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Jorge Luis Borges' *Poetics* of Narrative Fiction: Magic Causality and Defective Memory

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ABSTRACT: This article intends to discuss Jorge Luis Borges' *Poetics* of the Narrative, that is, to question the form and the literary devices which make a narrative somehow effective. I shall focus on aspects associated with the buildup of the plot, such as the magic causality, the writing style based upon a concept of selective memory and oriented towards a dynamic and concatenated articulation of the events. The technicity inherent to these aspects increases the interaction between the reader and the text, makes of the former a machine operator of an open mechanism.

KEYWORDS: Narrative Art; Mechanism; Jorge Luis Borges; Memory; Magic.

1. Introduction

In the first lecture given in Harvard College, "The Riddle of Poetry" (1967), Jorge Luis Borges evokes Bishop Berkeley in order to metaphorize the literary effect as the result of a contact, remarking that:

he wrote that the taste of the apple is neither in the apple itself—the apple can not taste itself—nor in the mouth of the eater. It requires a contact between them. The same thing happens to a book or to a collection of books, to a library. For what is a book in itself? A book is a physical object in a world of physical objects. It is a set of dead symbols. And then the right reader comes along, and the words—or rather the poetry behind the words, for the words themselves are mere symbols—spring to life, and we have a resurrection of the word." ("This Craft of Verse" 3-4)

It should be noted that only the right reader may give life to words, that poetry depends on the former in order to manifest itself. Therefore, each reading where poetry occurs implies a change of reference, materialized into a profound affectedness - a becoming - of the reader, in the production of intensities whose singularity invalidates any theoretical matrix we may wish to apply, beforehand and subsumable, to the interpretation of the discussed text. This allows us to associate the act of reading a literary text with the ideas of *motion* and *interactivity*: the reader runs across the pathways of the text and, by becoming affected by the later, interprets it, thus carrying out a shift in direction through that sort of rewriting.

A fundamental concept for the execution of any motion is the concept of friction. In section 107 of the first section of his *Philosophi-*

cal Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein states: "We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!" The term *friction* is used by the Austrian philosopher as a necessary condition to motion, not as a factor for increasing its difficulty or as implying impediment. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that, from the scientific point of view, both uses are correct. In order to broaden the functionality of the concept in the scope of Humanities, it may be worth to bring up to the discussion some notions and assumptions affixed to it by science. I must point out, in the first place, that friction is a fundamental component of tribology (from the Greek τριβω "tribo", which means "to rub, grit, scrub, erode", and λόγος "logos", meaning, among others, "reason, study, science, discourse"), a field which Peter Jost defined as "the science and technology of interacting surfaces in relative motion and associated practices".

In the scope of tribology, friction is considered to be a resistive force to motion. In figure 1, we may observe how this resistive force occurs as an effect of the contact between the irregularities of the interacting surfaces. Nonetheless, friction is necessary for motion inasmuch as it goes against it, assuring traction (from Latin *tractiōne* "the act of pulling"), which, in turn, fulfills a crucial role in the variability and control of movement: namely, in acceleration, deceleration and to shift direction. It may be needless to say that a superior frictional force to the applied force prevents the motion. The entire effort of an engineer is spent on studying the complexity (the chemical, physical, mechanic and material factors) of interactions and in the adjustment of the frictional conditions of the motion in accordance with parameters of efficacy and efficiency, aimed at the envisaged purposes.

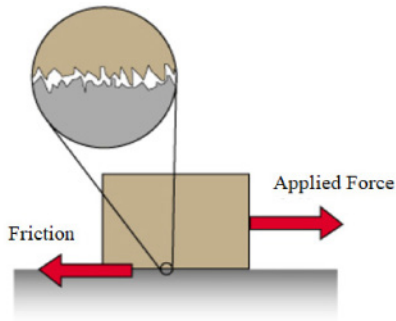


Fig.1—Detail of the frictional force

There are, however, important differences between literature and science. Since, if both seek to assure motion, then the effects the latter causes, whether political, social, economical, aesthetic, or others, are not able to be envisaged, nor are the multiple elements which get entangled and form their complexity measurable. Nevertheless, despite these differences, both the notion of *interaction* between two surfaces in relative *motion* contained in Jost's definition as well as the implications of the concept of friction reveal themselves to be useful enough to consider some aspects of the literary phenomenon.

In her book *Literatura, Defesa do Atrito* (2012) [*Literature, Defense of Friction*], the philosopher Silvina Rodrigues Lopes carries out a critique of present-day mass culture, in which most of the literary works are dominated by the uncritical following of models and prescriptions. In order to build a living culture, marked by the assertion of the singularities and the differences, Lopes proposes for literary works to establish a tribological relationship with the reader, where the interaction of the surfaces—since what both the text and the reader are in them-selves is unknown—can only be considered in the inseparability of the terms. Besides this aspect, and since the reader and the text keep, in their interaction, their contingency (in other words, their secret), the motion-meeting between them does not reflect something liable for absolutization, but only what the text and the reader are for one another.

Two of the several criticisms to consumer literature which Silvina Rodrigues Lopes underlines converge towards the problematic of the production of meaning: the criticism focused on the strict formal codification of the texts, exclusively founded upon technical assumptions; and criticism of the craftsmanship of the works, due to the use of a language which does not confront itself with its limits and which, due to that reason, only provides access to a sole meaning, unambiguous and indisputable.

What is at stake in the first criticism is the mere application of a scientific method to the construction of a text, substantiated in the use of techniques which predetermine if the former has the right to please or does not. For Silvina Rodrigues Lopes, literature, while not being able to dismiss technique, can never become reducible to the latter, thus being located in a frontier between knowledge and not-knowing: "[Literature] is not only about knowledge, but rather

about initiation, through thinking, to a dimension of existence non-linkable to a circle of competences and theories" (92-3)¹. Friction between the text and the reader is therefore hampered by the introduction of technical anomalies on the normative tags of taste, thus fragmenting and dividing the act of reading, obstructing the linearity of its course, ruffling it and multiplying the meaning(s) of the text.

The second criticism focuses on what we call literary language, namely, in the use of stereotypes and in the argumentative style, commonly used, respectively, in sentimental literature and in protest literature. This type of language, by showing itself to be unable to move the significations of common-sense, shows itself to be unable to reorder the world. It should not be assumed, however, that this corresponds, in Silvina Rodrigues Lopes' work, to a defense of originality. The latter implies an infinite deterritorialization of language incompatible with restart (the repetition with a difference) which safeguards the relative autonomy of art, in other words, which maintains the ability to attract the reader and engage with him in a critical fashion. An originality which may radically break with the entire history of literature runs the risk of creating a superior friction to the driving force of desire unleashed in the reader, thus preventing motion. The reordering of language's signification must produce defamiliarization, but not absolute lack of communication. As it occurs in formal matters, the important is to introduce irregularities, imperfections, to create voids, which may generate misunderstandings, tentative readings, unprecedented encounters.

Under this double perspective of the architecture of fictional texts and its inherent language, I shall attempt, in this article, to question how Jorge Luis Borges conceives a narrative as an interactive mechanism, which simultaneously intensifies and does not exhaust the relationship with the reader. It should also be noted that Borges reclaims for himself, with quite some frequency throughout his works, the role of reader (anonymous, hard-working, patient, hospitable) to the detriment of the statute as an author, as may be observed for example in the first edition of *Historia Universal de la infamia*: "A veces creo que los buenos lectores son cisnes aun más tenebrosos y singulares que los buenos autores. (...) // Leer, por lo pronto, es una actividad posterior a la de escribir: más resignada, más civil, más intelectual." ("*Obras Completas*" 341)

2. Narrative Fiction as a Mechanism

In his 1932 essay, "El arte narrativo y la magia", Jorge Luis Borges proposes an analysis of the proceedings of novel writing. As a corollary of the analysis of some passages from *Life and Death of Jason* and *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, two adventure narratives authored by William Morris and Edgar Allan Poe, respectively, Jorge Luis Borges postulates causality as the central problem of the novel. He distinguishes between two causal processes of writing narratives: the natural process and the magical process.

The natural process represents "Una de las variedades del gé-

nero, la morosa novela de caracteres, finge o dispone una concatenación de motivos que se proponen no diferir de los del mundo real" (Borges "*Obras Completas I*" 404-5). Due to Jorge Luis Borges's vision of a chaotic real world, this natural process continuously results in an endless and uncontrollable number of operations. In Borges's mind, however, the novel should not be natural, but artificial. As opposed to the disorder of the real world, the novel "debe ser un juego preciso de vigilancias, ecos y afinidades. Todo episodio, en un cuidadoso relato, es de proyección ulterior" (405). The magical process allows this to happen, since it obeys a general law: "la de la simpatía, que postula un vínculo inevitable entre cosas distantes" (405). That is, it obeys not just natural laws, but also the laws of imagination. The frenetic and precise causality of this process makes the resulting plot fully reasoned, limited, and teleological².

The above-mentioned processes are implicit in Jorge Luis Borges's prologue (1940) to Adolfo Bioy Casares's *La invención de Morel*. The comparison between psychological and adventure novels relies a great deal on a similar rationality. Since the psychological novel tends to portray the real world with its infinite possibilities, it is shapeless. Its intrinsic and boundless freedom is equivalent to total disorder. For Borges, the psychological novel:

prefiere que olvidemos su carácter de artificio verbal y hace de toda vana precisión (o de toda lánguida vaguedad) un nuevo toque verosímil. Hay páginas, hay capítulos de Marcel Proust que son inaceptables como invenciones: a los que, sin saberlo, nos resignamos como a lo insípido y ocioso de cada día. La novela de aventuras, en cambio, no se propone como una transcripción de la realidad: es un objeto artificial que no sufre ninguna parte injustificada. El temor de incurrir en la mera variedad sucesiva del *Asno de Oro*, de los siete viajes de Simbad o del *Quijote*, le impone un riguroso argumento. ("*Obras Completas IV*" 29-30)

This quote deserves to be unpacked. In the first sentence, it is said that the psychological novel, despite aiming at giving a sense of reality through the method applied in its construction, shall never stop from being a verbal artifice. Words are solely a part of the world, carrying out limited and specific functions. In view of this fact, if a verbal artifice intends to provide a representation of the world, such representation cannot configure but a radical opposition to what the world is in it-self. The precision which realist writers intend to obtain is futile, since every event is strictly motivated by an infinite set of causes, with any description thus demanding a compulsory selectivity³, no matter how detailed that description is. In the case that this selectivity is not judicious and focuses on unrelated events which, instead of producing the impression of a set, produce the impression of dispersion (filling the novel with "loose ends" and "dead ends"), then it is most probable that the feelings of *languor* and *vagueness* accompany the reading of the text. For Jorge

Luis Borges, however, these are precisely the impressions that literature should avoid inducing on the reader. What remains of the quote proves it.

In the second sentence, Jorge Luis Borges claims that Marcel Proust's literature is unacceptable, but not as a whole, solely certain pages and chapters. It is hereby unequivocally shown that Borges is more focused on an issue of writing methodology rather than literary genre, of form rather than content—in fact, only by observing the narrative's formal proceedings is it possible to establish any parallel between *In Search of Lost Time* and an adventure novel. What is unacceptable as literature, as *invention* (even though it is one), is everything which transports the reader to an atmosphere of *insipid* realism, because it is senseless, it makes him live literature *resignedly*, just as everyday life. The magical process, of which one can easily deduce, according to the last two sentences of the quote, that the adventure novel relies on, sets in motion a constructive inventive force, the creation of unique meanings, the conversion into a conceptual possibility of what is improbable and impossible in reality, inducing therefore on the reader a resistance to such resignation. The application of this method, which creates the sensation of verisimilitude through a causality which, rather than obeying the laws which govern the real world, occurs through an effect of nomination, leads to a literature which raises itself up as a snippet of order and vitality in an amorphous and anemic daily life.

The reading of both these Borgesian texts may be expanded and clarified through "La supersticiosa ética del lector" (1931). In this text, Jorge Luis Borges criticizes the two aesthetic criteria of his contemporary literary scene: style and perfection.

Firstly, Jorge Luis Borges accuses the literary agents of giving primacy to a stylistic criterion, which leads to "a una distraída lectura de atenciones parciales" ("*Obras Completas I*" 381), to the detriment of "la eficacia del mecanismo" (381). In his defense of *Don Quijote* against its detractors, Borges claims that the greatest value (and perhaps the only irrefutable one) of the Cervantian work is the *psychological* one, adding that "basta revisar unos párrafos del *Quijote* para sentir que Cervantes no era estilista (...) y que le interesaban demasiado los destinos de Quijote y Sancho para dejarse distraer por su propia voz." (381)

The second aesthetic criterion which Jorge Luis Borges rejects is the one concerned with perfection. Borges' arguments are focused on the idea of text where no word can be changed, under the penalty of a degradation of that same text. More specifically, the alterations would end up having the effect of erasing the lateral meanings and shades of signification of the text itself. As a consequence, the hypothetical perfect text is subject to a greater wear, since it does not benefit from the imperfections of a text with the vocation for immortality, namely the imperfections which lead to: the errata, the approximated versions, the distracted readings and the misunderstandings, which extend the text beyond itself, in time, in space and in the significance, without the loss of the soul of the text. The imperfections, when issued voluntarily, are usually the

proof that "la pasión del tema tratado manda en el escritor, y eso es todo." (383)

Three meaningful inferences regarding narrative art arise out of this recension.

The first and most obvious inference is the Borgesian refusal of any aestheticization of language. In other words, narrative art is not concerned with any concept of beauty or aesthetically recommendable adequacy of expression to what is expressed through language, with the latter being seen as the sole credible element of analysis to any explanation one may wish to give regarding what happens in the construction process of meaning.

The second point of analysis concerns Borges' commentary on *Don Quijote*, which becomes more complex read in comparison with other Borgesian commentaries on this very same work, such as the one included in the prologue to *La invención de Morel*, quoted above. Even though Borges considers it an adventure novel, *Don Quijote* does not possess a rigorous plot from the causal point of view, merely being constituted by a successive variety of episodes. The pairing of these two comments regarding the Cervantian masterpiece allows us to observe that Borges maintains the conviction that the joint (emotional) effect of a narrative, associated with the predominance of the action (even if it constitutes an imperfect plot—endowed with an inaccurate causality), is sufficient to guarantee its functioning.

The third conclusion is that the construction process of meaning has a double inseparable strand: the *narrative mechanism* works insofar as the text, as a whole, produces an effect which, nevertheless, suffers variations in accordance with the meanings that the imperfections keep opening. Consequently, for Jorge Luis Borges, the narrative is not limited to the fulfillment of a particular utilitarian function for the reader. Constituted by a profound human reality—conceptual, rigorous, intelligent and rational, whilst being passionate, subjective and imperfect (and, due to that, a differentiator)—, the narrative does not have a sole meaning but rather provides access to meaning, creates meaning(s)—it keeps the construction process of meaning in a continuous operation. For that to succeed, the reader has a crucial role. Borges does not assign a greater importance to the effect(s) that each sole literary work exerts over the reader than to the effects that each reader, through the singularity of each reading, exerts over the work.

3. Memory and Imperfection(s)

Notwithstanding these considerations, it is granted that the last two sentences of the recension of "La supersticiosa ética del lector" devised above are prone to raise several questionings regarding the nature and necessity of imperfections in the narrative. For, when one thinks about the consequences of a vague and misplaced word in a literary text, one thinks, firstly, in degradation, and not in an improvement of the overall set effect, let alone immortalization. Nonetheless, Jorge Luis Borges associates degradation to the

perfect word, which cannot be replaced in the context of the literary work, and that, for this very reason, wears away due to operating in a limited interpretative spectrum. Consequently, only imperfections may guarantee the interpretative differentiation of a text, and must be introduced in the latter consciously. But how to do so without writing carelessly and undermining the set effect of the mechanism? The answer to this question might be conceived starting with the essay "La postulación de la realidad" (1928), of which a passage must here be quoted:

la imprecisión es tolerable o verosímil en la literatura, porque a ella propendemos siempre en la realidad. La simplificación conceptual de estados complejos es muchas veces una operación instantánea. El hecho mismo de percibir, de atender, es de orden selectivo: toda atención, toda fijación de nuestra conciencia, comporta una deliberada omisión de lo no interesante. Vemos y oímos a través de recuerdos, de temores, de previsiones. En lo corporal, la inconciencia es una necesidad de los actos físicos. Nuestro cuerpo sabe articular este difícil párrafo, sabe tratar con escaleras, con nudos, con pasos a nivel, (...), sabe dormir, sabe tal vez matar: nuestro cuerpo, no nuestra inteligencia. Nuestro vivir es una serie de adaptaciones, vale decir, una educación del olvido (Borges "Obras Completas I" 395)

The first inference which emerges from the quote is related to the title of the essay. For even though it implies invention and artificiality in its conception, narrative literature is not strictly opposed to reality after all: it imitates the manner how human beings perceive the external matter and, concomitantly, how they do a selective use of memory (in other words, educate the forgetfulness) in their daily lives, although they do not possess an awareness of such operations. In *Evaristo Carriego* (1930), Borges defends a writing based on memory in opposition to a writing which transcribes reality: "Afortunadamente, el copioso estilo de la realidad no es el único: hay el del recuerdo también, cuya esencia no es la ramificación de hechos, sino la perduración de rasgos aislados." ("Obras Completas I" 215) Let us analyze these two types of writing from the point of view of the use of perception and memory.

In what concerns the copious style of reality, it was mentioned above that Jorge Luis Borges, in the prologue to the *La invención de Morel*, repudiates a literature which has the pretensions to achieve omniscience and omnipresence; in other words, the pretension to transcribe what reality is in it-self, in all its plurality and relational rigor. Additionally, it should be noted now that this type of writing simulates a perception and a memory which are closer to the ones of Ireneu Funes, of whom it is said, at the end of the tale "Funes, el memorioso" (1942), "que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos." (Borges

"*Obras Completas I*" 883)⁵ The accident which victimizes Funes not only provides a magical justification for the prodigious memory and perception which he suddenly acquires, but also deprives him of the possibility to act. Disconnected from the possibility to act, the elementary operations of the spirit, perception and memory, are taken over by operations of pure knowledge. What fills Funes's consciousness "is either the useless duplicate of an external reality or the inert material of an intellectual construction entirely disinterested" (Bergson "*Matter and Memory*" 227). Consequently, a writing based in these premises for the operations of the spirit cannot but constitute a useless reproduction method and a passionless intellectual construction.

In opposition to realist literature, literature which is centered on memory is better at simulating the human experience of reality and of time. This experience, carried out through the association of perception and memory, it is a mutilation, a simplification of the relational complexity of everything that exists and, as a consequence, it has a tendency for imprecision and for error. Let it be underlined that at the end of the passage from "La postulación de la realidad" which was cited, Jorge Luis Borges insists on placing on the same level, in what concerns the ways on how those operations of the spirit are used, the act of writing and any other physical act performed by the human being in his relationship with matter in his daily life. It is an act, as previously pointed out, driven by passion, with everything that the latter comprises of reiterative obsession and unconsciousness. To understand why the representation of reality is, for Borges, a diminution of what reality is in-itself implies knowing his conception of the functioning of perception and of memory. For such task the thought of a philosopher who has just been quoted shall be invoked: Henri Bergson. Let us observe the considerations which follow the works *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* and *Matter and Memory*.

For Henri Bergson, the body is a centre of action, where perception and memory perform a complementary and fundamental role. Perception connects the received stimulus with the body motors, thus sketching the simultaneity of the possible actions of the body over matter. Memory, on the other hand, fulfills a double function: firstly, it evokes past perceptions analogous to a present perception, thus contributing for a decision-making process taking into account a criterion of usefulness; the second function is based on capturing, in a unique intuition, multiple movements of the duration, withdrawing the human being from the condition of having a permanent need to act.

Let it now be ascertained which imperfections are inherent to main functions of the operations of the spirit, but not without underlining first, and once more, that Henri Bergson refuses the idea of a perception which can function without the participation of memory. The latter, besides fulfilling the double functionality described above, has a double nature: the image-remembrance and the movement. Thus, perception and memory introduce *imperfections* in our representation of reality in the following manners:

a) In the first place, the operations of the spirit perform a selective and reducing double role over reality. The need or the desire to act over a particular material object (or a set of objects) leads the perception that the human being has of that object, aided by memory, to have the tendency to isolate it from its context, where it exists in continuity with the other objects. Plus: for Henri Bergson, as for Jorge Luis Borges, the representation oriented towards action not only isolates and highlights the objects of the world to which they are in reality sympathetic, but also highlights the parts from these very same objects that matter for the potential action of man from the ones that do not. In other words, our representation of objects is imperfect, in first place due to the effect of selection (isolating it from the other objects) and also because our perception focuses only partially on them, in accordance with a criteria of relevance for our action.

b) In the process which has just been described, the imperfections of the representation are increased according to how both forms of memory and perception are conjugated. The first form of memory, as stated above, re-overlays the present perception with analogous past perceptions. The phenomenon of the introduction of imperfections in the act of writing (a present perception) is quite noticeable in *Evaristo Carriego*, a work which is supposedly a biography. In the opening of chapter II of this work, Borges enunciates some of the inherent problematics to the biographical genre itself:

Que un individuo quiera despertar en otro individuo recuerdos que no pertenecieron más que a un tercero, es una paradoja evidente. Ejecutar con despreocupación esa paradoja, es la inocente voluntad de toda biografía. Creo también que el haberlo conocido a Carriego no rectifica en este caso particular la dificultad del propósito. Poseo recuerdos de Carriego: recuerdos de recuerdos de otros recuerdos, cuyas mínimas desviaciones originales habrán oscuramente crecido, en cada nuevo ensayo. (Borges "*Obras Completas I*" 222)

The historical rigor of the biography shows itself to be fallible, in the first place, due to the biographer's impossibility to attest to the subjective experiences of the subject of that biography, under penalty of such testimony ceasing to be it so, with the memory of such testimony being degraded, in a second instance, in its process of construction and transmission. Jorge Luis Borges says that even the memories of his interaction with Evaristo Carriego are not the ones which he conveys to the paper, that such memories are memories of the memories of the (re)writing on the theme. This reveals that the published text is not born as a finished product, it rather results from an effort discontinued in time, one on which memory performs a central role. Between what, in the beginning, was presumed to have been and to have happened and the moment of the publication of the biography there is a set of differences which derive in every cumulative repetition from the evocation of the event.

These differences (mistakes, derivations, omissions), which, according to Jorge Luis Borges, are necessary elements for the effectiveness of the text on the reader, arise from the interaction of two types of memory: the image-remembrance and the movement. The first type covers the vast majority of the remembrances of the human being, and has as its object the discrete events and details of his life. The main characteristic of these remembrances is the fact that they are dated and, therefore, will not be reproduced again. When someone evokes one of these remembrances, this is done through *representation*. The second type of memory is the one which is born out of repetition. Every human being, in his existence, interacts, with greater or lesser incidence, with a limited number of objects and living beings. The perception of these objects and living beings provokes in us a series of movements through which we adapt to them, and the repetition of these movements over time creates in us a mechanism, a habit, which accompanies that same perception. This habit having been formed, the greater part of the image-remembrances have the tendency to be inhibited: the body acts automatically, without remembering the specific moments when the repeated contacts with such objects and living beings, which determine this mechanical action, happened. Also, in the moment of the action, there is a tendency for an inhibition of all the non-relevant information which belongs to the specific image(s)-remembrance(s) which is(are) evoked. If the first type of memory can be evoked through *representation*, the movement can be characterized as an *active* memory.

What has been exposed allows us to conceive, on one hand, why writing is for Jorge Luis Borges a physical act comparable to the unconscious movements of everyday life. The evocation of the images-remembrances does not guide that act, which has a nature of unconscious repetition, it only furnishes it with the imaginary complement necessary for its efficacy. Since that complement does not reflect more than a fragment (an imprecise one sometimes, modified by other remembrances) of a past reality, its characterization must be, despite being effective, imperfect in what regards the postulation of reality.

c) The third type of imperfections relates to memory's second function, which consists in synthesizing complex states which are developed throughout a certain period of time. In order to understand this point, I must evoke the famous Bergsonian concept of *duration* (*la durée*). In opposition to the idea of quantitative multiplicity, where the heterogeneity of the external reality is perceived in juxtaposition, in a homogeneous space, and conscience along with that external reality externalize themselves one from the other (as it succeeds with Funes), Henri Bergson defends that the data from the human conscience forms instead a qualitative multiplicity, made from a temporal heterogeneity, where "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, [and] gradually gain a richer content" (Bergson "Time and Free Will" 122). Since there is no juxtaposition of events in the *duration*, the causality observed in the latter does not obey to a linear mechanic. Let us

return to *Evaristo Carriego* and observe how Jorge Luis Borges integrates this qualitative multiplicity in his writing through a supposed description of the pre-history of the neighborhood of Palermo, in Buenos Aires:

Recuperar esa casi prehistoria [de Palermo] sería tejer insensatamente una crónica de infinitesimales procesos: las etapas de la distraída marcha secular de Buenos Aires sobre Palermo (...). Lo más directo, según el proceder cinematográfico, sería proponer una continuidad de figuras que cesan: un arreo de mulas viñateras, las chúcaras con la cabeza vendada; un agua quieta y larga, en la que están sobrenadando unas hojas de sauce; una vertiginosa *alma en pena* enhorquetada en zancos, vadeando los torrenciales terceros; el campo abierto sin ninguna cosa que hacer; (...) Así hasta la fundación de don Juan Manuel: padre ya mitológico de Palermo, no meramente histórico, como ese Domínguez-Domenico de Groussac. (215)

The affinity of writing with cinema is not of a documental nature, but rather of an artistic one. The images do not contain information, they do not follow each other in a precise chronology and do not form a nexus of real causality (infinite and multidirectional) observed in a homogeneous space. And, nevertheless, there is a continuity in the presentation of the images, constituting a block which incurs and actualizes a virtual pre-history of the neighborhood of Palermo, through a series of sensible stimuli associated with the local color, which exclude any reference to the establishment of the European colonization and which disembody in its mythical foundation (rather than historical). The enumerative heterogeneity, so common in the writing of Jorge Luis Borges, forms a concept or a figure of language which allows the reader to access an integral aesthetic experience. However, the feeling of integrity is not yet the feeling of completeness, since the fragmentary nature of the images invites us to the filling of imaginary voids.

To summarize everything that has been said in these three points, the act of writing which arises from the prevalence of the use of this type of physical memory has the tendency to incorporate a more abstract consciousness of a reality which is clearly more delimited, with these two factors being the ones into which the element *imperfection* is introduced. The acquisition of knowledge is, on a first moment, of an analytical character, that is, it occurs through the division and selection of things under several adopted perspectives. On a second moment of synthetic reconstruction of such multiple perspectives (where the relational factor already comes in) that analytical knowledge is completed. This synthesis never gives the reader more than a general concept of things and events, thus simulating a contracted intuition of multiple times. Such an abstract writing leads that same reader to be put in charge of completing or animating those very same things and interactions among them⁶.

4. Conclusion

Let it be noticed how, on the texts under analysis, Jorge Luis Borges uses a language which is more technical (when it is not plain scientific) rather than aesthetic. Following such language, let us propose, in order to wrap up this article, the presentation of a schematic sketch of the main ideas of Borges on narrative art. Towards that purpose, let us invoke the thought of Gilbert Simondon, who, in the introduction to his text *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (1958), claims that:

A purely automatic machine completely closed in on itself in a predetermined way of operating would only be capable of yielding perfunctory results. The machine endowed with a high degree of technicity is an open machine, and all open machines taken together presuppose man as their permanent organizer, as the living interpreter of all machines among themselves. Far from being the supervisor of a group of slaves, man is the permanent organizer of a society of technical objects that need him in the same way musicians in an orchestra need the conductor. (...) He is *among* the machines that operate with him. (17-8)

We may realize, through this quote, how the use by Jorge Luis Borges of scientific terminology to exhibit conceptualizations on narrative art is not merely rhetoric. The type of narrative which the Argentine writer considers to be the most effective is the one which has the characteristics of a technical object—a mechanism—, being constituted by an articulation of artifices which forms a complex structure, and whose conception must be oriented for the intensification of the interactivity with the reader.

By advocating the magical method to the detriment of the natural method, Jorge Luis Borges is advocating a technically simpler

mechanism; let us be clear, a mechanism which, by condensing the routes of causality, works less as an interaction of multiple subsystems that fulfill a limited and specific number of functions than in the integrated multi-functionality of the biggest number of elements in the global system⁷. The advocacy of this technical simplicity is eloquently postulated in the critique to those to whom "la concisión es una virtud y tienen por conciso a quien se demora en diez frases breves y no a quien maneja una larga." (Borges "Obras Completas I" 381) In other words, if the mechanism is technically simpler, that is due to its synthetic conception rather than analytical, a factor which makes it more complicated from the logical⁸ point of view.

In what concerns the intensification of the interactivity between narrative art and the reader, I must discuss the articulation of the imperfections with the synthetic conception of the literary mechanism. The inaccuracies allow for a technical simplification of the literary mechanism mentioned above, thus avoiding an exhaustive exposure of the narrated events through a process of selection and conceptualization of complex states, synthesizing them. In the opposite direction, because such complex states are not accessible to the reader and because this process of selection and conceptualization which constitutes the imperfections is not more than an operation which intensifies the subjectivity of the text⁹, the narrative art, even though it is much more rigorous from the logical and macro-structural point of view, becomes much more differentiated (singular) and a differentiator. And this is how the author, in a simultaneously conscious and unconscious manner, and bearing in mind the aim of immortalizing the text, integrates the effects of the global functioning of the mechanism (to be clear, meaning the critical readings which arise out of the interaction between the text and the reader) in the functioning of the mechanism in it-self. It is thereby proven how, for Borges, in a literary hyper-causal mechanism, the condensation of multiple functions in its structures corresponds to a process of differentiation of those same structures.

NOTES

¹My translation.

²Both *Poética narrativa de Jorge Luis Borges* (Guerrero 25-6) and *Borges's Poe: The Influence and Reinvention of Edgar Allan Poe in Spanish America* (Esplin 24-32) demonstrate not only the general influence of the Edgar Allan Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" in the Borgesian narratology, but also emphasize, in such influence, the centrality of the following passage: "Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen." (apud Esplin 24). Specific examples of this influence can be glimpsed in the Borgesian tales of fantasy from the decade of the 40s, where the development of plots which converge into a surprise-effect are recurrent.

³See the opening paragraph of "La poesía gauchesca" (1931): "Es fama que le preguntaron a Whistler cuánto tiempo había requerido para pintar uno de sus *nocturnos* y que respondió: "Toda mi vida". Con igual rigor pudo haber dicho que había requerido todos los siglos que precedieron al momento en que lo pintó. De esa correcta aplicación de la ley de causalidad se sigue que el menor de los hechos presupone el inconcebible universo e, inversamente, que el universo necesita del menor de los hechos. Investigar las causas de un fenómeno, siquiera de un fenómeno tan simple como la literatura gauchesca, es proceder en infinito; básteme la mención de *dos* causas que juzgo principales." (Borges "Obra Completa I" 359)

⁴In Alfred Mac Adam's essay on Adolfo Bioy Casares, "Satire and Self-portrait" (1977), he points out some insufficiencies concerning Jorge Luis Borges's dialectics, namely the fact that, at the time he wrote these texts ("El arte narrativo y la magia" and the prologue to Casares's *La invención de Morel*), no

significant contemporary authors were writing orthodox psychological novels anymore: "it is clear that the psychological, realist novel had been on the wane since Flaubert. The moment novelists gave up their claims to be historians, the moment character ceased to be linked to history and began to exist as an excuse for itself, the orthodox novel no longer held hegemony among the other classes of extended narrative. While it is true that an author like Faulkner could revive it in *Sartoris*, the 'novel' in the second half of the nineteenth century was tending toward either satire or romance. Such dissimilar writers as Melville, George Eliot, Zola, and Machado de Assis do have one thing in common: they reduce society's role in their works to that of setting; they explore character either as a social phenomenon or as the result of a given set of circumstances, such as biological inheritance or property tenure." (Mac Adam 32) Here it is demonstrated that Mac Adam did not understand that Borges is concerned, above all, with the formal characteristics of the psychological narrative, not with psychology per se.

⁵ Jon Stewart demonstrates that "Funes, el memorioso" constitutes a critique to nominalist philosophy, which has as the center of its rationality the idea that "abstract concepts do not adequately represent things in the empirical world. Thus, if our goal is to make language veridical, it would be desirable to purge language as far as possible of general concepts such that it could more accurately reflect what is actually given in our perception. This would involve having individual words for every individual thing or even individual perception." (71-2)

⁶ This may be confirmed by returning to the essay "La postulación de la realidad". The citation highlighted above appears as the corollary of a dispute between two methods of writing: the romantic and the classic. Proposing an alternative to the doctrine of Benedetto Croce, who defends an identity between the aesthetic and the expressive (a contribution to his defense of the autonomy of art), Jorge Luis Borges exposes in detail the classical method and the possibilities of writing which are opened by it, including the non-realist ones. The general exposure of the classical method, which obeys the aforementioned technique of selection and conceptualization of complex states, appears in the commentary to the first quoted example, a passage from *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, XXXV, from Edward Gibbon: "Basta el inciso "Después de la partida de los godos" para percibir el carácter mediato de esta escritura, generalizadora y abstracta hasta lo invisible. El autor nos propone un juego de símbolos, organizados rigurosamente sin duda, pero cuya animación eventual queda a cargo nuestro. No es realmente expresivo: se limita a registrar una realidad, no a representarla. Los ricos hechos a cuya póstuma alusión nos convida, importaron cargadas experiencias, percepciones, reacciones; éstas pueden inferirse de su relato, pero no están en él. Dicho con mejor precisión: no escribe los primeros contactos de la realidad, sino su elaboración final en conceptos." (Borges 394-5)

⁷ An essay from Jorge Luis Borges which illustrates this assertion is "La máquina de pensar de Raimundo Lulio" ("Obras Completas IV" 391-4), where the multiple combinatorial possibilities of a limited number of words are thought of as a literary and poetical instrument.

⁸ By using the word "logical" in this context, it is intended to make a reference to a logic that, doing justice to Borgesian literature, transverts formal logic.

⁹ A subjectivity which realist writing, while aiming to reflect the events rather than thinking them, does not eliminate, but diminishes.

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