

## **'Posthumanism in the Work of Jorge Luis Borges'**

**Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus**

This is no longer the earth on which man lives. (Heidegger 1993: 106)

There is no doubt that Jorge Luis Borges is a major literary precursor of contemporary interactive and multimedia works. It is almost commonplace to see tales like 'Funes el memorioso' [Funes the Memorious], 'La biblioteca de Babel' [The Library of Babel], or 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' [The Garden of the Forking Paths] as prefigurations of cyberliterature. Borges' webpresence is vast – from sites dedicated to 'Webmaster Borges', which claim that 'the greatest influence on the Argentine writer was a phenomenon invented after his death [namely: the Internet]' (Wolk 1999), to the all-encompassing site of the 'Jorge Luis Borges Center for Studies and Documentation' hosted by the University of Iowa.

This chapter aims to demonstrate the depth and importance of Borges' legacy not only to cyberliterature but to discussions of the entire contemporary 'posthuman' paradigm. Even though Borges rarely speaks in any direct way of technology and of the cybercultural futures which it makes possible, his speculative fictions and other prose writings provide glimpses of posthuman conditions that are more fully portrayed by writers like William Gibson and Philip K. Dick or in films like *The Matrix* (Wachowski 1999) and *Minority Report* (Spielberg 2002). His work thereby can stake a claim to a foundational presence within contemporary debates on the future of the archive, memory and consciousness, on the machinic and the digital prosthetisation of the human, and on

the pervasiveness of communications systems and their reshaping of the very notion of the literary. Much of this has to do with the way in which many of Borges' writings are readable as unsurpassable experiments in how to make thinkable the impossible and the unrepresentable. The current obsession with the posthuman, as that which reconfigures the actual and the possible once technology re-engineers human potential, institutes a new physics and redefines inscription itself, is therefore everywhere present in Borges. For is it not the posthuman order which would make it possible to inhabit infinite libraries and archives, perceive plenitude in a pinprick, remember all experience, and return to roads not taken?

### **Critical Posthumanism**

Posthumanism can be understood in at least two ways. Firstly, as the contemporary critical and theoretical discourse that rethinks what it means to be human by reengaging with and radicalising a long history of critiques of humanism – of which the anti-humanist, poststructuralist and postmodern movements of the last third of the twentieth century were maybe only the most advanced and coherent examples. This critique has always focused on conceptual flaws within humanist ideals, like the liberal individual self, realism and representation, essentialism and truth, autonomy and universalism. The renewed urgency for such a posthumanist critique of humanism arises out of extensive technological developments both at nano- and cosmic level which promise to change beyond recognition and maybe even challenge humanity in its survival. We refer to the discourse that privileges critical continuity in the face of these changes as 'critical posthumanism' (Herbrechter and Callus 2003, 2004a, 2004b). It understands the 'post' in 'posthuman', in analogy with Lyotard's notion of the postmodern, as the return of the repressed 'non-human' in various forms. Just as the modern is 'always already'

marked by its particular anticipated *and* repressed postmodern, humanism is haunted by the non-human—the supernatural, animal, lesser-than-human, object—that it continues to exclude. Therefore in order to evaluate critically the current changes that are driven by technology and more or less effectively contained by politics, it is necessary to bear in mind the critical tradition that has been shadowing the rise of the humanist paradigm to its current point of apparent self-surpassing. We differentiate this critical posthumanism from the second meaning that posthumanism has acquired and which refers to a much less critical and more celebratory desire which more or less wholeheartedly embraces the so-called opportunities which leaving the humanist paradigm behind seems to promise.

While we entirely recognise the importance of current technological change we also feel that a long-term critical view of a humanism that always adapts to and incorporates its repressed posthumanisms will serve as a good vaccine against rampant contemporary technophilia and technological determinism. In the context of these parameters our project is to seek past, present and future allies for a critical posthumanism. These allies can be found in those thinkers and writers that have been working at the edges and margins of ‘Western metaphysics’, and we claim Borges as one such ally – not only as a precursor of certain contemporary trends that contribute to a posthumanist climate, but far more importantly, as a critical commentator of our present. We therefore juxtapose Borges with some of his posthumanist commentators—N. Katherine Hayles in particular—for the sake of unsettling causality, teleology and finality. Borges, we claim, is an exponent of what might be called ‘posthumanism without technology’, which brings to the fore the precariousness of the human; the human not so much threatened by ‘his’ technology but by ‘its’ very humanity, imagination and ex-istence. What Borges might contribute to critical posthumanism is a memory of the posthuman long before the invention of any cyborg-, nano- or biotechnology.

### **Precursivity and Critical Anticipation**

Borges is a prime example of a ‘literary philosopher’ (Gracia *et al.* 2002), which places Borges’ work within the vicinity of the fantastic, the mythological and the postmodern on the one hand, and science fiction and the posthuman on the other. It is therefore no wonder that he should often be cited strategically at the beginning of posthuman thought experiments, whether critical, fictional or philosophical. In a sense, and quite ironically, Borges himself encourages the idea of his prefiguring the posthuman. It is the very logic of precursivity—for example to contemporary forms of posthumanism—that is problematised in Borges’ writing. The topos that one man is all men, that one human is both the archetype, essence and the ‘end’ of all humanity is ubiquitous in Borges’ fictional and critical essays. For ‘the writer’ this means that the logic of engendering works backwards rather than merely causatively forwards. This is most clearly expressed in ‘Kafka y sus precursores’ [Kafka and His Precursors], where Borges concludes by saying that ‘every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future. In this correlation the identity or plurality of the men involved is unimportant’ (Borges 1970: 236).

Within this vision of ‘posthuman’ humanity, Borges makes several crucial appearances in Katherine Hayles’ ground-breaking volume *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Firstly, in the opening pages, he is named as one of a number of precursors to the cybernetic notion of reflexivity, as Hayles comments that ‘Las ruinas circulares’ [The Circular Ruins] illustrates ‘the system generating a reality [that] is shown to be part of the reality it makes’ (Hayles 1999: 8). However, it is possible to go beyond a mere analogy between Borges’ fiction as precursor to ‘modern-day’ reality, because his ‘dreamed’ reality could easily be extended into the very posthuman condition Hayles is attempting to

embrace critically in her strategic intervention. It would be difficult to ignore in Borges' story the parodic anticipation of some of the more naïve creationist scenarios circulated in posthumanist or transhumanist circles. It may come as no surprise that Borges' 'stranger', willing to bring about a posthuman 'dreamexistence', is a professor dreaming up a multitude of silent students in what could only be the interdisciplinary '(post)humanities of the future':

the man was lecturing to them on anatomy, cosmography, magic; the countenances listened with eagerness and strove to respond with understanding, as if they divined the importance of the examination which would redeem one of them from his state of vain appearance and interpolate him onto the world of reality. (Borges 1970: 73)

The dreamer-demiurge's narcissistic choice of one single student fails, and subsequently he reverts to dreaming merely a proto-Deleuzian 'body-without-organs': 'the penumbra of a human body as yet without face or sex' (Borges 1970: 75). In order to bring this altogether non-technological 'artificial intelligence', this 'Adam of dreams', to life, the Frankensteinian dreamer invokes the 'monstrosity' (not the electricity) of the gods.

There is something eerily cyborgian about the dreamed phantom in 'Las ruinas circulares' and something eminently posthuman in the insight that the dreamer in the end realises that he himself is merely the phantom of another dreamt reality, or, in analogy, that humans have 'always already' been cyborgs, contaminated with their own posthumanity. What Borges thus 'prefigures' is not only the phantasm of the posthuman but also its very impossibility, which justifies including his writings within a tradition of critical posthumanism.

Monsters, according to Zamora, are part of Borges' 'lifelong exploration of the status of the real, and more particularly, his exploration of the relations of philosophical idealism and literary form' (Zamora 2002: 48). This monstrous 'zoología fantástica' [fantastic zoology] plays an important part in the gradual 'dehumanisation' of the individual human as part of Borges' 'intellectual teratology' (Zamora 2002: 56). Zamora claims that for Borges monstrosity 'is a state of being that he defines as the unnatural combination of natural parts, the possible permutations of which, he tells us, "border on the infinite"' (Zamora 2002: 58). In the way Borges' monsters challenge 'the Western binarism between nature and culture' and 'inhabit at once the realm of nature and artifice' as a 'man-made species', they clearly prefigure Donna Haraway's cyborg, who 'has no origin story... The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars' (Haraway 2004: 9).

Not only could Borges be seen as one of the precursors of contemporary cyberculture, but also Borges' writing could be understood as a kind of 'cyborg writing' as such, which problematises the idea of a self-conscious writing self in charge of the meaning it produces but rather thinks of itself as 'a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self' (Haraway 2004: 23). What Donna Haraway's feminist recuperation of the cyborg in its technological and less technological forms and Borges' writings have in common is the suspicion of the (liberal, Western) self. Both see the breaking away from a strong idea of personality or selfhood as a liberation; and both see this liberation realised in 'textuality' and thus privilege an ontological view of writing: 'Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the

tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (Haraway 2004: 33). Borges' attitudes towards the self, impersonality and immortality are widely known and span his entire writings.

While Haraway is of course mainly concerned with 'liberal technologies' and their 'phallogocentric origin stories' to arrive at something like cyborg (or posthuman) writing, Borges' critique of identity and origin as a basis for humanist metaphysics obviously takes a more long-term historical and rather 'old-fashioned' spiritual view, thus bypassing modern technologies altogether. However, if 'writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century' (Haraway 2004: 34), then, anachronously, Borges will have been among the cyborgesian writers of that late twentieth century (and beyond). The challenge of the 'troubling dualisms' in Western tradition—'self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, ... reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man' (Haraway 2004: 34)—is thus not confined to 'high-tech culture' but finds its untechnological anticipation in Borges.

### **Memories of the Posthuman**

Hayles makes further use of Borges in her criticism of Foucault's abstract theoretical notion of 'the body', to which she prefers a processual idea like 'embodiment'. The same criticism is then levelled at 'theory' in general which, according to Hayles, 'by its nature seeks to articulate general patterns and overall trends rather than individual instantiations' (Hayles 1999: 197). Here she strategically uses Borges' 'Funes el memorioso' to create an analogy between theory and Funes' 'number scheme':

If embodiment could be articulated separate from the body—an impossibility for several reasons, not least because articulation systematizes and normalizes experiences in the act of naming them—it would be like Funes’s numbers, a froth of discrete utterances registering the continuous and infinite play of difference. (Hayles 1999: 197)

It is worth recalling that the narrator of Borges’ story ironically reports that one Pedro Leandro Ipuche ‘has written that Funes was a precursor of the supermen, “a vernacular and rustic Zarathustra”’ (Borges 1970: 87). Funes, in many respects, could be seen as an ‘embodiment’ of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* but also as posthuman in the sense that the narrator describes the infallibility of his memory – a perfect recording device that one might provocatively name ‘cyborg memory’, but without technology. It is all the more surprising that Hayles does not exploit Borges’ story any further, beyond a rather tangential number analogy, because Funes actually stresses the embodied nature of his posthuman memory (Borges 1970: 92). It is precisely the embodiment of what seems to be the entirety of mankind’s memories that makes Funes experience his memory as a ‘garbage heap’. The key passage of the story, the turning point where the narrator bursts into commentary mode, again relates not only to Borges’ precursivity to posthuman ideas but also their critique. In fact, the narrator seems almost surprised by the belatedness of technology for the posthuman (Borges 1970: 92). What follows is an explanation of the radical inhumanity of Funes’ ‘computational’ memory: ‘the truth is that we live out our lives putting off all that can be put off; perhaps we all know deep down that we are immortal and that sooner or later all men will do and know all things’ (Borges 1970: 92). However, the real challenge for posthuman memory lies not so much in the embodied recording or inscription process or with the informational computation, but with the

aspect of psychological repression necessary to separate actual experience from imagination, remembrance and invention (Borges 1970: 93). Funes' vertiginous world of perfect memory, the narrator reminds us, is incapable of accounting for 'ideas, of a general, Platonic sort' (Borges 1970: 93), and invites one to imagine a posthuman as 'the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world' (Borges 1970: 94). Again, this seems to be a case where a seminal work on posthumanism, mentioning Borges in a seemingly self-contained way, will have to admit that the thinkability of the posthuman relies heavily on pretechnological conditions entirely outside its remit.

### **[Cyber]culture and [Hyper]textuality?**

The same pattern, of Borges being an acknowledged but ultimately downplayed precursor to posthumanism, continues in Hayles' *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005). One of Hayles' main arguments here is that the digital code is radically different from linguistic code, or that machines speak an entirely different language than humans, which therefore poses the urgent problem of 'translation'. Chapter 4, 'Translating Media', begins by referring to Borges' 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote' [Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*] to discuss the 'transformation of a print document into an electronic text as a form of translation' (Hayles 2005: 89). What Hayles calls Borges' 'mock-serious fantasy', the idea of rewriting Cervantes' *Don Quixote* word for word but in a contemporary cultural context, is taken as a precursive analogy of 'more mundane operations carried out every day around the globe' (Hayles 2005: 89). Borges' premonition of this hypertextuality, in this and other stories, raises the same question: namely, whether an electronic version of a work would still be the same work, or indeed, whether

hypertextuality is merely another form of textuality or something qualitatively, or even ontologically, entirely different.<sup>1</sup>

Hayles duly admits that Borges' 'idea of translation'—as interpreted by Efrain Kristal in *Invisible Work* (2002)—is a proto-deconstructive approach that sees translation as at once the general condition of textuality (the impossibility of an original, including Borges' logic of precursivity) and the text as a (Deleuzian) 'assemblage' and 'rhizomatic network' (Hayles 2005: 114-115). In line with her previous strategy, Hayles praises Borges for his foresight but then quickly moves on: 'that Borges arrived at this view while working exclusively in print should caution us not to overstate the fluidity of electronic texts compared to print... It remains the case, however, that the resources of print are *different* than the resources of electronic textuality, and that each medium interacts with and influences the others' (Hayles 2005: 115).

However, sticking with Borges' 'Pierre Menard' would inevitably lead to another encounter with the posthuman without technology. As the narrator clearly states, Menard was doing something radically different from rewriting the same story in another medium, namely reinventing the original (Borges 1970: 65-66). It is not a question of recreating the same, a perfect 'simulacrum', or of 'becoming Cervantes' (Borges 1970: 66); the challenge is to reproduce a singularity, one might say, or a perfect 'contingency' (Borges 1970: 67), or, indeed, an absolute identity, without repetition.

Menard's venture seems to involve the oxymoronic creation of an identical singularity under radically different conditions, or the creation of a perfect repetition while accepting radical contextuality. It is true that this idea could be used as an illustration of the Derridean understanding of the im/possibility of translation: translation as that which is impossible but at the same time most necessary or desirable. In this sense, it is no paradox to say that 'Cervantes's text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the

second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness)' (Borges 1970: 69). This seems to capture precisely the impossibility *cum* desirability of 'perfect' machine translation: the resistance of and to ambiguity. Instead, Borges' view seems much more radically posthuman than mere technological intermediality. The question whether textuality can be translated from print into electronic format, from the lettered to the digital, involves the idea of a 'palimpsest' of singularities which nevertheless cohere and form a unified experience within a 'subject'. Independently of technoculture, and in a 'deconstructive' vein, Borges' Menard thus found a posthuman 'technique' that bypasses the modern logic of originality and the technology of translation: 'Menard (perhaps without wanting to) has enriched, by means of a new technique, the halting and rudimentary art of reading: this new technique is that of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution' (Borges 1970: 71).

Rather than seeing Borges' texts as merely a proponent of hypertext *avant la lettre*, what makes Borges a critical posthumanist is that he anticipates not only the potential but also the limitations of the digital. While Borges does conceive of a cyborg textuality, this cyborg textuality is very different from what usually ranks as cyberliterature. While, in 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' for example, he 'discovered the essence of bifurcation theory thirty years before chaos scientists mathematically formalized it' (Weissert 1994: 223), and while he 'does not hesitate to postulate that an infinite number of alternative events coexist, as in so many multiple universes or so many infinite sets' (Thiher 2005: 239), Borges' fiction nevertheless merely insinuates 'the possibilities of self-generative readings' which produce 'a multiply-interpretative and highly self-conscious reader' (Stoicheff 1994: 93). If Borges' 'metafiction sensitizes the reader to transcoding rather than to certainty', it is rather to the literary legacy than to 'fiction as yet unwritten' that it urges the reader to turn (Stoicheff

1994: 94). The implication of this is that it may be rather problematic to see Borges as a straightforward precursor of cyberliterature with its promise of liberated, self-generated textuality and reader interactivity, and with boundless rhizomatic narrative networks and interconnectivity at a formal, textual level. Borges' 'promise' rather occurs at a discursive, conceptual level. While his stories depict conceptual complexity *ad infinitum*, formally, their narratives show almost classical restraint. If Borges' scenarios were to be implemented within the new (digital) media and cyberliterature, then this could not merely happen at a conceptual but mainly at a formal level, which until now has rarely been the case, and it is not at all clear whether digital technology is in fact a good 'translator' or mediator of textual information. Instead of convergence between Borges and cyberliterature there might in fact be contradiction. This is why, when we speak of Borges as an ally for a posthumanism without technology, it is also in order to do justice to an imaginary that resists technological determinism, and which resists its own technologisation, digitalisation and translation into (mere) 'fantasy information structures' (Murray, in Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort 2003: 3).

### **Science 'as' Fiction, or Technognosis**

Returning to Hayles, her most sustained engagement with Borges had already occurred in *The Cosmic Web* (1984), where she relates the mathematical 'field concept' to literature on the basis of the two ideas of interconnectivity and self-referentiality. Comparing Borges' with Nabokov's responses to the field concept, she argues that Borges is attracted to the field concept, 'because its discontinuities reveal that everything, including itself, is no more than a game' (Hayles 1984: 138). In line with her strategy of showing an inspirational link between science and literature, Hayles dwells on Borges' discussion of Cantor's set theory and how this 'led directly to the discovery of paradoxes

of self-referentiality’, ‘indefinite expansion’ and the possibility for creating ‘new kinds of Strange Loops’ in his writings (Hayles 1984: 142-143). For Hayles, Borges uses these paradoxes to exploit rather than to suppress any inconsistencies, ‘because he hopes to use them to reveal the essential fictionality of the model. His intent is thus subversive’ (Hayles 1984: 143). She refers to Borges’ strategy in a combination of Baudrillardian (‘seduction’) and Deleuzian (‘fold’) terms.

It is fascinating to see that in this early text on Borges, Hayles does in fact credit him and his stories with the (subversive) power to create a kind of dialogic imagination between literature and science, fiction and reality. Her readings of ‘El Aleph’ [The Aleph] and ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ are at once powerful, detailed and persuasive. However, it can already be seen that, by focusing on Borges’ ‘literary strategy’ in his ‘metaphorical appropriation’ of scientific models, the flow of the argument will inevitably return to science: ‘where Borges’ fiction differs from scientific models of the field concept, however, is in using the concept to suggest that everything, including reality, is a fiction’ (151). Hayles ends by challenging Borges’ ‘Nueva refutación del tiempo’ [A New Refutation of Time] (Borges 2001: 317-332) on the grounds that Borges remains unable to free himself from the very ‘Newtonian’ notion of time he tried to escape. By imposing a circular structure on the infinite series, according to Hayles, he has to admit the limitations of his own artistic project (Hayles 1984: 166). However, Borges’ stories, and ‘El Aleph’ in particular, might be more powerful in their self-referentiality than they seem. Although there is a circular structure that seems to try to recapture the runaway infinite series, it nevertheless never manages to do so without a ‘twist’ – a Heideggerian ‘*Verwindung*’, or a ‘Strange Loop’ rather in the manner of a Möbius strip, which, precisely, does not turn into a simple ‘cybernetic’ feedback structure. Hence the ineffability of the Aleph as explained by the narrator—the simultaneity that like Hayles’

intermediality, in a sense, does not translate into a successive medium like language—might just be another realist lure (Borges 1971: 26).

The ‘unimaginable universe’, the total vision of the whole and all its parts at once, this piece of ultimate nanotechnology without technology, is undialectisable for the human mind, just like Cantor’s *Mengenlehre* [theory of assemblages] mentioned in the ‘Postscript’ which insists on distinguishing between the nature and the name of the Aleph (Borges 1971: 29). Instead of resolving the final paradox between the fictionality or reality of the Aleph, Borges’ story instead adds to the confusion: the narrator questions the truthfulness of the Aleph whose reality has given rise to the rival’s fiction (Borges 1971: 29-30).

Let us repeat that our argument is not that Hayles’ use of literature to elucidate scientific metaphors is wrong or that a link between scientific ideas and literary strategies does not exist, or should not be made; rather, in line with the idea of a critical posthumanism, one must ask whether the very link is not ‘contaminated’ by unacknowledged humanist assumptions. It might be argued that at the heart of the desire to resolve the difference between literature and science is an irreducibly humanist model in which both literature and science are ultimately seen as serving an end to human understanding or human self-legitimation – an anthropomorphism difficult, and maybe impossible, to avoid as long as literature and science (co)exist. It should be remembered that in this context a writer like Borges may be legitimately called posthumanist in the sense that his choice of genre to a certain extent seems to unhinge both the fictionality of ‘literature’ and the factuality of ‘science’. As Deborah Knight, in her critique of ‘humanist ethical criticism’, asks: ‘what sense will [humanistic ethical criticism] be able to make out of the mock-essay, that fabulous Borgesian genre, that completely subverts both the expectations of realist literary fiction and any straightforward application of the idea that

as readers we are in communication with an author (however implied) who is merely communicating things to us known as fact?’ (in Gracia *et al.* 2002: 23-24). To see Borges as a kind of ‘science fiction writer’ could therefore be justified as long as one takes the phrase literally (science ‘as’ fiction and *vice versa*). Science fiction is one of the most important fictional genres that underpins the cultural dynamic and the cultural imaginary of posthumanism. It is also one of the main genres that engages with the representation of contemporary cultural and social change. Even though Borges is certainly not a straightforward political writer, at a deeper, metaphysical level his texts do of course engage with the notion of utopian and dystopian visions of change in cultural values, namely through the articulation of spirituality, eternity and the fantastic.

What might make Borges an ally for critical posthumanism—as an engagement with scenarios of the inhuman, past, present or future—is that the profound existential anxiety that exists side-by-side with Borges’ irony and nihilism is precisely not resolved in some return to humanist morality. It might be gesturing towards a posthumanist ethics instead, which seems to be what Coetzee insinuates in relation to Borges’ gnosticism:

Borges’s Gnosticism – his sense that the ultimate God is beyond good and evil, and infinitely remote from creation – is deeply felt. But the sense of dread that informs his work is metaphysical rather than religious in nature: at its base are vertiginous glimpses of the collapse of all structures of meaning, including language itself, flashing intimations that the very self that speaks has no real existence. In the fiction that responds to this dread, the ethical and the aesthetic are tightly wound together. (Coetzee 2002: 173)

It is striking how absent technology is from such a vast logistical challenge as posed by ‘La biblioteca de Babel’ – which others call the universe, as the narrator remarks. Nothing is said about the workings of the latrines, in each of the infinite number of hexagonal galleries; no details are given about the functioning of the ventilation of the infinite number of ‘vast air shafts’; and the reference to the ‘powering’ of the Library, especially its electrical wiring and lighting, remains mysterious: ‘light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps’ (Borges 1970: 78).

Thus could ‘posthumanism without technology’ be merely some kind of ‘technognosis’, or a simple repression of technological materiality by an irrational insistence on radical spirituality? Is it simply a negation of the techno-logical that can be found in so many writers of the first half of the twentieth century? Is it merely a Heideggerian-like attempt to invalidate technology’s specificity by re-ontologising it and binding it to the metaphysical *longue durée* of humanity?<sup>2</sup> Or is Borges’ envisaged posthuman condition merely another techno-apocalyptic scenario in the vein of *The Terminator* (Cameron 1984) where an inanimate machine-world ‘survives’ humanity (cf. Borges 1970: 85)? Is posthuman for Borges merely synonymous with posthumous? Maybe. But we would like to believe there is another, more serious and critical aspect to Borges’ irony and nihilism.

Borges’ special value for critical posthumanism lies in the fact that his writings, in a sense, constitute an archive of the future even before it arrived. He was, for example, famously unimpressed by the idea of ‘artificial intelligence’ and a machinic future set to replace humanity, arguing that ‘it would be risky to await revelation from the all-knowing machine’ (Borges 2001: 155). However, in a typical turnaround move, Borges assigns the machine with a future for poetry, or the aesthetic imaginary. In fact, the idea of the

machine as poetic—as the automatic other within the self—makes the poet ‘himself’ machinic (Sarlo 1993: 59-61).

In summary, studying the links between Borges and emerging cyberculture and its theorisation can provide important and broader statements on the relations between literature and the post-human(ist). The discourse and the imagination Borges brings to bear do not only prefigure what the posthuman order might achieve, they also anticipate its own critique. Even without technology, Borges’ ingenious imaginary arrives at the posthuman before it, as the very memory of the uncreated and perhaps uncreatable order which technology might just set about fashioning in the more or less posthuman future.

### **Bibliography:**

Aizenberg, Edna, ed. 1990. *Borges and His Successors: The Borgesian Impact on Literature and the Arts* (Columbia: U of Missouri P).

Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P).

Borges, Jorge Luis. 1970. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, trans. by Donald A. Yates, James E. Irby *et al.* (London: Penguin).

—. 1971. *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, ed. and trans. by Norman Thomas di Giovanni (London: Jonathan Cape).

—. 2001. *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, ed. and trans. by Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin).

Cameron, James, dir. 1984. *The Terminator*. Pacific Western.

Coetzee, J.M.. 2002. *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999* (London: Vintage).

- Gracia, Jorge J.E., Carolyn Korsmeyer and Rodolphe Gasché, eds. 2002. *Literary Philosophers: Borges, Calvino, Eco* (New York: Routledge).
- Graham, Elaine L. 2002. *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester UP).
- Haraway, Donna. 2004. 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', in *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge), pp. 7-45.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. 1984. *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell UP).
- . 1999. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P).
- . 2005. *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: U of Chicago P).
- , ed. 1991. *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* (Chicago: U of Chicago P).
- , ed. 2004. *Nanoculture: Implications of the New Technoscience* (Bristol: Intellect).
- Heidegger, Martin. 1993. "'Only a God Can Save Us": *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger', in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. by Richard Wollin (Cambridge: MIT Press), pp. 91-116.
- Herbrechter, Stefan, and Ivan Callus. 2003. 'What's Wrong with Posthumanism?' *Rhizomes 7*, special issue dedicated to 'Theory's Others', <http://www.rhizomes.net>
- . 2004a. 'The Latecoming of the Posthuman, Or, Why "We" Do the Apocalypse Differently, "Now"', *Reconstruction*, 4:3, <http://www.reconstruction.ws/043/callus.htm>
- , eds. 2004b. *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)resistibility of Theory* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP).

*The Jorge Luis Borges Center for Studies and Documentation.*

<http://www.uiowa.edu/borges/borges.htm> Accessed 10 November 2006.

Kristal, Efraín. 2002. *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP).

Ryan, Marie-Laure, ed. 1999. *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP).

Sarlo, Beatriz. 1993. *Jorge Luis Borges: A Writer on the Edge*, ed. John King (London: Verso).

Spielberg, Steven, dir. 2002. *Minority Report*. DreamWorks SKG.

Stoicheff, Peter. 1991. 'The Chaos of Metafiction', in *Chaos and Order*, ed. by N.

Katherine Hayles, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-99.

Thiher, Allen. 2005. *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (Columbia: U of Missouri P).

Wachowski, Andy and Larry, dirs. 1999. *The Matrix*. Warner Bros. Pictures.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort, eds. 2003. *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Weissert, Thomas P. 1991. 'Representation and Bifurcation: Borges' Garden of Chaos Dynamics', in *Chaos and Order*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-243.

Wolk, Douglas. 1999. 'Webmaster Borges',

<http://www.salon.com/books/feature/1999/12/06/borges/print.html> Accessed 7 April 2003.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson. 2002. 'Borges' Monsters: Unnatural Wholes and the Transformation of Genre', in *Literary Philosophers: Borges, Calvino, Eco*, ed. by Jorge J. E. Gracia, Carolyn Korsmeyer and Rudolphe Gasché (London: Routledge), pp. 47-84.

---

Hayles in fact also discusses ‘La biblioteca de Babel’ in this passage, and speculates about the feasibility of something like a ‘digital book’ (Hayles 2005: 96).

<sup>2</sup> The (re)mythologisation of technology coincides with certain ‘techno-gnostic’ aspects in more celebratory contemporary posthumanisms. In particular, some of the posthuman desires expressed by so-called ‘transhumanists’ could be described as gnosticism’s reinvention through technology, very similar to Heidegger’s notion of technology as a kind of ‘techno-gnosis’, from which ‘only a God can save us’ (cf. Heidegger 1993:105-07).