

WORLDS OF LIBRARIES: METAFICTIONAL WORKS BY ARLT, BORGES, BERMANI, AND DE SANTIS

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La historia suele quemar la historia. Y nos transformamos en la sombra que se apaga
con la letra. Las bibliotecas pueden ser una prisión, un refugio, o una hoguera.
Emmanuel Taub, "Tesis sobre la escritura"

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The culture of Spanish America was marked by the white man's effacement of the indigenous cultures when the colonizers occupied the lands of "the New World." Occupiers saw the Mayan and Aztec cultures as meaningless and pagan. Led first by Hernán Cortés (1519), they set fire to texts of the Mayas, Aztecs, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs. In 1529, at Tlatelolco, Juan de Zumárraga, who was by then New Spain's Bishop, ordered whole archives containing folk tales, works of history, science, economics, agriculture, theology, and astronomy, as well as holy scriptures, to be burned. Polastron describes the holocaust of the indigenous archives:

Juan de Zumárraga, Bishop of Mexico, then high inquisitor of Spain outside the walls between 1536 and 1543, proudly burned all the Aztec codices that the conflagration of Cortez had missed—all the *tonalamatl*, the sacred books that he sent his agents to collect or that were found gathered together in *amoxcalli*, the halls of archives. [...] Thus in 1529, Zumárraga had the library of the "most cultivated capital in Anahuac, and the great depository of the national libraries"¹ brought to the market square of Tlatelolco until they formed "a mountain heap," which the monks approached, brandishing their torches and singing. Thousands of polychrome pages went up in smoke. The conqueror was there to kill and capture, the cleric to erase... (124)

Immense amounts of knowledge, acquired by different cultures over the centuries, disappeared within a few nights under Western fire, consumed by the spirit of the Inquisition. In 1562, Bishop Diego de Landa burned large numbers of pictograms in Yucatan, believing they were letters of the devil. His testimony says: "We found a large number of books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which

were not to be seen as superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they (the Maya) regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction” (169).² Following this, the Maya themselves were defeated and their oral culture—a transmitter of ancient wisdom—was rejected. Western culture and literature arrived in this “new territory,” seen as a void without history or literacy.

Further library burnings were repeated across the continent. As Alberto Manguel says in his book *The Library at Night*,

242 Libraries, in their very being, not only assert but also question the authority of power. As repositories of history or sources for the future, as guides or manuals for difficult times, as symbols of authority past or present, the books in a library stand for more than their collective contents, and have, since the beginning of writing, been considered a threat. It hardly matters why a library is destroyed: every banning, curtailment, shredding, plunder or loot gives rise (at least as a ghostly presence) to a louder, clearer, more durable library of the banned, looted, plundered, shredded or curtailed. Those books may no longer be available for consultation, they may exist only in the vague memory of a reader or in the vaguer-still memory of tradition and legend, but they have acquired a kind of immortality. (123)

Indeed, libraries turned out to be powers that threatened the foreign occupiers. The unfathomable library, written in hieroglyphs and mysterious signs, was seen as a double threat because it contained a magic power terrifying to the conqueror. The burning practices of the Inquisition were founded on the belief that fire was the only means of undermining ‘satanic’ books. However, the very disappearance of indigenous literature turned it into an eternal presence, floating like a ghost, feeding a constant thirst to decipher the ashes.

The few remaining autochthonous texts taught us the nature of the writing systems that horrified the conquerors. Different from the Romanic alphabetic system, indigenous writing methods were mixed: the Mayan system was mostly syllabic; Nahuatl was prominently ideographic, produced on long strips of deer hide, cotton, or bark paper. In the Andean region, for its part, the Inca had different methods: the *tocapu* were geometric designs written on elaborate textiles and wooden vessels; despite long decades of research, their symbologies did not receive satisfactory explanations.³ Meanwhile, the Inca adopted the ancient Wari⁴ scheme for recording numerical information, as well as songs, genealogies, and other narrative forms containing historical and religious information: the *kipu*, colored knotted strings used for administrative goals (Brokaw) and general record-keeping.⁵ It is important to remark that literacy in the Americas was accessible to a limited and privileged part of the population, even more restricted than in the Old World, a fact that put its continuity in major danger: “[Aztec, Mixtec, Mayan, and Zapotec] writing was a tool of the state. An elite minority, consisting of hereditary rulers with their priests and scribes, monopolized the ability to read and write, just as they had monopolized a number of other skills and privileges” (Marcus xvii; emphasis in original), and those skills were taught at aristocratic schools, called *calmecac* in Aztec tradition and *yachay*

wasi in the Inca Empire. Literacy of large populations in modern Latin America was only reached by the middle of the twentieth century, and with no exclusive relation to Spanish evangelism.

The first settlers quickly realized that the appropriation of land required them to imprint their culture and language onto it, necessitating the assertion of Spanish customs and their religious self-narrative of redemption. Those first invaders dispersed quickly, first throughout Mexico, soon sailing southwards through the Plata delta, laying anchor at the land of the Guarani with Amerigo Vespucci (1501), Juan Díaz de Solís (1516), Fernando de Magallanes (1520), and Pedro de Mendoza (1536), and travelling through the Andes with Pizarro (1532), conquering Inca territory; they roamed along rivers north and south, chasing after gold, motivated by the indigenous legend of El Dorado. Bureaucrats tried to impose order in the country of “nothingness” at the same time as they tussled with Spanish colonists who were taking advantage of the chaos to do as they pleased; some of the colonists were criminals released from overcrowded prisons in the Iberian Peninsula, while others were *conversos* from Spain and Portugal seeking to invent a new world.

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One of the first utopian fictive constructions projects Judeo-Christian imaginary over the new continent: the *converso* Antonio de León Pinelo, the Major Chronicler of the West Indies, wrote *El Paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo* (1656)⁶—though he did not publish it because of the threat of being found guilty of heresy and spreading Judaism—in which he imagines the Garden of Eden in the Peruvian Amazon, and Lima (Peru) as the place from which Noah and his family set out as they began their navigation of the Pacific in their long journey across the world toward Mount Ararat (Gisbert 19-52).

The cultural colonization of Latin America started with the publication of Catholic literature as well as with the translation of certain indigenous texts, before their destruction. After the *Libro de los Coloquios*,⁷ a bilingual compilation of the religious debates performed between the first twelve Franciscan priests in New Spain and Aztec sages during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, Bernardino de Sahagún devoted over forty years to collecting Nahuatl testimonies and chronicles from aristocratic informants, and translating them into Spanish. This work was published only in 1905 under the name of *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*,⁸ also known as the *Florentine Codex*. Other priests, such as Toribio de Benavente Motolinia, Martín Jesús de la Coruña, Diego de Durán, and Bartolomé de las Casas,⁹ followed Sahagún’s ethnographic work by collecting and translating cultural and historical Mexican tales into a known alphabetic system of signification. Marcus explains:

It was those conquering Spaniards who gave us our most detailed look at the way writing functioned within Mesoamerican society. While our greatest interest here is in prehispanic writing, no pre-Conquest period provides us with the richness of detail that we gain from eyewitness Spanish descriptions of native rulers, priests, and scribes during the sixteenth century. (45)

Ironically, it was thanks to the evangelists in New Spain that a few Aztec texts survived to the present day.

In the context of evangelical indoctrination, the first printing house in the so-called New World was established in 1539 by the apparent *converso*, Jacobo Cromberger of Seville (Lafaye), in cooperation with the inquisitor Juan de Zumárraga;¹⁰ its building sat, symbolically, on what was probably an Aztec temple. Cromberger's Printing House served the interests of the church and printed, at first, various prayer books and theological works (Griffin).

If the massive burning of autochthonous literature represents the opening chapter of American colonization, then the new Spanish-American culture was established by an act of negation. This gesture of deletion was indeed an attempt to erase the indigenous cultures, but the gesture itself was not deleted, and endured as a pattern projected into the future. This pattern was later followed by acts of renewal. Unsurprisingly, Latin America became an unquiet land, always inspiring the rise and fall of philosophical questions, social and political struggles, and aesthetic ideas. The dynamic of creation and destruction became an inherent component of Latin American culture and, often, the interrelation of these dynamics was represented through metafiction.

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In a land where the cycle of creation and destruction became the seal of the culture, books turned out to be the first tools for raising questions of identity, history and language. For many centuries, Latin American culture has been exceptionally fertile; the book reflects the complex enigma that founded Spanish America. Around 1810, the spirit of emancipation emerged in the new countries, which began to disconnect from European culture, taking independent paths, while vigorously debating their identity and destiny.

This essay seeks to examine the representation of *libraries* in Latin American literature of approximately the last hundred years. It focuses on the ways fiction, with its introspective gaze, inquires about its own essence and practices, becoming metafiction; it explores constructions of libraries, archives, or bookstores, constructions that frame the questions of writing and reading, creation, and poetic representation. Library scenes appear frequently in Latin American literature. Descriptions of libraries and/or archives and their important role in the construction of the setting indicate the place of literature in culture, raise philosophical questions, reveal aspects of social behavior, and demand a disposition to aesthetic contemplation. A detailed cartography of metafictional texts presenting library and archive scenes across the literary tradition of the continent includes works such as *La invención de Morel* by Adolfo Bioy Casares (1940), *Cien años de soledad* (1967) and *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981) by Gabriel García Márquez, *Rayuela* (1963) by Julio Cortázar, "El gaucho insufrible" (2003) by Roberto Bolaño, and *El cuerpo en que nací* (2011) by Guadalupe Nattel. Here, however, I will focus on the Argentine tradition of metafiction, drawing on some of its paradigmatic cases, starting with a text by Roberto Arlt, and pursuing the trail through Jorge Luis Borges's, Ariel Bermán's, and Pablo de

Santis's metafiction.

In fact, some literary works conceived of libraries and books as clues to understanding social and political phenomena, reinforcing the point that libraries and books are symbols of power, menacing hegemony in some cases, and, in others, serving as tools of subjection or perceived as a medium of exclusion. This is the case of *El juguete rabioso* (*Mad Toy*), published in 1926 by Roberto Arlt, a journalist and working class writer from an Austrian family who was close to anarchism, and documented this phenomenon in Spain. When Arlt broke into Argentine literature, other intellectuals accused him of being unable to write fiction, mocking his expressive "mistakes" and scandalized by his use of the *lunfardo*, the popular slang of Buenos Aires, as well as his lexicon, which was compounded from different languages that mirrored the world of European immigrants in Argentina.

Arlt's first novel tells the picaresque story of Silvio Astier, a lower-class boy who fervently desires to complete his education and is, meanwhile, an autodidact; among other topics, he explores alchemy and even invents patents, which are as ingenious as they bear marks of his delirium. His desire for knowledge leads him to become a book thief and, eventually, an informant. He and the members of his club, "The Knights of Midnight," break into a school library, from which their low social status excludes them:

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Enrique warily opened the door to the library.

The smell of old paper filled the air, and by the light of the flash-light we saw a spider scurrying across the polished floor.

Tall, red varnished book-cases rose to the ceiling, and the cone of light traveled over their dark interiors, revealing shelves laden with books.

Majestic display cases added an austere decorum to the somber room, and behind their glass panes, on leather, cloth, and paper spines, gleamed arabesques and gilded titles.

(23)¹¹

The poor boys are seduced by the place and they explore the library looking for books to their liking; they find poems by Charles Baudelaire and enjoy reading them aloud, dreaming of first love.

Later, Silvio works at a bookstore, earning a pittance. The humiliation of living in poverty leads him to fantasize about burning books. One evening he throws a live coal onto a pile of papers and volumes. The library materializes as the symbol of a society he wants to destroy; the book burning represents the first step of the anarchist struggle the boy imagines. A mix of satisfaction and guilt permeate him. His act gives him a sense of freedom, of detachment from the society he describes as "hypocritical," as society demands seriousness and morality from the poor and the same ones it humiliates. The next day, Silvio Astier discovers that the fire has gone out and that his action has therefore failed, but the feeling of freedom remains and he resigns from his job. *Mad Toy* includes two scenes that place the main character in the world of literature and make the book a symbol of social status to which the poor boy can only aspire as he paves a way in crime. However, the book also represents the

world of knowledge from which Silvio, despite being a prodigy, is rejected because of his social rank. This story, then, is related, through fire and destruction, to the early history of the book in Latin America. However, what Roberto Arlt proposes here is that the library is a political monument, representing an elitist social structure that ought to be toppled by anarchy.

A central example in the metafictional tradition is Jorge Luis Borges's story "The Library of Babel" (1941). Borges was obsessed with the figure of the book and wrote many stories around this topic, such as "The South," "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "The Secret Miracle," "The Book of Sand," and many more. But only "The Library of Babel" focuses on the space and structure of the library. Borges's short story provides a central reference to which many future fictions are intertextually linked. "The Library of Babel" focuses on the hive-like architecture of the library; it describes an infinite hexagonal structure in which every inhabited hexagon finds itself reflected in others, while every book reverberates through its peers: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (51).¹² As in most of Borges's works, "The Library of Babel" establishes multiple intertextual ties. According to Oriol Poveda (2011), Borges based his numerical theory of the apparent infinity of literature and the universe on *Sefer Yetzirah* (which means *Book of Formation* in Hebrew), traditionally attributed to the patriarch Abraham, orally transmitted for hundreds of years, and known as the first esoteric Hebrew source. Poveda compares Borges's theory with that of the cabalist Rabbi Abraham Ben Shmuel Abulafia's letter permutation theory.

Abulafia, a thirteenth-century Spanish philosopher, delved into the "permutation theory" while exploring combinations of letters in his epistle "Seven Paths of Torah."¹³ Abulafia, unlike other cabalists, claimed that the permutation and combination of letters, and the calculations of *gematria*,¹⁴ are not just hermeneutic tools, but that the combination of the letters of God's names may also issue in prophecy (Idel). According to his theory, the combination of existing signs reaches the score of 1.124 trillion different possible words. Borges, for his part, decided that this number was incomprehensible, and that it is therefore legitimate to talk about an endless combination of letters, or in any case, an infinite number of books (fictions). Oriol Poveda, however, did the math: the result is 25 raised to the power of 1,312,000, according to Borges's data. Borges was right: there is a paradox between the amount of numerical multiple options—though strictly finite—and what a person is able to perceive; the possibilities *appear* endless from his/her perspective. In fact, the narrator of the story declares: "I prefer to dream that [the library's] polished surfaces represent and promise the infinite" (51).¹⁵ Therefore, what is described here is not the possibility of infinity but the *representation* of infinity. Here the difference between the cabalist and the writer is revealed: Abulafia is in search of Truth; Borges endures towards aesthetic *representation* of probable truth.¹⁶ If the options of literature are endless—"I say that the Library is unending" (52),¹⁷—then the universe is infinite. From this perspective, the individual, unsurprisingly, will never come to read all the

books in the library, since “the universe, with its elegant endowment of shelves, of enigmatical volumes, of inexhaustible stairways for the traveler and latrines for the seated librarian, can only be the work of a god” (52).¹⁸ The library, then, separates the individual from deity.

Reading, on the one hand, is described as an attempt to approach God and, on the other, marks the abyss between God and the person. According to Moshe Idel, the cabalistic craft of combination takes the sage beyond epistemological comprehension; the permutational play¹⁹ of signs installs him in a place where social language is broken, decomposed, disjointed. This is faithfully described in Borges’s story. The breakdown of language brings him to degrees of spirituality beyond a “flat” hermeneutic comprehension. The ontological experience—if it can be so called—brings the sage face-to-face with this abyss; he confronts death. The cabalist sage believes, or in cabalistic words, *he knows*, that when he faces the abyss, divine truth will be revealed to him. This too is accurately indicated by Borges in the story: many librarians dealt with the abyss, but no one came back with Truth in his hands because Truth cannot be translated or transmitted. Indeed, many of Babel’s librarians and readers jumped to their deaths, committing suicide, or vanished in the labyrinthine library. It can be argued that the readers in Borges’s story jump to their deaths out of despair, unlike cabalists who imagine their deaths conjured from sign combinations in the aftermath of a revelation of Truth.

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With respect to the structure of the story, Borges adopts a tactic that is repeated throughout. The structure, the way the series of arguments are organized in the story, is simultaneously the key to understanding the story’s intentionality: The narrator presents a theoretical position, or a number of different theses, and later negates all of them, leaving the reader without a definitive answer. The reader is guided to a state of extreme confusion like that of the biblical Babel:

For a long time it was believed that these impenetrable books corresponded to past or remote languages. It is true that the most ancient men, the first librarians, used a language quite different from the one we now speak; it is true that a few miles to the right the tongue is dialectical and that ninety floors farther up, it is incomprehensible. All this, I repeat, is true, but four hundred and ten pages of inalterable MCV’s cannot correspond to any language, no matter how dialectical or rudimentary it may be. Some insinuated that each letter could influence the following one and that the value of MCV in the third line of page 71 was not the one the same series may have in another position on another page, but this vague thesis did not prevail. Others thought of cryptographs; generally, this conjecture has been accepted, though not in the sense in which it was formulated by its originators. (53)²⁰

Borges’s text eventually becomes a powerful tautological statement declaring that fiction rules the story’s discourse and reality. For example, the narrator describes a parallel world that does not match the external reader’s reality:

Five hundred years ago, the chief of an upper hexagon came upon a book as confusing as the others, but which had nearly two pages of homogeneous lines. He showed his find to

a wandering decoder who told him the lines were written in Portuguese; others said they were Yiddish. Within a century, the language was established: a Samoyedic Lithuanian dialect of Guarani, with classical Arabian inflections. (54)²¹

This paragraph shows that the text “the chief of [the] upper hexagon” found is not mimetic of the familiar reality of librarians; they have difficulties understanding the script. Though they look for a reflection of reality in the book, the book presents a fictive and independent dimension, one detached from human reality: a parallel world. The librarians’ lack of understanding leads them to make irrational or at least unrealistic statements, since a dialect is a spoken language that cannot only be written or be a product of mathematically combined languages such as “a Samoyedic Lithuanian dialect of Guarani” (54). Moreover, this dialect, which does not exist outside the library, neither for readers in the story nor for Borges’s extratextual readers, is a mere product of the author’s ludic imagination. In addition, the paragraph suggests that library books might be false, or at least inaccurate, since they do not contribute to epistemological inquiry. In fact, the library does not mirror reality, but instead contains everything imaginable. For example:

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Everything: the minutely detailed history of the future, the archangels’ autobiographies, the faithful catalogues of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of those catalogues, the demonstration of the fallacy of the true catalogue, the Gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary on that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book in all languages, the interpolations of every book in all books. (54)²²

It is hypothesized that there was a lucky librarian who found the book containing all books. He is regarded as a god:

We also know of another superstition of that time: that of the Man of the Book. On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god. In the language of this zone vestiges of this remote functionary’s cult still persist. Many wandered in search of Him. (56)²³

The narrator designates as “superstition” almost all events related to the library. Humans—also called librarians—are desperate beings, irrational, working in vain and systematically in error. It is common for librarians to commit suicide. In fact:

The impious maintain that nonsense is normal in the Library and that the reasonable (and even humble and pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception. They speak (I know) of the “feverish Library whose chance volumes are constantly in danger of changing into others and affirm, negate and confuse everything like a delirious divinity.” (57)²⁴

Actually, the narrator is mocking the characters of the story who pursue absolute truth within the library; he argues that since all possible literary work is already included in the library, everything that can be said is essentially true. But if everything is true, and the lie that denies the truth is also true, then it is not possible to distinguish between the false and the true. As the librarian says, “To speak is to fall

into tautology. This wordy and useless epistle already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five shelves of one of the innumerable hexagons—and its refutation as well” (57).²⁵ Here, the narrator also mocks the implied reader: “You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language?” (58).²⁶ He continues, attacking ignorant readers: “I know of districts in which the young men prostrate themselves before books and kiss their pages in a barbarous manner, but they do not know how to decipher a single letter” (58).²⁷

The intentionality of this fictional story holds either that human beings are unable to decode signs and to know the absolute truth, or that there is no truth at all, not because of a cognitive incapability to grasp it, but because truth is self-contradictory through an infinite tautological argument. This ambiguity is actually the only statement that will persist until the end of creation; it is actually itself “the Library [that] will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret” (58).²⁸ Could it perhaps be deduced that the secret hidden in the library is actually that there is no secret at all? That would imply that the structure of the library is an architecture full of content but empty of significance.

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Finally, the story tries to solve the tautology of infinity by again mocking the reader who appears unable to decipher the story’s words. It offers a solution that is itself spiral, immeasurable, incomprehensible:

Those who judge it to be limited postulate that in remote places the corridors and stairways and hexagons can conceivably come to an end—which is absurd. Those who imagine it to be without limit forget that the possible number of books does have such a limit. I venture to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: The Library is unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: the Order). My solitude is gladdened by this elegant hope. (58)²⁹

This hope seems to reveal that the story is philosophical entertainment conceived by the narrator to fight his own existential boredom. As the narrator suggests and emphasizes, the structure of the library is a spiral space, on the one hand apparently never-ending and on the other, cyclical.

Borges’s posture finally appears to be one of acid irony towards the concepts of *absoluteness* and *truth*, as found in Abulafia’s work. In Borges’s short story, the Library represents the possibility of conceiving existence as mere fiction, leaving the writer the task of providing fictional parallel worlds, raising imaginary buildings that would fill the existential void with significance. Fiction is perceived, then, as the possibility of overcoming the despairing enigma of human life.

After Borges, many Latin American writers have imagined literary scenes taking place in the library, and many of these writers have forged intertextual ties with Borges’s hive-like library with its multiple significations. In *Leer y escribir* (2006), Ariel Bermán presents the character Basilio Bartel, who works at the Buenos Aires National Library and experiences life completely immersed in the world of fiction.

The library employees are extremely lazy, and do what they can to dislodge readers from the reading hall. Sometimes they dismiss stubborn readers through a special small door; here, one of the more compelling scenes in the novel presents the “street of lost readers:”

they open right into the street, one of the backstreets, exceedingly dangerous, populated with lost readers, on the verge of desperation and misery, who jostle against one another, steal from one another photocopies of this or that library book, and never manage to reach an agreement to organize themselves, return, and take the entrance by storm.³⁰

Later:

In the street of lost readers, countless incidents occur. Almost all of these cases involve brief clashes, blows to the air, to the body, kicks that never end up materializing; immediately, everything returns to the usual routine: some people walk in circles with their hands behind their backs, like the boss does; others share wine from a box; others converse without listening to each other, grab grubby pieces of paper from each other.³¹

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Finally, the novel points out the decadent behavior of lost readers, which may be suggesting the decline of the whole *intelligentsia* system (literature, writers, readers, and librarians):

Those who continue their agonized way on the street of lost readers are bums, poor devils who possess nothing that carries exchange value. Once upon a time, they were young men with a brilliant future, but now they are exposed to the elements, out of touch with all bibliographic developments, without a prayer of reinserting themselves back into the labor market and the love market; but every now and then, they let themselves be overcome with desire, notwithstanding the stink and mildew that impregnate their bodies.³²

The novel describes Basilio’s progressive awakening to reality. In a sense, *Leer y escribir* takes the opposite view of fiction to that of Borges. Married and the father of a baby, Bartel lives silently detached from his environment. He resides between the fictional walls provided by books: a parallel world of his own. He is a man without a life. One day, he wakes up and leaves the library and his family without notice. He jumps on a train and, just like Borges’s character Juan Dahlmann, in the short story “The South,” Basilio tries to revive his past life. He suffers a series of minimalist adventures that arouse his dormant soul. He returns to his wife and son and finally manages to look life in the eyes. Bermani’s novel is, then, the story of departure from the library, a story that tries to examine the human that is beyond fiction, a world that seems forgotten by postmodernity: the real world of emotions and relationships. But the end of the book gives the reader a wink that he/she has to decipher for him/herself, pointing out another suggestion through an obscure sign: Bartel’s finger stuck in a broken bottle, like a ring that cannot be removed unless it is broken and its symbolism is dissolved.

Before I focus on Pablo de Santis’s novel *Filosofía y Letras*, it is important to mention Ricardo Piglia’s *The Last Reader* (2005). As with Piglia’s other works, *The Last Reader* is dedicated to an inquiry into metafiction, especially concentrating on the

behavior and role of the reader. Piglia, inspired by Borges's library, opens the essay with a short story about a man interested in a photographer who built a miniature and comprehensive model of the city of Buenos Aires. Like the act of reading, observation of the model is done in isolation. The narrator refuses to name it as a mere "model" since its role goes beyond the representational: "It is not a map, or a scale model, but a synoptic machine; the entire city is there, concentrated into itself, reduced to its essence. The city is Buenos Aires, but modified and altered by the madness and microscopic vision of the builder."³³ The replica does not represent the city known to its inhabitants, a city that in their eyes is like a book full of aesthetic meaning. Instead, it embodies the photographer's hermeneutical view of the city. As with Baudrillard's *simulacrum*³⁴ that overlays the city and blocks its cultural representation, this replica seems to hide the original and take the place of the real metropolis. Piglia's mock-up is an artifact in which urban stories resonate. The prologue of Piglia's book is a kind of metaphor for the act of reading.

By a surprising structural mechanism, Pablo de Santis's *Filosofía y Letras* (1998) takes Borges's philosophical and mystical themes and projects them, architextually, into the detective fiction genre.³⁵ The novel takes the physical building of the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy at Buenos Aires as the scene for crimes and mysteries. It progressively reveals that a metafictional mechanism is responsible for the very destruction of the building. The writer in the book, a chameleon-like character, writes down the story as it happens and foresees the total destruction of the faculty building. The young narrator presents the writer as the "Architect" of the story, who ironically produces the metaphorical destruction of literature and philosophy's traditional edifice. One of the detectives, a doctoral student working as the sole librarian at the Argentine Institute of Literature, is a projection of the reader, who plays the role of reconstructing the story after the building's collapse and the disappearance of the writer's manuscript.

Filosofía y Letras begins in a seemingly simple manner with the doctoral student, Esteban Miró, preparing his research. The aim of his work is to write a biography of the psychiatrist and poet Enzo Tacchi (asserting, with this false existence, what I call an "intertextuality of artifice"³⁶ that leads no more than to a fictive character). His work progresses slowly and attracts particular attention, since the chosen theme is not really compatible with that of a doctoral student of literature. Esteban Miró finds a job as a librarian in the archives of the university building where some of the literature classes are given. It is important to note that the description of the building is remarkably detailed. It starts mimetically and gradually deviates into the bizarre. In reality, the building housing the Department of Literature and Philosophy in Buenos Aires looks just as it is described in the novel: some of the walls are on the point of collapsing, moisture eats at the ceilings, paint on the walls peels. There are a number of other literary institutes on the second floor where the Argentine National Institute of Literature is located. Floors are connected by the broad stairs of a typical colonial building. There are three elevators, but only one of them works. Some corners are full

of garbage accumulated over time. Water leakages on the fourth floor have turned its surface into a disgusting pool of floating wet paper, like a thick swamp. The ground floor leads to a street near the Plata River (Río de la Plata). There are also two underground floors, one of which opens to a secret tunnel connecting the building to the Colonial Museum, a hundred metres from the University. No sign of the third floor is given by the narrator, but the fourth is central to the story. The fourth floor contains a huge and chaotic archive, composed of millions of documents from the beginning of time. Many years before, librarians were instructed to remove all the documents and set them on fire, but since there was no budget to move them out of the building, they remained in place, creating the city's most decadent space.

The institute in which Esteban works is divided into four rooms: first is the entrance with the librarian's desk; second, leading off from the first, is a room for casual readers. The third, "The Lair" (La Guarida), is open to regular researchers. Finally, the director of the Institute of National Literature's room, "The Crypt" (La Cripta), is a room that apparently contains a hidden secret but, as in Borges's story, the only secret it contains is its own suggestion.

The director of the Institute, Emilio Conde, is of Jewish origin, and expert on the work of the mysterious author Homero Brocca—whose texts have long since disappeared. He rarely comes to the library. Esteban works there every night and receives the few assiduous readers. The mysterious story begins when a crumbling roof collapses onto Esteban's desk; he miraculously survives and looks for the manager of the building to take care of the problem. During his search for the manager, Esteban discovers that the manager does not always come to work, suffering from a deep depression. In fact, the story alludes to a number of depressed people in the building who commit suicide, exactly as in Borges's story.³⁷ After discovering the manager's absence, Esteban finds the night watchman's room on the terrace of the building. The guard refuses to open the door and help him. Hopeless, Esteban cleans his desk himself and continues working.

Two researchers, Conde's rivals, seeking the unknown literature of Homero Brocca, convince Esteban to go up to the fourth floor and plunge into the chaos of documents to find the mysterious writer's notebooks. Esteban agrees, though he remains loyal to Conde. The journey to the archive becomes an adventure. The travelers—Esteban, Professor Selva Granados, who knew Homera Brocca as a young man, and Professor Novario, the second rival—discover the dead body of the manager, sitting on a chair, a blue notebook in his hands signed by the mysterious Brocca. Written in the blue notebook is a sentence repeated indefinitely: "this notebook is blank, this notebook is blank."³⁸ From this moment, and against his will, Esteban becomes a detective searching for a murderer, who will soon become a serial murderer, and for Homero Brocca's other blue notebooks. Of course, the two searches are connected.

The unknown killer eliminates Brocca's researchers, killing Conde's rivals. All signs indicate that Conde, Esteban's boss, is the culprit, seeking to protect his treasure: the unknown texts of Homero Brocca that might be hidden in "The Crypt."

Apparently, Brocca is a writer who only published one story, called, surprisingly, “Substitutions.”³⁹ But the original story vanished soon after being written, and only one reader remembers it: the researcher, Conde. The story “Substitutions” was used at the time of its publication in the communist struggle to convey covert messages; this is the reason that many encoded versions of the story are known, but not the original one.

Conde, in his pursuit of recognition and honor, pays Esteban to write a synthesis of a hundred different versions of “Substitutions.” Conde publicly announces that he has found the original story; this way, all his research and writing will be justified. Esteban, who is rather lazy by nature, does not work hard on the story and invents a large portion of it. In fact, he creates a new version of the story to replace previous ones, producing a new “substitution.”

After the murders, another figure appears: the academic detective Gaston Trejo, who provides the Department of Logic with a “floating cathedra;” he does not give lessons, but, while wandering between different academic departments, tries to connect the signs appearing all over the university, aiming to decipher the mystery common to them. In order to investigate and find the serial killer, he frequently changes his identity and gathers a set of objects and artifacts that, if put together, could possibly indicate an explanation for the enigma. At home, he puts the artifacts in order, in display windows, presenting them as if in a crime museum and contemplates them:

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In general, I place things in display cases that I have in my house and look at them as if I didn't know what they are. Little by little, I close the net that holds them together. In my imagination, I edit the catalog of the museum, where everything has its place. My method combines reason with intuition. You don't get anywhere with reason alone. Only when you admit that reality is largely imaginary can you reach the truth.⁴⁰

Esteban and the detective of the “floating cathedra” discover that every week Conde visits “Casa Spinoza,” a mental asylum exclusive to patients with different kinds of writing disorders. There they discover that Conde uses and manipulates one of the patients suffering from graphomania, a writer who cannot stop writing for even a moment:

He says that he has to keep writing to keep the things that surround him from disappearing. We have seen only a few cases of this sickness; there is still not a precise clinical description. We provisionally call it acute graphomania or Van Holst disease, named for the first documented patient. He was an employee of the national library in Amsterdam who began to destroy all the things in his house, replacing them with papers on which he wrote their names.
[...] For him, things and words are not enemies; they can coexist. At the core of his delirium is the certainty that objects cannot exist without words. Indeed, he sees the relationship backward: things are signs that serve to express the only thing that truly exists, language.⁴¹

Conde successfully manipulates the patient to write as if he was the author Homero Brocca. The output of the graphomaniac writer will permit Conde to claim that he

has found more of Brocca's manuscripts; that is, he will forge the research material.

During the last night of the story, the Dean and the Minister of Education interrogate Conde about his involvement in the murders in a room on one of the underground floors, with the two detectives (Trejo and Esteban) present. Suddenly, all the doors are locked and the phone lines are cut. Functionaries and researchers try to escape. The Dean and the Minister flee through the secret tunnel that leads to the Colonial Museum and call for help. Detective Trejo is attacked in the dark of the fourth floor. With Trejo injured and vulnerable, Conde seizes the opportunity to take revenge on him and Esteban, trying to kill them both, but when he is about to jump on them, someone suddenly kills him instead: it is the night watchman, who snatches Esteban away to his room on the terrace and reveals that he is Homero Brocca, the mysterious author, and that he was behind the murders and the recent events in the building. He explains that he wanted to prove, indeed with considerable success, that his literature could influence reality and become prophecy. Each time he delivered

254 one of his blue notebooks to the archive of the fourth floor, he changed the story-line. Esteban, in a proleptic announcement suggesting a superior point of view, calls Brocca "the Architect" of the story:

When I reached the fourth floor, I lost sight of him. Another world began, without sound, without life. An absolute silence was born in those dead papers, accumulating year after year and superimposing on that deteriorated architecture a blueprint of narrow corridors, unsteady bridges and columns, dead-end passageways. For the first time, it was revealed to me that this order was not random, that there was a plan behind the papers' apparent chaos; beyond the zigzag walls formed by files, I scried the profundity of a closed world that had nothing to share with the lower floors. From somewhere, invisible, reigned the Architect.⁴²

Brocca's story is inherently connected to the Philosophy and Literature building: "El edificio y la novela guardaban una complicada correspondencia que él era el encargado de vigilar" (125). Some of his influence on the building was slow to take its destructive effect; sitting atop of it, he flooded the stairwells, drowned an infinite number of documents, swamped halls, and caused the collapse of ceilings:

He was like a god hidden in the depths of the papers, who determined our destiny and death. He was not interested in killing, but only in writing: crime was simply a nutrient for plot tension. For him, life already had become a series of scattered narrative blocks that he had to tie together with audacious maneuvers and diabolical impulses. In the meantime, he worked to demolish the building, because he wanted to transform it into a symbol. In literature, he claimed, to construct something, one has to destroy it, and a writer has to start planning the ending before he writes the first line.⁴³

Brocca's last two sentences here work as an accurate statement for this study: "He worked towards the demolition of the building, because he wanted it to be transformed into a symbol. In literature, he sustained, in order to build something you must destroy."

Brocca's last blue notebook describes the total destruction of the building. The

Architect⁴⁴ asks Esteban to read his work, in which Esteban finds what the real reader already knows and Esteban has experienced. Simultaneously, the text recounts how Esteban reads the notebook, in a *mise en abyme*. Brocca informs that he has planned a special role in his drama for Esteban; he will be the one to tell the story after the complete destruction of the building, and Brocca bequeaths Esteban the task of rewriting this last blue notebook. As Esteban finishes reading the story that predicts the immediate future, the building starts to collapse. Esteban manages to escape from the falling building by running out, but on the way loses the Architect's last blue notebook:

I heard a crash above my head and managed to get off the stairs. Down the stairway ran a dark river, thick with papers and debris. The torrent of putrid water managed to soak me but not sweep me away: I remained to one side of the stairway, stunned and frozen to death. It took a few seconds for me to realize that the water had swept the novel from my hands.⁴⁵

The tale ends in a circular way when Esteban, at the request of the Dean, sits in the underground level of the destroyed building to write down all the events to which he, the student, is the absolute and unique witness. Thus, the real reader understands that the story that he/she received is Esteban's reconstruction and rewriting of the complex drama of a writer, who became the architect of the bizarre history of the Philosophy and Literature building.

From a broad perspective, De Santis's *Filosofía y Letras* is intertextually and architecturally related to Borges's "Library of Babel." First, De Santis focuses on the spatial link between the library building described by Borges and the Academy of Philosophy and Literature. This relation establishes a mutual projection between literature and space, and attributes the characteristics of a three-dimensional edifice to fiction. On the one hand, edifices are independent artifacts installed in an urban context: icons, rooted presences by themselves. On the other hand, they include the silent presence of an architect; an edifice is the projection of a mind that continues to be a factor of influence long after the building can stand by itself. A novel is thus a fictive edifice showing a continuous dialectic between the creator and the creation.

Second, De Santis translated the concept of the so-called *infinite building* of Borges's library into a *narrative structure* that exploits the *mise en abyme* strategy, creating, as Borges envisioned, a *spiral structure* or, in his own words, an edifice that is "unlimited and cyclical" (Borges 58). In fact, De Santis's narrative structure does not allow one to specify where the story begins or where it ends: is the beginning Esteban's writing of a reconstruction of Homero Brocca's story, or does the story open with Esteban's self-relation? Not one of these options is true; the different narrative levels undergo moments of *metalepsis*,⁴⁶ subtle to the degree that they create continuity between the various story levels and between parallel worlds of fiction and reality, as between fiction and more fiction. The story's narrative structure is reminiscent of a Möbius strip.

Third, the enigma designed by Borges, which is actually a simulation of mystery

focused on the same possibility of verbality—not necessarily hiding a secret, but creating the illusion of a hidden thing—is projected into the architextual dimension in De Santis’s novel. The mystery surrounding Borges’s language thus appears in the novel codified in the detective genre: Borges questions the relationship between writing and truth, and De Santis highlights a direct link between fiction and reality. If Borges reveals that the purpose of literature is a ludic “hope” of filling the meaninglessness of the universe, De Santis also shows how the role of literature influences and even guides reality. Both, equally, note that fiction and reality go hand-in-hand. Here, again, Ariel Bermán’s novel steps away from the Borges-De Santis axis, as well as did Roberto Arlt, previously, looking at the library from the outside.

256 Fourth, De Santis’s *Architect* is the materialization of Borges’s hypothetical librarian, the “Man of the Book” (Borges 56), holding an endless book and compared to a god. Indeed, the one who controls the effect of fiction over reality guarantees that the story will never end and that the building of the universe will never collapse or, alternatively, will always be rebuilt after demolition. Lastly, there is, however, an interesting further element. Though Homero Brocca is the architect of a story structured in a way that seems endless, the Architect is also the one to cause the collapse of the building of Literature and Philosophy, which is no doubt a metaphor for the subversive desire of contemporary literature to shake up and shock literary tradition and build a new, parallel, world (of fiction). As at the beginning of this paper, we here again meet the gesture reiterating the dynamic of creation and destruction, inherent to Latin American literature.

I see the paradigm of fictive Latin American libraries, in its specific Argentine axis, as dreams of creation and destruction, as the reverberation of cyclical dynamics that started more than five hundred years ago. The metafictional question of the self, from book to text and text to book, can be interpreted as the projection of this movement by which systems of signification are, metaphorically, displaced, but still remain. Cultural ashes are not nothing; they are a hollowness inhabited by an enigma that fiction looks to decipher or overcome, playfully. De Santis’s novel is an example of postmodern fiction that works side-by-side with readers, so as not to expel them to “the street of lost readers” (Bermán 18), insisting on the quest for the book of books to decipher the ashes of lost signs, and to reformulate the question of existence and the universe. The home of books, creation, and destruction (by fire or by water) always appear related, drawing a triangular correspondence; the metaphor of a variable metaphysical conception of the universe.

This paradigm, in fact, has multiple faces. It does not stop with Borges’s proposals, but also inquires into political and ideological factors surrounding the metafictional question. The path that Roberto Arlt opened up sometimes appears in Latin American literature alongside metaphysical speculations. At other times, the book offers views on eroticism, gender, and childhood. Books appear as never ending hermeneutical artifacts, which seem to entice readers with questions, with unthinkable answers, and answers to impossible questions.

NOTES

1. Polastron is quoting William Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), but forgets to mention that in 1881, Joaquín García Icazbalceta denied this theory in *Don Juan Fray de Zumárraga*; in other sources, Zumárraga is even remembered as responsible for collecting and saving indigenous testimonies of art and narratives.
2. Nevertheless, there were also Spaniards who criticized violent actions against indigenous books and documents, alleging the necessity of knowing the subjugated in order to better control them. See Durán and Acosta.
3. Thomas B.F. Cummins explains: “most tocapu are composed of geometric figures—diamonds, squares, rectangles, and vertical, diagonal, and horizontal lines, all organized within a bordered square, rhomboid, or rectangle. The framing of each geometric composition allows the tocapu to be seen simultaneously as an individual entity and as an element in relation to other elements. In this sense, the visual characteristics of the tocapu would seem very different from those of the khipu; however, the modular nature of the tocapu is conceptually parallel to the organization of the khipu in the sense that each knot is both discrete and also meaningful in relation to the others” (286).
4. The Wari culture was a pre-Inca civilization that developed in the central Andes during the Middle Horizon period (AD 600-1000).
5. The leading research on this topic is being carried out by Gary Urton. See, for example, *Signs of the Inca Khipu: Binary Coding in the Andean Knotted-String Records*.
6. Published in 1943 as *El paraíso en el Nuevo Mundo: comentario apologético, historia natural y peregrina de las Indias Occidentales de tierra firme del mar océano*. I am currently doing research on the poetic aspects of León Pinelo’s text.
7. This treasured compilation remained unpublished until 1938, when its manuscripts were discovered in the Vatican’s secret archives. See Sahagún, *Colloquios y Doctrina christiana con que los doze frayles de san francisco enviados por el papa Adriano sexto y por el Emperador Carlo quinto convirtieron a los indios de la nueva España, en lengua Mexicana y Española*.
8. Published in 1956 as *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España: fundada en la documentación en lengua mexicana recogida por los mismos naturales*.
9. For an overview of these authors, see Baudot.
10. See Greenleaf.
11. “Enrique abrió cautelosamente la puerta de la Biblioteca. / Se pobló la atmósfera de olor a papel viejo, y a la luz de la linterna vimos huir una araña por el piso encerado. / Altas estanterías barnizadas de rojo tocaban el cielo raso, y la cónica rueda de luz se movía en las oscuras librerías, iluminando estantes cargados de libros. / Majestuosas vitrinas añadían un decoro severo a lo sombrío, y tras de los cristales, en los lomos de cuero, de tela y de pasta, relucían las guardas arabescas y títulos dorados de los tejuelos” (30-31).
12. “El universo (que otros llaman la Biblioteca) se compone de un número indefinido, y tal vez infinito, de galerías hexagonales” (Borges 465).
13. In his doctoral dissertation (written in Hebrew), Moshe Idel says this epistle of Abulafia was written for an unknown addressee, though certainly either a student of cabala or a sage, and it represents a pillar of Abulafia’s theory and practice. It seems to have been written in 1289 (year 5049 of the Jewish calendar).
14. *Gematria* is a “Kabbalistic method of interpreting the Hebrew scriptures by computing the numerical value of words, based on those of their constituent letters,” as defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary.

15. “Yo prefiero soñar que las superficies bruñidas figuran y prometen el infinito” (465).
16. Saúl Sosnowski explains the result of this difference: “El vacío que el narrador debe llenar con juegos de azar y reducciones de infinitos divinos a espacios humanos, es ajeno al cabalista: el lenguaje está concentrado en un Libro que no se oculta en un anaquel de la Biblioteca; el texto, si bien de origen divino, es accesible al hombre; su grado de comprensión dependerá de su preparación intelectual y religiosa” (39).
17. “Yo afirmo que la Biblioteca es interminable” (465).
18. “el universo, con su elegante dotación de anaqueles, de tomos enigmáticos, de infatigables escaleras para el viajero y de letrinas para el bibliotecario sentado, sólo puede ser obra de un dios” (466).
19. I use the concept of “play” not in a pejorative way, but, on the contrary, as creative action *per se*.
20. “Durante mucho tiempo se creyó que esos libros impenetrables correspondían a lenguas pretéritas o remotas. Es verdad que los hombres más antiguos, los primeros bibliotecarios, usaban un lenguaje asaz diferente del que hablamos ahora; es verdad que unas millas a la derecha la lengua es dialectal y que noventa pisos más arriba, es incomprensible. Todo eso, lo repito, es verdad, pero cuatrocientas diez páginas de inalterables MCV no pueden corresponder a ningún idioma, por dialectal o rudimentario que sea. Algunos insinuaron que cada letra podía influir en la subsiguiente y que el valor de MCV en la tercera línea de la página 71 no era el que puede tener la misma serie en otra posición de otra página, pero esa vaga tesis no prosperó. Otros pensaron en criptografías; universalmente esa conjetura ha sido aceptada, aunque no en el sentido en que la formularon sus inventores” (467).
21. “Hace quinientos años, el jefe de un hexágono superior dio con un libro tan confuso como los otros, pero que tenía casi dos hojas de líneas homogéneas. Mostró su hallazgo a un descifrador ambulante, que le dijo que estaban redactadas en portugués; otros le dijeron que en yiddish. Antes de un siglo pudo establecerse el idioma: un dialecto samoyedo-lituano del guaraní, con inflexiones de árabe clásico” (467).
22. “Todo: la historia minuciosa del porvenir, las autobiografías de los arcángeles, el catálogo fiel de la Biblioteca, miles y miles de catálogos falsos, la demostración de la falacia de esos catálogos, la demostración de la falacia del catálogo verdadero, el evangelio gnóstico de Basíides, el comentario de ese evangelio, el comentario del comentario de ese evangelio, la relación verídica de tu muerte, la versión de cada libro a todas las lenguas, las interpolaciones de cada libro en todos los libros” (467-68).
23. “También sabemos de otra superstición de aquel tiempo: la del Hombre del Libro. En algún anaquel de algún hexágono (razonaron los hombres) debe existir un libro que sea la cifra y el compendio perfecto de todos los demás: algún bibliotecario lo ha recorrido y es análogo a un dios. En el lenguaje de esta zona persisten aún vestigios del culto de ese funcionario remoto. Muchos peregrinaron en busca de Él” (469).
24. “Afirman los impíos que el disparate es normal en la Biblioteca y que lo razonable (y aun la humilde y pura coherencia) es una casi milagrosa excepción. Hablan (lo sé) de «la Biblioteca febril, cuyos azarosos volúmenes corren el incesante albur de cambiarse en otros y que todo lo afirman, lo niegan y lo confunden como una divinidad que delira»” (469-70).
25. “Hablar es incurrir en tautologías. Esta epístola inútil y palabrera ya existe en uno de los treinta volúmenes de los cinco anaqueles de uno de los incontables hexágonos, y también su refutación” (470).
26. “Tú, que me lees, ¿estás seguro de entender mi lenguaje?” (470).
27. “Yo conozco distritos en que los jóvenes se prosternan ante los libros y besan con barbarie las páginas, pero no saben descifrar una sola letra” (470).
28. “la Biblioteca perdurará: iluminada, solitaria, infinita, perfectamente inmóvil, armada de volúmenes preciosos, inútil, incorruptible, secreta” (470).

29. “Quienes lo juzgan limitado, postulan que en lugares remotos los corredores y escaleras y hexágonos pueden inconcebiblemente cesar, lo cual es absurdo. Quienes la imaginan sin límites, olvidan que lo tiene el número posible de libros. Yo me atrevo a insinuar esta solución del antiguo problema: La biblioteca es ilimitada y periódica. Si un eterno viajero la atravesara en cualquier dirección, comprobaría al cabo de los siglos que los mismos volúmenes se repiten en el mismo desorden (que, repetido, sería un orden: el Orden). Mi soledad se alegra con esa elegante esperanza” (471). All translations are by Michael Werner except where indicated.
30. “desembocan en plena calle, una de las calles laterales, peligrosísima, poblada de lectores perdidos, al borde de la desesperación y la miseria, que se empujan los unos a los otros, se roban entre sí las fotocopias de alguno de los libros de la biblioteca y no consiguen ponerse de acuerdo para volver, organizados, y tomar la entrada por asalto” (18).
31. “En la calle de los lectores perdidos suelen ocurrir innumerables incidentes. Se trata, en casi todos los casos, de enfrentamientos rápidos, de golpes al aire, al cuerpo, patadas que nunca terminan de materializarse; enseguida todo vuelve a su curso habitual: algunos caminan en círculo, las manos en la espalda, como suele hacerlo el jefe; otros comparten una cajita con vino, otros conversan sin escucharse, tironean de unos papeles manoseados” (26).
32. “Los que continúan, agónicos, en la calle de los lectores perdidos, son indigentes, pobres diablos que no poseen nada que les sirva como valor de cambio. En otras épocas fueron jóvenes de brillante futuro pero ahora están varados a la intemperie, desactualizados de todas las novedades bibliográficas, sin chances de volver a insertarse en el mercado laboral y en el mercado del amor, pero dejándose ganar, a veces, por el deseo, a pesar de los olores y la mugre que impregnan los cuerpos” (26).
33. “No es un mapa, ni una maqueta, es una máquina sinóptica; toda la ciudad está ahí, concentrada en sí misma, reducida a su esencia. La ciudad es Buenos Aires pero modificada y alterada por la locura y la visión microscópica del constructor” (11).
34. See Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*.
35. Since there is yet no English translation available for this novel, my analysis includes a detailed paraphrase of it in order to enable readers to closely follow the metafictional moves that are performed.
36. For an example of “intertextuality of artifice,” see my article “Intertextualidad de artificio y dialogismo imaginado: los alter-ego autoriales en la obra de Julio Cortázar.”
37. The young narrator discovers that a censored short story is the trigger for many acts of suicide in the building in which he works: “La divulgación del relato ha formado parte de un prolongado experimento que empezó hace años. No ha sido un medio de transmisión de mensajes, sino un solo mensaje eternamente repetido: la invitación a la muerte. La prohibición de que se lo divulgue es una nueva etapa del experimento: cuanto más secreto sea el cuento, más presión ejercerá. El porcentaje de suicidios ha aumentado en los últimos tiempos, y el medio favorito es la soga. No está permitido divulgar cifras, pero las encontré en una carpeta perdida del archivo general. Ahora construyo con papeles y gráficos mi propio archivo para probar un día que todos estamos metidos en un experimento. Hicieron circular el relato para probar que podían actuar incluso dentro de nuestros sueños. Porque todas las versiones son distintas, y distintos los objetos sustituidos, pero tienen, todas, el mismo final” (85).
38. This translation is mine. The original says: “este cuaderno está vacío” (71).
39. “Substitutions” is, no doubt, a reference to Abulafia’s “permutations” and Borges’s “combinations.” Using my research on intertextuality as a guide (see *Los ríos metafísicos de Julio Cortázar*), I would call this a “reminiscent link” to those texts as “substitutions” comprises a semantic field along with “combinations” and “permutations.”
40. “En general ubico las cosas en vitrinas que tengo en mi casa y las miro como si no supiera qué son. Poco a poco armo la red que las une. Redacto en mi imaginación el catálogo del museo, donde cada cosa tiene su lugar. El método combina la razón con la intuición. Con la razón sola no se llega a

ninguna parte. Sólo admitiendo que la realidad es en gran parte imaginaria se puede alcanzar la verdad” (90).

41. “Dice que tiene que seguir escribiendo para que no desaparezcan las cosas que lo rodean. Es un mal del que se han presentado pocos casos; todavía no hay una descripción clínica precisa. Lo llamamos provisoriamente grafomanía aguda o mal de Van Holst, que es el nombre del primer paciente detectado. Era un empleado de la biblioteca nacional de Amsterdam que comenzó a destruir las cosas que había en su casa para reemplazarlas con papeles donde escribía los nombres de las cosas. [...] Para él las cosas y las palabras no son enemigas, pueden coexistir. En el centro de su delirio está la certeza de que los objetos no pueden existir sin las palabras. De hecho ve la relación al revés: las cosas son signos que sirven para expresar lo único que de veras existe, el lenguaje” (164).
42. “Al llegar al cuarto piso lo perdí de vista. Empezaba otro mundo sin ruido, sin vida. Un silencio absoluto nacía en aquellos papeles muertos juntados año tras año y que superponían, a la deteriorada arquitectura, un dibujo de pasillos estrechos, puentes, columnas vacilantes, pasajes clausurados. Por primera vez me fue revelado que aquel orden no era casual, que había un plan detrás del aparente caos de papeles; adiviné, más allá de los zigzagueantes muros formados por las carpetas, la profundidad de un orbe cerrado que nada tenía que compartir con los pisos inferiores. Desde alguna parte reinaba, invisible, el Arquitecto” (40).
- 260 43. “era como un dios oculto en el fondo de los papeles, que determinaba nuestro destino y nuestra muerte. No le interesaba matar, sino escribir: el crimen era apenas un alimento para la tensión de la trama. La vida ya se había convertido para él en una serie de dispersos bloques narrativos que había que unir a través de maniobras audaces e impulsos demoníacos. Mientras tanto, trabajaba para demoler el edificio, porque quería transformarlo en símbolo. En literatura, sostenía, para construir algo hay que destruirlo, y un escritor tiene que empezar a planear el final desde que escribe la primera línea” (216).
44. It should be noted that Trejo, the detective and, symbolically, the expert reader, also pretends to be an “architect” while pursuing his investigation (107, 125). Through these two architects, who have different functions in the story, the intentionality of the text is such as to break with a binary structure dividing “the reader” (the detective/false architect) and “the creator” (the writer/metaphorical architect). In fact, while the author builds the architecture of a fiction, the reader reconstructs the memory of it through contemplation and reading. Both functions are indeed constructive pursuits.
45. “Oí un estruendo sobre mi cabeza y alcancé a apartarme de la escalera. A través de ella se derramó un río oscuro y espeso de jirones de páginas y escombros. La tromba de agua pútrida alcanzó a empujarme pero no me arrastró: quedé a un costado de la escalera, aturdido y muerto de frío. Tardé unos segundos en darme cuenta de que el agua me había arrancado la novela de las manos” (220).
46. *Metalepsis* here refers to the enlargement of a concept in rhetoric proposed by Gérard Genette in *Figures III* to designate a superposition or fusion of fictive levels.

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