix). Thus, when Borges juxtaposes actual, physical travel with virtual, textual one, what he is examining is the relations between disorder and order, between reality and knowledge. As Pierre Jourde writes in his study of imaginary geographies in twentieth-century literature: "Borges s'interroge sur l'ordre, sur le sens d'un système global d'explication du monde" (83).

The imaginary space in Borges is above all presented as a function of representation (18). The knowledge of this space is acquired through the reading of a map. The map is a configuration of space, an abstraction. It engages not with material things, but rather with their signs

and their relations (20). According to Jourde, Borges presents the imaginary world, which is a system of explication, as what he calls “une totalité derobée”. The system (the map) is implicitly absolute, because it contains an encyclopedic description of the coherence of the world. But the system is explicitly void, because it is precisely that—a description. It contains the principles of a structure, but not the structure itself. The world itself is absent from it. “Chez Borges nous avons bien l’ordre mais nous avons à peine l’espace: il a été dévoré par la pensée... L’espace imaginaire (...) c’est, plus qu’une rêverie de la matière, une rêverie de la forme” (85-87).

In this way, Borges undermines the pretense of the map, in fact, of any system of knowledge, to offer an absolute explication of reality: “si elle impose à notre rêverie des formes précises, la carte en même temps lui ouvre des perspectives inépuisables” (104). The map, as it appears, for example, in “Death and the Compass”, can be interpreted differently by different reader—hence the disagreement between Lönnrot and Treviranus. Moreover, a truthful, original meaning can only be reached if the riddle itself was devised by humans—if the world the map refers to is an artificially enclosed world -like Red Scharlach’s plot. But any “real” meaning is infinite and inaccessible, and ultimately, the map evokes its own deficiency: “Enfin, (...) la carte excède le discours... tout concourt à donner le sentiment d’une réalité non contrôlée, sauvage” (118). The configuration of the real is beyond the scope of humans, who owe their sense of identity to limits and definitions. That is why the narrator of “The God’s Script” no longer remembers himself once he understands the script of the tiger (173).

Accordingly, the piece “On Rigor in Science” recounts the absurdity of the scientific aspiration to accuracy in the story of the crumbling “Widespread Map” (90). Jean Baudrillard relates this Borgesian concept of scientific knowledge to questions of power. Following “On Rigor”, he envisions an episteme of total simulation: “take as the finest allegory of simulation the Borges tale where the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up exactly covering the territory” (166). Such a total simulation blurs the distinction between real and representation: “it is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map... it is the map that precedes the territory...that engenders the territory.” When any map and any boundary are revealed to be artificial, then power is no longer in the hands of whoever knows the Truth, but rather in the hands of whoever is drawing the map, creating the par-

ticular truth. More importantly, power is in the hand of whoever is able to obscure the artificiality of his creation: "it is with the same imperialism that present-day simulators try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models... the specific character of every relation of force is to dissimulate itself as such, and to acquire all its force only because it is so dissimulated" (166, 173).

In such an epistemic environment, the only way to draw a map which is produced neither in a naive belief in true knowledge nor in an imperial exploitation of false knowledge, is to draw a map that refers to its own existence as a map. Foucault gives Borges' heterotopias as an example for such a different kind of epistemological grid: "It is on the basis of this newly perceived order that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid... between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge there is a middle region which liberates order itself... it makes manifest the modes of being of order" (xxi). This middle region is located on the borderline between belief and skepticism, and is focused not on the perception of facts, but on the facts of perception. It is a map that examines its own practice of mapping. Borges' geographical essays are, as Jourde concludes, "non plus quête de l'ordre à travers le désordre du monde, mais découverte progressive, angoissée, à partir d'un ordre donné, de la vanité de tout ordre: aventure de l'esprit, métaphysique-fiction" (154).

We find easily read cartographic texts, which in their very corporeality signal fundamental absences. They can be read instead as meditations on the issues of boundaries and definitions, and the interactions between the two (Irit Rogoff).

In geographical terms, the boundary in question is the borderline between city and country. The city, as Jourde observes, represents man's domination over nature. He dates the notion of urbanism back to ancient Greece -- "l'idéal de la cité, la volonté de construction rationnelle ou le social s'inscrit harmonieusement dans l'espace maîtrise" (112), and through the Renaissance—"face à l'ouverture vertigineuse de l'espace, la tâche humaine par excellence sera de structurer, de donner forme" (111). Thus the notion of civilization is inseparable from a notion of closure, limit and structure. Its opposition is the open space of the country: "à l'inverse, la barbarie s'identifie à l'informe, elle occupe un espace inorganisé, et par-là même elle est instable, remuante (...) la terre sans fin" (127).

But, as we learn from Borges, this boundary cuts both ways. The notion of uncontrollable infinity, the efforts to draw a total map of the world which end up trapped in the labyrinth of a *mise en âbîme*, hold both the threat of vertigo and the possibility of freedom. In "The Fearful Sphere of Pascal" the metaphor of the world as "a sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (190) is both exulting and frightening, depending on the different intonations of different historical periods. "Partial Magic in the Quixote" attributes a similar double edge to the notion of the infinite: "Does the reader clearly grasp the vast possibility of this interpolation, the curious danger?" (195). And in "The Aleph", the narrator confesses: "I felt infinite wonder, infinite pity" (30).

The ambivalence is there because for Borges, cities are neither simply safe havens, nor are they simply prison houses. They are, rather, "soothing fables of captivity" (194). One needs the security they give in the face of wild infinities, but one must also be always aware of their artificiality, so as not to become their captive. Moreover, there is also a sense of freedom in being a city dweller. The narrator of "The Aleph" is afraid of being the infinite country's captive: "I was afraid I would never again be free of all I had seen. Happily, after a few sleepless nights, I was visited once more by oblivion" (29).

So where would one want to be, in order to keep both one's identity and one's freedom? For Borges, the place to be is not the city, nor the country, but precisely the borderline between the two. The border is the place where identities are both determined and left open. It is both the line that separates entities, and the line that allows movement between them. In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", the border holds the possibility of penetration between the fictional world of Tlön and the real world of the narrator (17). The border signals transgression and hybridity: the small, very heavy cones that made their way from Tlön to reality evoke "a disagreeable impression of repugnance and fear" (17). In "Death and the Compass" the outskirts of the capital, where the city disintegrates, are also sites of strange and impure mixtures: "that dingy street where side by side exist the cosmorama and the coffee shop, the bawdy house and the bible sellers" (80).

Deleuze and Guattari talk about this schizophrenia of the border-dweller as a possible source of resistance to socio-cultural hegemony. The spatial configuration in which we impose order on the world, they say, tends to get fixated in institutions. These are social structures and codes that present themselves as natural and self-evident in order to win in the game

of power which is the social field. Deleuze and Guattari call this tendency a movement towards territorialization and colonialization; a taking over of a territory that would otherwise be psychically unbound, fluid and free. Against this tendency they posit the notion of Nomadism, which is a decoding, a de-territorialization of social boundaries – “a *map and not a tracing*” (12). Nomadism is an existence, physical or cultural, on the border between the city and the country, and a mechanism against the rational grid of definition and control. Nomadism maintains enough dynamics and freeplay in the system to allow for the emergence of the transgressive, the marginal, the unexpected.

The nomad, according to Deleuze and Guattari, can be a real traveler – a gypsy, a squatter – but he or she can also be a cultural or an artistic nomad. They give the example of Kafka, who in his writing uses the German language for a deterritorialization of state power from within. His position cannot be regionalized to a specific area, group or language. It resides on the borderline, which is the only site from which to resist hegemony: “a minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language... The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (quoted in Ottmann 29).

In a similar way, Borges in his writing uses the maps (which are, as we saw, equal to systems of knowledge, to language), for purposes of deterritorialization. Rather than assert their power of definition and control he undermines and destabilizes it by marking his itineraries and routes, as well as his points of destination, not on the secure and static mainlands, but on the elusive borderlines.

This residence on the border, indeed, gives rise to the marginal and the unexpected – to Borges’ text itself. For as Paul Virilio points out, the very possibility of an imaginary projection requires forgetting, understood as the absence of reminiscence. He quotes Borges as once remarking: “If something were unforgettable, we could never think of anything else” (102). It is only the flaw in totality which can produce a text: “La frontière qui sépare et met en contact deux entités, c’est la casure qui peut générer le texte: la ligne frontière est aussi ligne de l’écriture, se déroulant dans la zone de l’ambiguïté” (Jourde 101). Ultimately, traveling in Borges equals not only the reading of texts, but also, and perhaps more importantly, writing them. In fact, in this border existence, this very distinction between reading and writing no

longer holds; both become strategies of deterritorialization employed by the nomad.



This last document dispelled my final doubts. I knew now that my conjecture was correct. Borges' travels were not the folly of an old man, but the last encoded gesture of a devoted member of a clandestine organization. It was not important whether Borges actually saw the places he visited or not. The important thing was the movement itself, the instability and the constant crossing of borders – the Nomadism.

In the waning light of the library I considered all I had learnt. The information I gathered and the interpretations I formulated ended up in nothing but the assertion of absence. But around me the library swarmed with the heaviness and abundance of presence. While making the last gesture of subversion towards the metaphysics of plenitude, Borges at the same time created, for me, a map full of secrets and possibilities to follow and decipher. This map evokes both the melancholy of a self-reflexive, desolate solitude, like Death and the Compass' Triste-le-Roy, and the lively exultation of diversity, like that enclosed in the Aleph. My thoughts drifted back to my office in the city, with its door and the inscription saying:

PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS

Maybe, after all, my penetrating insight was not that irrelevant to the case I was working on. How far are my own private investigations from Borges' North Pole expeditions, his nostalgic forays towards a hidden meaning that can never be reached? And does the Society of the Mapped View really exist at all? It is up to us to create or to designate our own hieroglyphic texts:

Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces belabored 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 (*Labyrinths* 188).

Michal Sapir
New York

Works Cited

- Algernon, Malcolm. "Denis Wood's *The Power of Maps*." *Mapology* 14 (1992):25-31.
- Alpers, Svetlana. "The Mapping Impulse in Dutch Art." 119-168 in *The Art of Describing*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations." 166-184 in Mark Poster, Ed.: *Selected Writings*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Dreamtigers*. Tr.: Mildred Boyer & Harold Morland. Austin: U of Texas P, 1964.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*. Ed.: Donald A. Yates & James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 1964.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Tr.: Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- Draftsman, Linda. *Where We Think We Are*. New York: Methuen, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. "Preface." *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Jay, Martin. "Scopic Regimes of Modernity." 3-23 in Hal Foster, Ed. *Vision and Visuality*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1988.
- Jourde, Pierre. *Géographies Imaginaires de Quelques Inventeurs de Mondes au XXe Siècle: Gracq, Borges, Michaux, Tolkien*. Paris: José Corti, 1991.
- McCormick, Carlo. "Changing Landscapes." 7-13 in Neustein.
- Neustein, Joshua. *Catalog: October 24- November 28, 1987*. New York: Exit Art, 1987.
- Ottmann, Klaus. "Neustein's Law." 28-29 in Neustein.
- Rogoff, Irit. "Mapping Out Strategies of Dislocation." 15-25 in Neustein.
- Smith, Roberta. "Introduction." 5-18 in *4 artists and the map: image/process/data/place: April 5- May 24, 1981*. Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, U of Kansas, 1981.
- Tracer, John. "Ways We Picture the World: The Mapped View and Scientific Linear Perspective." *ArtView* 18.2 (1988), 3-27.
- Virilio, Paul. *The Lost Dimension*. Tr.: Daniel Moshenberg. New York: Semiotext(e), 1991.
- Wood, Denis with John Fels. *The Power of Maps*. New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1992.