Spaces of (Dis)location

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Edited by

Rachael Hamilton,
Allison Macleod and Jenny Munro

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Rachael Hamilton, Allison Macleod and Jenny Munro
University of Glasgow, UK
May 2013

INTRODUCTION

SPACES OF (DIS)LOCATION

TERESA ZACKODNIK

"As national and cultural boundaries are blurred in our increasingly global society, the ideas of space and location—whether physical or metaphysical, real or imaginary—are evolving." This observation about contemporary life under the effects of globalization and transnationalism formed the call for *Spaces of (Dis)location*, a two-day multidisciplinary graduate conference held at The College of Arts, University of Glasgow in the Spring of 2012. This volume of essays is drawn from the provocative and cutting-edge research presented by postgraduate participants and early-career researchers from as far afield as the Middle East, North America, Australia, and Asia. Organized by University of Glasgow postgraduates Alison Burns, Mikela Fotiou, Emma Gascoigne, Rachael Hamilton, Allison Macleod, Jenny Munro, Philip Phillis, Leila Riszko, and Emily Ryder, and generously funded by the University's Graduate School of Arts, *Spaces of (Dis)location* offered keynotes from African American studies scholar, Teresa Zackodnik (University of Alberta); poet and postcolonial scholar, Bashabi Fraser (University of Napier) and award-winning poet and playwright, John Menaghan (Loyola Marymount), along with Pecha Kucha presentations, poster displays, artistic works, film screenings, and conference paper presentations. Over a stimulating two days, participants thought together about contemporary film, urban spaces, revolution, soundscapes, power and control, musicians and music festivals, writing and reading, art and curation, travel and migration. The essays in this volume represent some of that fascinating work.

Choosing four broad themes, the editors of this volume have drawn together work that asks us to consider representations of space and dislocation in artistic mediums and performance, architecture, and the individual's interaction with both space and spatial representation. In Part One, *Conceptual Spaces*, Elizabeth Finnigan examines spatial representation within narrative and its effect upon cognitive efficiency in

the act of reading, while Sarah Roger interrogates our impossible desire for the space of libraries to reveal some larger meaning within and across their collections. Part Two, *Cultural Identity and the Creative Arts*, brings together the thinking of Graham Neil Gillespie on the ability of intertextual cinematic strategies to dislocate historical and political reality in Im Sang-soo's film *The President's Last Bang,* with Pasquale Cicchetti's consideration of space and residual time-space in the film *Winter's Bone* as a challenge to progressive national narratives, and Blake Parham's study of composer, pianist and conductor, Andrzej Panufnik's defection from Poland to Great Britain and its effects upon both his music and its reception. In Part Three, *Urban Space and Belonging* Carol Cooper discusses the ways in which the form, materials and placement of arts buildings affect the physical and sensory perception of the public that uses them; Robert Dutton considers subcultural challenges to space and architecture that challenge the hierarchical ordering of the contemporary city; and closing this chapter, Martina Tanga examines *Campo Urbano* (1969) and *Volterra '73* (1973), two key exhibitions of Italian experimental artist that radically transformed city space into an alternative site for encounters between art and society. The volume's final chapter, *Dislocation in Practice*, draws together Annouchka Bayley's paper on a seven-week course at the University of Warwick that examined dual-heritage experience through verbatim theatre practice, with Dipna Horra's on conceptual and physical responses to the dislocation of sound as experiential metaphors for migration.

Conceptual spaces, artistic forms such as film and music, urban spaces, and experiences represented through live performances and soundscapes are, then, the multiple ways in which this volume of essays interrogates spaces of (dis)location, their possibilities and effects, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Professor Teresa Zackodnik
University of Alberta, Canada
January 2013

PART I

CONCEPTUAL SPACES

Conceptual spaces are fundamentally abstract spaces, set up in direct contrast to those more tangible spaces based on architectural forms and physical landscapes. Despite often seeming ambiguous and enigmatic, conceptual spaces exert a strong influence on how we perceive and experience the physical world.

The two essays in this chapter explore a dislocation between conceptual space and lived reality. Seen together, both essays introduce innovative approaches to investigating and interrogating conceptual spaces, and suggest that these explorations have broader real-lived repercussions that extend beyond national and cultural borders.

Sarah Roger's essay, "In Pursuit of the Total Library: Libraries as Physical and Conceptual Spaces in the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Alberto Manguel," focuses on the library as not only a physical space but also a conceptual space, exploring whether the ideas and legacies contained within its collections can ever truly achieve the library's fundamental purpose of revealing the "bigger picture." In both the real and conceptual library, Roger finds a dislocation between what libraries really are and what we want them to be. According to Roger, while we want libraries' physical collections to reveal the "bigger picture," their practical reality actually conceals such a meaning. Roger asks how and why libraries fail to provide an ordered and comprehensible view of the universe, despite the best efforts of the librarians who assemble them.

In Elizabeth Finnigan's essay, "Cognitive Landscapes: The Systematic Construction of Narrative Space," she claims that the conceptual ambiguity of narrative space has dislocated it from other narrative features, such as temporality and character interaction, and has resulted in it being largely overlooked as a functional operative within narrative. Drawing from a number of English language narrative prose texts and focusing specifically on literary descriptions of landscape and how these are systematically structured, Finnigan seeks to prove her hypothesis that narrative space is systematically structured and that this in turn is cognitively governed. To further support her argument, Finnigan explores a number of psychological concepts relating to visual perception in order

to understand how we perceive our surroundings in real life, and then applies this theory to fictional texts.

CHAPTER ONE

IN PURSUIT OF THE TOTAL LIBRARY: LIBRARIES AS PHYSICAL AND CONCEPTUAL SPACES IN THE WORKS OF JORGE LUIS BORGES AND ALBERTO MANGUEL

SARAH ROGER

In his essay "La biblioteca total" (The Total Library) (*Sur* 1939) and his short story "La biblioteca de Babel" (The Library of Babel) (*Ficciones* 1941), Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges pushes the idea of the library to its logical limit by considering what it would mean for a library to contain all possible texts.[1] If such a space were to exist, its collection would include every conceivable fact and every imaginable work of art, but it would also hold every possible meaningless combination of letters. In "La biblioteca de Babel, Borges describes an imaginary library where every book has the same number of pages, lines, and letters, but where the galleries, walls, and shelves on which they sit appear to extend without limit. Although the number of books in the Library of Babel is said to be finite (since there are a fixed number of elements out of which they can be made), the collection is so unfathomably large as to seem as big as the universe itself:

> The universe (which others call the Library is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings. From any of the hexagons one can see, interminably, the upper and lower floors. The distribution of the galleries is invariable (Borges, trans. Irby 2000, 78).

[1] A version of this paper appears as "Die Bibliothek als Universum, die Bibliothek als Selbst: Bibliotheken in den Werken von Jorge Luis Borges und Alberto Manguel." 2013. *Wissensräume: Bibliotheken in der Literatur*, edited by Mirko Gemmel and Margrit Vogt. Berlin: Ripperger & Kremer.

If Borges's fictional Library of Babel were to exist, it would be difficult to contain within the known universe. As Floyd Merrell explains,

> Rucker […] calculates that the number of symbols in each book in the Library [of Babel] is 410 pages x 40 lines x 80 symbols = 1,312,000. And since there are 25 different symbols, there are $25^{1,312,000}$ books, which is approximately $10^{2,000,000}$! Lasswitz […], who presumably inspired Borges to write his story, obtains the same figure for his Universal Library, and to illustrate the magnitude of this number he estimates that a shelf $10^{1,999,982}$ light years long would be needed to hold them. This number of light years is so monstrously large that for practical purposes, it is not substantially smaller than the total number of books on the shelf! (Merrell 1991, 127-28).

Merrell demonstrates the Library of Babel's unfathomable size by describing the incredible length of shelves that would be required to hold all of its books. William Bloch proves the same point by way of a different calculation, which shows that there are more books in the Library of Babel than our known universe could physically contain:

> Suppose that each book is shrunk to the size of a proton: that is, shrunk to about 10^{-15} meters across. Given that each book is 10^{-15} meters across, we could pack 10^{15} of them in a very narrow one-meter-long strip. Thus, packing a cubic meter with proton-sized books yields $10^{15} \cdot 10^{15} \cdot 10^{15} = 10^{45}$ books. Our Universe holds merely $10^{81} \cdot 10^{45} = 10^{126}$ of these subatomic books [out of a possible $10^{1,834,097}$ books in the Library of Babel] (Bloch 2008, 20).

Even with books each as small as a proton, the Library of Babel would be impossibly large. There is space for Borges's imaginary Library of Babel only in fiction.

Like a number of scholars before him (among them Aristotle and Lewis Carroll), Borges recognizes that written language is made of a finite number of letters and punctuation marks, and therefore there are a finite number of words—and texts—that can be created. It is this limitation that leads the German author-philosopher Kurd Lasswitz (mentioned by Merrell above, and discussed by Borges in "La biblioteca total") to suggest that it would be conceivable to assemble a "total library," a term Lasswitz (and later Borges) uses to denote a library that contains one of each possible combination of letters:

> By means of similar simplifications, Lasswitz arrives at twenty-five symbols (twenty-two letters, the space, the period, the comma), whose

> recombinations and repetitions encompass everything possible to express in all languages. The totality of such variations would form a Total Library of astronomical size. Lasswitz urges mankind to construct that inhuman library, which chance would organize and which would eliminate intelligence (Borges trans. Weinberger 2001b, 216).

Building on Lasswitz's idea, Borges imagines that in infinite time, authors will eventually produce the total library by composing books made of every possible combination of letters. They will write all possible books, and all of them more than once. For Borges, this possibility is compelling yet horrifying:

> Everything would be in its blind volumes. Everything: the detailed history of the future, Aeschylus' *The Egyptians*, the exact number of times that the waters of the Ganges have reflected the flight of a falcon, the secret and true name of Rome, the encyclopaedia Novalis would have constructed, my dreams and half-dreams at dawn on August 14, 1934, the proof of Pierre Fermat's theorem, the unwritten chapters of *Edwin Drood,* those same chapters translated into the language spoken by the Garamantes, the paradoxes Berkeley invented concerning Time but didn't publish, Urizen's books of iron, the premature epiphanies of Stephen Dedalus, which would be meaningless before a cycle of a thousand years, the Gnostic Gospel of Basilides, the song the sirens sang, the complete catalogue of the Library, the proof of the inaccuracy of that catalogue. Everything: but for every sensible line or accurate fact there would be millions of meaningless cacophonies, verbal farragoes, and babblings. Everything: but all the generations of mankind could pass before the dizzying shelves—shelves that obliterate the day and on which chaos lies—ever reward them with a tolerable page (Borges, trans. Weinberger 2001b, 216).

The libraries Borges imagines in "La biblioteca total" and "La biblioteca de Babel" contain every possible book, all possible information, and all possible revelations. Included in their collections are books that could explain the existence of the library, the meaning of our universe, and the meaning of our lives. Unfortunately, all these desirable texts are lost amid and greatly outnumbered by meaningless works. Rather than opening up access to knowledge, these libraries—if they were to exist—would close access down.

Borges's imaginary total library and Library of Babel are problematic spaces. On one hand, they contain anything their librarians could ever want to know; on the other hand, they conceal this knowledge so well that their librarians may never be able to find it. Borges's disciple Alberto Manguel has observed that this problem may extend to our own real libraries, which (although less than total) are still problematic spaces that

obscure from us the knowledge we hope to find in them. Throughout history, we have assembled libraries to preserve and protect the vast quantities of writing that humankind has created, but we have been unable to make full use of the material we have collected. In *The Library at Night* (2008) Manguel tells the story of these libraries; in doing so, he reveals how our libraries fall prey to the same shortcomings as Borges's imagined total library and Library of Babel. This essay looks at libraries as conceptual and physical spaces in the writing of both Borges and Manguel in order to explore the dislocation between libraries' potential and their practical realities.

Borges Among the Stacks

Borges lived most of his life in and around libraries. In "An Autobiographical Essay," he says, "If I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library. In fact, I sometimes think I have never strayed outside that library" (*The Aleph and Other Stories*, 1968, 209). Borges's first job was at a municipal library in Buenos Aires where he catalogued books for a few hours each day before retiring to the basement to write; later in life he was awarded the prestigious directorship of the Argentine national library. Borges counted libraries among his favourite places, and he even went so far as to imagine that heaven might take the form of a library: "I, who had always thought of Paradise | in form and image as a library" (Borges, trans. Reid 2000, 95). However, he also viewed libraries with a certain degree of detachment. His time spent working as a municipal librarian in the 1940s was tainted by depression, the product of his lowly (and sometimes futile) employment and his sense of dissatisfaction with his writing:

> I stuck out the library for about nine years. They were nine years of solid unhappiness. […] Ironically, at the time I was a quite well-known writer—except at the library. I remember a fellow employee's once noting in an encyclopaedia the name of a certain Jorge Luis Borges—a fact that set him wondering at the coincidence of our identical names and birthdates. […] At some point, I was moved up to the dizzying height of Third Official (Borges 1968, 241-42).

During these years, the library was not Borges's paradise. His later experiences as the director of the Argentine national library were similarly coloured by negative emotions. By the time he was appointed to the post, he had lost his sight due to a genetic condition and was unable to read the books that surrounded him.

Not only did Borges spend a lot of time in libraries, but he also spent a lot of time thinking about them. The possibility that libraries—or the books they contain—are meaningless haunts many of Borges's texts. In "La biblioteca de Babel" Borges connects the idea of a library that contains all possible information with its consequence, which is that having all possible information is as problematic as having no information at all. In "Poema de los dones" (Poem of the Gifts, 1959) he laments the fact that he will never read the books in the national library because he is blind. In "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" (Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*, 1939) all texts lose their author-intended messages in infinite time. In "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" (The Garden of Forking Paths, 1941) and "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain" (An Examination of the Works of Herbert Quain, 1941) all-encompassing books are revealed to be meaningless as a result of their infinite chapters, bifurcating plots, and labyrinthine structures. In "El libro de arena" (The Book of Sand, 1975) an infinite book contains endless information, but it is written in a language that its owner cannot read. While libraries may offer readers access to a wealth of ideas, they only fulfil this potential when readers are able to locate, read, and understand the texts they seek—a possibility that Borges demonstrates to be uncertain.

The idea that the library provides and yet withholds information appears throughout Borges's work, but it receives pride of place in "La biblioteca de Babel." In this story, the narrator describes the experiences he shares with his fellow librarians in the unfathomably large Library of Babel. Faced with more texts than they can ever read, most of them seemingly gibberish, they struggle to make sense of the books that surround them and the library in which they are contained. Because they believe the library holds every permutation of letters (as is presumed above), the narrator and his fellow librarians reason that there must be some books that hold messages that are of particular interest to them: books that tell the stories of each of their lives, books that serve as vindications for their sins, books that tell the origin of the library and of time, and even the book that acts as the formula and compendium of all the others.

The librarians despair of finding these "*libros preciosos*" (precious books) because they cannot possibly read all of the books in the library, and because they lack an adequate method for searching through the shelves and assessing the messages the texts seem to contain (Borges 1996, 468). In lieu of searching, some librarians use dice, discs, and cups to generate new texts out of randomly chosen strings of letters; the texts they create are no worse but undoubtedly no better than those shelved in

the library (by virtue of being repetitions of them). Other librarians attempt to streamline the search by eliminating the seemingly useless books, throwing those they believe to contain no meaning over the library's balconies and consigning them to oblivion. Even identifying the books with no meaning poses difficulties. Any combination of letters, no matter how arbitrary, may have meaning in some language, or indeed in several languages:

> I cannot combine some characters *dhcmrlchtdj* which the divine Library has not foreseen and which in one of its secret tongues do not contain a terrible meaning. No one can articulate a syllable which is not filled with tenderness and fear, which is not, in one of these languages, the powerful name of a god. […] (An *n* number of possible languages use the same vocabulary; in some of them, the symbol *library* allows the correct definition *a ubiquitous and lasting system of hexagonal galleries*, but *library* is *bread* or *pyramid* or anything else, and these seven words which define it have another value. You who read me, are You sure of understanding my language?) (Borges, trans. Irby 2000, 84-85; original emphasis).

This makes it impossible for the narrator to be certain that he has discerned the true meaning of any text he has read; it also makes it impossible for him to dismiss any text just because it seems to him to contain nonsense. The Library of Babel becomes the antithesis of what a library should be. Instead of providing access to knowledge through books that are well ordered and comprehensible, it offers up a collection of disordered texts that are written in languages that can never be confidently understood.

Dismissing searching among the shelves or reading the texts they hold as fruitless, the narrator searches elsewhere in the library for meaning. He proposes the possibility that the library's meaning is contained within something he cannot see (rather than something that he cannot find or understand), and he suggests that there is a meaningful pattern across all of the library's books:

> *The Library is unlimited and cyclical*. If an eternal traveller 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 (Borges, trans. Irby 2000, 85-85; original emphasis).

In making this suggestion, the librarian goes against the assumption that the library's collection is limited to one copy of each text—a belief held

by the other librarians, and which he previously shared. Instead, he takes solace in the possibility of an infinite, periodic pattern. This possibility is his "*elegante esperanza*" (elegant hope)—it is his hope for the existence of an order in an otherwise incomprehensible space (Borges 1996, 471). The only meaning that the narrator can find in the library is one he cannot see and from which he gains no knowledge, but it is enough for him to believe this order to exist.

Borges returns to the idea of the library many years later in "El Congreso" (The Congress) (*El libro de arena*, 1971), where he moves from the idea of a total library (a library that contains all possible books) to the idea of a universal library (a library that contains every book that has ever been written). The story of "El Congreso focuses on a man named Glencoe who is attempting to assemble a Congress of the World. His Congress will be composed of one member representing each of the word's archetypal citizens. On the recommendation of his advisor Twirl, Glencoe tries to accumulate a library to help him and his fellow congressmen in their work; this library starts out as a small collection of relevant books, but it grows to be as vast as the project that it is meant to support:

> Twirl had invoked Pliny the Younger—who had affirmed that there was no book so bad that it didn't contain some good—to suggest that the Congress indiscriminately purchase collections of *La Prensa*, thirty-four hundred copies (in various formats) of *Don Quijote*, Balmes' *Letters*, and random collections of university dissertations, short stories, bulletins, and theatre programs. […] The enormous packages now began piling up, uncatalogued and without card files, in the back rooms and wine cellar of don Alejandro's mansion (Borges, trans. Hurley 2001, 31).

Following Twirl's all-inclusive logic, the congressional library books pile up in Glencoe's cellar until they become so disordered and so vast in number that they become as useless as the books in the total library. It is this uselessness, however, that ultimately proves to be of use to the Congress. Seeing all the books—each purchased because it potentially contains something of merit somewhere within it—alerts Glencoe to the fact that no book can be excluded from his collection, and by corollary no man can be excluded from his Congress. The world, with every extant book shelved somewhere in it, is its own congressional library, which no manmade collection can match. Acknowledging this, Glencoe orders the books to be brought up from his cellar, and he burns them in a massive bonfire in his courtyard:

> Irala, one of literature's faithful, essayed a phrase:
> "Every few centuries the Library at Alexandria must be burned."
> It was then that we were given the explanation for all this.
> "It has taken me four years to grasp what I am about to tell you. The task we have undertaken is so vast that it embraces—as I now recognize—the entire world. It is not a handful of prattling men and women muddying issues in the barracks of some remote cattle ranch. The Congress of the World began the instant the world itself began, and it will go on when we are dust. There is no place it is not. The Congress is the books we have burned. It is the Caledonians who defeated the Caesars' legions. It is Job on the dunghill and Christ on the Cross. The Congress is even that worthless young man who is squandering my fortune on whores" (Borges, El Congreso (1971) trans. Hurley 2001, 33).

Glencoe destroys his library because he realizes he cannot assemble everything that has ever been written in a library smaller than the world itself. This realization leads Glencoe to a subsequent one: the citizens of the world—like the congressional library, like the total library, like the Library of Babel—cannot be distilled down to a subset. Together, the citizens of the world make up the Congress.

At the end of the story, Glencoe celebrates his discovery by surveying the world as though it were his completed Congress:

> On the evening on which he gives up his great project, he hires a horse and buggy and takes a tour of the city. He sees brick walls, ordinary people, houses, a river, a marketplace, and feels that somehow all these things are his own work. He realizes that his project was not impossible but merely redundant. The world encyclopedia [or the Congress], the universal library, exists, and is the world itself (Manguel 2008, 88-89).

When Glencoe finally acknowledges the existence of the universal library and the Congress, he experiences a feeling of ecstasy, a sense of having seen the bigger picture. He has glimpsed the pattern within all of the books—the pattern that the librarian in "La biblioteca de Babel" believes in, the pattern that is too large to see. In Glencoe's experience, the attitude towards libraries (and towards the universe) that pervades Borges's fiction is revealed. Resignation to the fact that the meaning concealed within the library—the meaning of the universe—can never be grasped is tempered by the solace that comes from believing that this unattainable meaning exists. Although Borges's characters are permanently dislocated from the message they seek, their libraries' shortcomings (and their awareness of them) provide them with cause for celebration rather than a sense of loss.

In Pursuit of the Universal Library

While Borges's characters search for meaning in fictional libraries, Manguel undertakes the same quest for meaning in real libraries that have been destroyed, libraries that currently exist, and libraries that have yet to be built. In *The Library at Night* he groups these libraries together under headings that are sometimes practical and sometimes fanciful, such as "The Library as Identity" and "The Library as Shadow." Some of the libraries he describes are noble in their aims, such as the Colombian *biblioburros*—mobile libraries transported to rural areas by donkeys (2008, 229-30). Others are more sinister or tragic, such as the library accumulated as part of the *Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage* (Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question)—a collection of confiscated books used to study "the Jewish question" during the Second World War (2008, 238).

As a teenager, Manguel was a companion to the blind Borges. He recalls this relationship in his memoir, *With Borges*, where he also meditates on "La biblioteca de Babel" as a manifestation of Borges's belief that "every book, any book, holds the promise of all others, both mechanically and intellectually" (2006, 65). This is a compelling idea for Manguel, for whom the act of reading is of the utmost importance. Although the two authors share an interest in libraries and even though Manguel mentions Borges eight times in *The Library at Night*, he only refers to "La biblioteca de Babel" in the epigraph to the collection's final chapter: "The universe (which others call the Library)…" (Borges cited in Manguel 2008, 307). Despite this notable absence, there are echoes of Borges's story and the ideas about libraries it proposes throughout *The Library at Night*. Indeed, it may not be outlandish to suggest that Manguel's essays, whether knowingly or not, grew out of Borges's text, since the organizing principle for Manguel's collection is his perception of his own Babel-like library at night:

> In the dark, with the windows lit and the rows of books glittering, the library is a closed space, a universe of self-serving rules that pretend to replace or translate those of the shapeless universe beyond (Manguel 2008, 12).

This description could very well have come from "La biblioteca de Babel." The basis for Manguel's collection echoes the premise of Borges's story, since the library and the universe are one in both.

In the early chapters of *The Library at Night*, Manguel explores historical attempts to create libraries that held the collected knowledge of

the universe. These universal libraries were precursors to the total library, insofar as they attempted to contain all books that had already been written. For example, in its ancient incarnation the Library of Alexandria was built to hold "all the books of all the peoples of the world" (Luciano Canfora quoted in Manguel 2008, 22); in doing so, it aimed to be a place where "the universe itself found its worded reflection" (Manguel 2008, 24). Despite the Library of Alexandria's comparatively modest goal of containing only every book that had been written (and not every book that could possibly be written), Manguel says that it is still a project beyond our grasp:

> Like Nature, libraries abhor a vacuum, and the problem of space is inherent in the very nature of any collection of books. This is the paradox presented by every general library: that if, to a lesser or greater extent, it intends to accumulate and preserve as comprehensive as possible a record of the world, then ultimately its task must be redundant, since it can only be satisfied when the library's borders coincide with those of the world itself (Manguel 2008, 66).

Given enough time, the Library of Alexandria might have grown until it became a total library (consuming the world it sought to represent), since (as Borges suggests) in infinite time every combination of letters will eventually be written. Not surprisingly, the impossibility of such a project is demonstrated by its history: the Library of Alexandria burned to the ground in 48 BCE, reminding the librarians that the knowledge they had accumulated was fragile and ephemeral.

The obstacles the Alexandrians faced in trying to assemble their library are ones we still face today. We cannot construct a total library (a library of all possible books), since we do not have enough space for all the books it would need to hold. Nor can we construct a universal library (a library of all books that have ever been written), because many of the books it would have to contain have already been lost to time and to disasters such as the destruction of the Library of Alexandria. Even a digital library such as the one held as part of the collection of the modern Library of Alexandria (the Bibliotheca Alexandrina) cannot become a total library. Although digitized libraries may be able to preserve existing books, they cannot recover those that have already been lost, and as far as protecting the books we have, digital collections are no more stable than their printed counterparts:

> [T]he argument that calls for electronic reproduction on account of the endangered life of paper is a false one. Anybody who has used a computer

> knows how easy it is to lose a text on the screen, to come upon a faulty disk or CD, to have the hard drive crash beyond all appeal. The tools of the electronic media are not immortal (Manguel 2008, 75).

A digital Library of Alexandria would be neither more secure nor more feasible than its analogue predecessor.

If we cannot construct a total library in either print or digital form, we will never be able to see the overarching pattern that the librarian hopes for in "La biblioteca de Babel":

> Outside theology and fantastic literature, few can doubt that the main features of our universe are its dearth of meaning and lack of discernible purpose. And yet, with bewildering optimism, we continue to assemble whatever scraps of information we can gather in scrolls and books and computer chips, on shelf after library shelf, whether material, virtual, or otherwise, pathetically intent on lending the world a semblance of sense and order, while knowing perfectly well that, however much we'd like to believe the contrary, our pursuits are sadly doomed to failure (Manguel 2008, 3).

Since we cannot lend "the world a semblance of sense and order" with our libraries, Manguel reasons there must be something else that we are seeking when we collect books and build spaces to house them. He suggests that although we cannot use libraries to explain the universe, we can use them to understand our own identities. By documenting what we have read and by revealing how we have chosen to arrange the knowledge (the books) we have accumulated, our libraries help us understand our past, define ourselves in the present, and leave a legacy for the future. Manguel develops this idea by considering the relationship between his own identity and his personal collection:

> A keen observer might be able to tell who I am from a tattered copy of the poems of Blas de Otero, the number of volumes by Robert Louis Stevenson, the large section devoted to detective stories, the minuscule section devoted to literary theory, the fact that there is much Plato and very little Aristotle on my shelves. Every library is autobiographical (Manguel 2008, 194).

Manguel's library serves as a mirror that reflects his identity. It does so not by presenting a picture of his physical form, but rather by containing the ideas that have shaped his way of thinking and sense of self. His library is a physical manifestation of his mind, and the arrangement of his books echoes the arrangements of his thoughts. By exhibiting his preference for

Plato over Aristotle, his enthusiasm for detective stories, and his distaste for literary theory, it demonstrates something about his character and about the ideas that have formed it. Extrapolated, the same argument can be made about institutional libraries and national ones: they reflect the identities of their (collective) collectors. According to Manguel's view, libraries do not hold meaning within one privileged volume of vindications or a book that represents God, as many of the librarians hope to be the case in the Library of Babel. Meaning stretches across entire collections rather than being held solely within any one volume.

Although Manguel believes that libraries do not make sense of the universe but rather of the readers who populate them, he still sees a connection between the books that an individual acquires and the universe in which he lives. Recall that Manguel sees his own library as a Borgesian "universe of self-serving rules that pretend to replace or translate those of the shapeless universe beyond" (Manguel 2008, 12). At night, the connections between pairs of books—and perhaps the pattern that connects them all—come to light:

> Free from quotidian constraints, unobserved in the late hours, my eyes and hands roam recklessly across the tidy rows, restoring chaos. One book calls to another unexpectedly, creating alliances across different cultures and centuries. A half-remembered line is echoed by another for reasons which, in the light of day, remain unclear. If the library in the morning suggests an echo of the severe and reasonably wishful order of the world, the library at night seems to rejoice in the world's essential, joyful muddle (Manguel 2008, 14).

The conclusion Manguel draws here inverts yet echoes the one that Borges's narrator draws in "La biblioteca de Babel." For Manguel, the library's late-night muddle hints at the world's true meaning in its chaos; for Borges's narrator, there is a pattern held by the library as a whole that serves as its explanation and justification. Like Borges's narrator, Manguel has an "*elegante esperanza*." Borges's narrator hopes for an order that unites all of the books and that indicates a divine meaning shaping the library as a whole; Manguel hopes for meaning in the disorder that connects his books to each other and to his own identity, formed through happenstance, unaccountable preferences, and the chaotic habits of a reader unconstrained by a carefully ordered library. Manguel's "*elegante esperanza*" is not that the library holds some grand meaning, but the possibility that the library, in all of its inherent disarray, reproduces his identity and the world in its "essential, joyful muddle" (Manguel 2008, 14). For Manguel, real, disordered libraries are dislocated from their

imaginary, perfectly ordered counterparts. However, this does not result in a loss. It is because of the libraries' incompleteness and disarray that the librarians' identities can be seen.

In *The Library at Night*, Manguel celebrates the meaning that becomes apparent only through recognizing the library's disorder. He rejects approaches that try to make sense of library books by grouping them under fixed, artificial headings, since they stand in the way of seeing the larger pattern:

> Ordered by subject, by importance, ordered according to whether the book was penned by God or by one of God's creatures, ordered alphabetically or by numbers or by the language in which the text is written, every library translates the chaos of discovery and creation into a structured system of hierarchies or a rampage of free associations. […] Not only are such methods arbitrary, they are also confusing (Manguel 2008, 60-61).

Among the systems that Manguel criticizes is the one devised by Melvil Dewey, which tries to contain "the infinity of the universe […] within the infinite combination of ten digits"—a method that recalls the seemingly endless combinations of letters in Borges's Library of Babel and that hints at the lack of meaning they manage to convey (Manguel 2008, 60). Manguel dismisses Dewey's approach because of its Western bias and its rigid categories. Dewey's system forces all possible information "to fit in categories of Anglo-Saxon devising" (Manguel 2008, 60); it is limited to categories that privilege white, Western interests:

> It never seemed to have occurred to [Dewey] that to conceive a universal system that limited the universe to what appeared important to the inhabitants of a small northern island and their descendants was at best insufficient, and at worst defeated its own all-embracing purpose (Manguel 2008, 59).

The limitations of Dewey's system are not lost on Manguel, whose Argentine and Jewish background places him outside Dewey's Anglo-Saxon tradition. With this criticism, Manguel reinforces a view held by Borges, who also opposed the application of pseudo-scientific rigour to the disordered spaces of the universe and its libraries:

> The Bibliographical Institute of Brussels also exercises chaos: it has parcelled the universe into 1,000 subdivisions, of which number 262 corresponds to the Pope, number 282 to the Roman Catholic Church, number 263 to the Lord's Day, number 268 to Sunday schools, number 298 to Mormonism, and number 294 to Brahmanism, Buddhism,

> Shintoism, and Taoism. Nor does it disdain the employment of heterogeneous subdivisions, for example, number 179: "Cruelty to animals. Protection of animals. Duelling and suicide from a moral point of view. Various vices and defects. Various virtues and qualities" (Borges, trans. Weinberger 2001a: 231).

Borges's principal objection to this approach is the artificial divisions it forces on the universe, but like Manguel, he also implies criticism of the disproportionate space it allots Western, Christian interests. Like the classification system invented by Dewey, the one devised by the Bibliographic Institute is biased against areas outside the purview of those who created it. Inherent in both Borges's and Manguel's criticisms is a recognition that any set of categories will be flawed as a result of the categorizer's context, and any effort to catalogue the universe or its libraries will inevitably reiterate the disorder it sought to avoid.

Refusing to submit his own library to a flawed order such as Dewey's, Manguel turns to another possibility: a disordered order that does not impose a rigid structure on the texts it purports to arrange. In "The Library as Mind" Manguel describes the private library of Aby Warburg, a German intellectual who assembled his library not according to a preordained, scientific system, but rather according to a "whimsical, associative order" that "follows a logical if deeply personal organization" (Manguel 2008, 197). Instead of categorizing his books by subject, language, or time period, Warburg arranged them based on the connections he sensed between them, with ideas from one book running seamlessly into the next. He arranged his library's shelves in an oval, so that his thoughts could flow around the room:

> [B]ooks on philosophy were set next to those on astrology, magic and folklore, and art compendiums rubbed covers with works of literature and religion, while manuals on language were placed next to volumes of theology, poetry and art (Manguel 2008, 198).

Established in the first decade of the twentieth century, Warburg's oval library anticipated the repeating hexagons and the chaotic confusion of Borges's Library of Babel by more than thirty years. Foreshadowing Borges's fictional librarian, Warburg rejected the possibility of finding an easily comprehended order. In exchange, he imagined a library that offered the possibility of access to a greater one:

> The overriding idea was that all the books together—each containing its larger or smaller bit of information and being supplemented by its neighbours—should by their titles guide the student to perceive the