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A thought would be necessary that would no longer be constructed as a relation linking the thinker to the thought, or in this thought a relation without correlatives would be necessary, a thought not compelled by the rigorous correspondence between noesis and noema, not compelled by the adequation of the visible to the aim to which it would respond in the intuition of the truth; a thought would be necessary where the very metaphors of vision and aim would no longer be legitimate. (Levinas 134)

Newness, World Language, Alterity. On Borges' Mark.

I. Borges' Mark

There will be no newness—certainly no newness in the language—without the archive. Newness is never more than a mark in the archive. Since the archive is language, newness is a mark on language—if it occurs and when it occurs. But this notion of a mark on language is not simple. If it is a mark on language, where does it come from? Does it come from the outside, or is it a mere fold in language as such? And even if it were a fold, why does language fold upon itself, or fail to do so, at a certain point in time? There are only two ways of responding to this general problem at the appropriate level of generality: a mark on language constitutes an event; or else is it the mere consequence of an analytic development. We can complicate the scheme

by claiming that an analytic development can bring forth or produce an event; or that an event is the precondition for an analytic development. But, ultimately, we are left with the question of whether a mark, any mark on language, whether it is a new one or simply the memory of an older one that has been disavowed, is an event that responds to a logic other than the logic of language itself; in other words, whether the event is necessarily alterity, alterity's blow to language.

In his essay "The Old and the New," Emmanuel Levinas suggests that the desire for the new is essential to the human to the very extent that the human is "the rupture of . . . ontological rhythm" (121-22). The difference between being a human and merely existing is precisely, for Levinas, the very possibility of going beyond the conatus essendi (the preservation of our being, or perseverance in our own being). The desire of the new is the essentially human mechanism to deal with an archaic, or perhaps even an-archic, tiredness with and towards sameness. But then a mark on language, the index of newness, as the blow of alterity to language, constitutes the human in the very interruption of the human. The event that marks language, the event that introduces in language the trace of a novelty, is other, precisely, does not belong in sameness. The interruption of sameness is the creation of the human—but the human is, then, aporetically, never itself, never self-same; always, and only, an exposure to the new, an exposure to interruption.

Levinas calls the resulting necessary thought, namely, the thought of "a relation without correlatives," an "impossible exigency" (134). This is or would have to be a thought commensurate to the rupture of the presumed identification of thinking and being that organizes modernity as precisely the historical capture of the new, its full arrangement as always already there for the self, for consciousness and experience. If in Hegelian philosophy "the novelty of the modern is not, to be sure, the end of everything unknown, but an epoch

where the unknown to be discovered can no longer surprise thought with its new alterity. Thought is already fully conscious of itself and of all the dimensions of what is reasonable in reality. For thought, everything is consummated” (127), the retrieval of a new possibility for thought, that is, the retrieval for thought of a possibility of the new is necessarily the abandonment of the “identification of mind with the intellection of being or with the ontology within which the philosophy which has been handed down to us lives” (133). The possibility of a mark on language, in other words, the very possibility of an event that would reconstitute the human to the human by interrupting the lock of ontological sameness on the human, would be, seemingly, an impossible exigency, impossible and necessary. What would it take for such a mark, and for the very possibility of theorizing the mark, to occur? Levinas asks: “What else can one seek than the thought of consciousness and experience, so that, welcoming absolute novelty, [absolute novelty] is not stripped of its novelty by its very welcome? [my emphasis]” (133). If we could answer that question, then we might be able to answer the question regarding the possibility of a non-Hegelian or a-Hegelian reflection on the literary.¹

Perhaps Jorge Luis Borges, within the Spanish archive, can be said to have constituted a mark on language, first on the Spanish language, then on language in general. Does Borges break history, the history of language, the history of the Spanish language, in two, does he create a situation such that we, the successors, must then think of a state of things before Borges and of a different state of things after Borges? In this paper I am concerned with understanding what Borges’ work implies for reflection in the humanities today, and I will do so in dialogue with at least some aspects of three recent books, Gayatri Spivak’s Death of a Discipline, Christopher Fynsk’s The Claim of Language, and Brett Levinson’s Market and Thought. I would like to show how those three books, by themselves and also in their relation, propose a program for thinking in the humanities, which is also a political program.

The rapid succession of theoretical paradigms in the 1980s and 1990s was dazzling, but today we live in their wake, semi-paralyzed, not because we do not know what to do, since the busy work continues, rather because we cannot find a sufficient answer to the question whether what we do as scholars has an efficient purchase on the real as it has evolved in the course of our generation. Can our work even impress the university authorities that are relentlessly proceeding to the corporatization of the university, sometimes with the full consent and cooperation of humanities programs and cultural studies departments? Can our work, beyond the university, inspire anyone at all? Does our work, in the first place, exist beyond the corporate university? Could it? At another important programmatic moment for the refoundation and development of the humanities on a planetary level, in 1947, Martin Heidegger said that we needed “less literature, but more cultivation of the letter” (“Letter” 276). He was calling at the time for a preparatory thinking, geared towards the overcoming of nihilism. Paul de Man felt no compunctions about repeating precisely that Heideggerian program towards the end of his life, in a commentary on his essay on Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator.”² Today few of us would dare claim that more cultivation of the letter is needed, whereas most of us do feel that the call for less literature has been abundantly met. We have less literature, we deal with literature, collectively, less than we once did, and no doubt for good reasons. But our renunciations have not yet served us to progress towards what Simone Weil, in an essay written in the 1930s and entitled “Reflections Concerning the Causes of Liberty and Social Oppression,” expressed as a desire to turn, not work into political action, but rather, because here is the problem, political action into a form of work. I will quote Weil in full as to what is necessary in order not to have to limit ourselves to watching “history unfold as one watches the seasons go by:”

It would be necessary first of all to define by way of an ideal limit the objective conditions that would permit of a social organization absolutely free from oppression; then seek out by what means and to what extent the conditions actually given can be transformed so as to bring them nearer to this ideal; find out what is the least oppressive form of social organization for a body of specific objective conditions; and, lastly, define in this field the power and action and responsibilities of individuals as such. Only on this condition could political action become something analogous to a form of work, instead of being, as has been the case hitherto, either a game or a kind of magic. (Weil, "Analysis" 132)

No doubt, mutatis mutandis, Simone Weil's general program could be translated to our own needs, that is, it could be translated into the expression of a desire for the putting-into-work of whatever we think is political enough in our teaching, in our speaking, in our writing. Tiresome calls for the abandonment of work and the move to political action are regularly heard, but, so that they do not inevitably result in little more than games, or a kind of (bad) magic, in the humanities, for the humanities, it is perhaps time to think of turning political action into work. Spivak, Fynsk, and Levinson give us precisely that possibility. They clear the ground.

Before moving into their thoughts, and in the wake of Levinas' reflection, I will advance a hypothesis at the same time modest and ambitious on the nature and specificity of Borges' mark. My hypothesis is that Borges' mark on language is the theorization of language's mark. Or perhaps, to follow a remark by Christopher Fynsk, we should abandon that word, theorization, and call it an encounter: the encounter with language's mark.³ Borges' mark is the encounter with language's mark. It is an ambitious hypothesis because it attempts to cipher the sum of Borges' most important accomplishment as a writer; it is modest because it simply claims

that Borges' splitting of the literary into two is the result of a simple fold in language. The Borges event is a fold: his mark on language is a fold in language. We are still thinking—or not thinking—the event of that fold.

Take “El idioma analítico de John Wilkins,” an essay from Otras inquisiciones (1952) that attempts to correct the injustice of the fact that the 14th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica dropped the article on John Wilkins and thus silenced his “speculative work” (221).⁴ Borges' interest is on Wilkins's attempt at a “world language” (221). The point of departure is the notion that language is inexpressive, in the precise sense that “all of the languages in the world are equally non-expressive” (222). That is, the non-expressivity of language is perhaps nothing but a historical contingency, but, even as contingency, it has an overwhelming facticity that the creation of dictionaries cannot really correct. It just happens to be the case that languages are non-expressive. We know that. Languages would be expressive if every word carried with it an immediate indication of its own meaning. But they do not. We compensate. We have invented dictionaries in order to give some expressivity to language. Through dictionaries, words find definitions, but of course that is a rather ad hoc and inelegant solution to the basic problem of the non-expressivity of languages: the word luna would not say anything at all were it not defined for us in the most cumbersome of alphabetical ways, as it does not express meaning of its own, and we cannot always rely on the kind of good memory it takes to remember the dictionary by heart, and we do not always have the dictionary close to hand. And of course what happens to luna happens to every word in every natural language.

Wilkins realized this, felt somewhat tormented by it, and set his mind to developing a truly expressive language, in which “every word [would] define itself” (222). If this language could be developed, Wilkins thought, or came to realize, it would in fact do more than spare us the use of memory or the use of dictionaries. It would eventually “organize and encompass all

human thought" (222), in the sense of every possible human thought, not just in the historical sense, in the same way that arithmetical or algorithmic systems can cipher infinity. Once an expressive language is in place, it is simply a matter of developing it, of letting it come into its own, of letting it come to its own end. It would be an analytical language that, in its full deployment, would provide a total synthesis of the human: nothing thinkable, nothing possible would eventually be left behind.

Thus described, Wilkins' attempt has everything to do with precisely what Levinas understands as the sum of modernity in Hegelian philosophy: with Hegel, "philosophy is guided by the idea of the totality of the real, of its truth beyond the old and the new" (Levinas 127). If for Hegel "to think the new is to raise it to the true" (Levinas 127), then for Wilkins the possibility of his new language is the very possibility of reaching "the supreme freedom referring to all possibilities, to all the acquisitions of European civilization, reuniting all types of knowledge, and interpreted as progress toward absolute knowledge knowing itself absolute and synonymous with Spirit" (Levinas 126). Wilkins's analytical language is in fact the language of Spirit, the true language of the Hegelian Spirit for which dialectics is only an approximate substitution.

The condition for the development of a language of Spirit is language's full expressivity; that is, words, the words of the new language, can no longer be "clumsy arbitrary symbols" (223), but they must define themselves, and therefore the thing, with rigor and necessity, they must come to express, to say, their referent through their very verbal matter. For this project it is not at all a matter of rejecting the thought that language is a system of differences. On the contrary, it is a matter of radicalizing difference, of exhausting difference, through a systematic, full, and comprehensive mapping of it. In fact, the arbitrariness of symbols is precisely proof of the drastically deficient halting of difference that occurs in every natural language: say, luna, sol, and estrella are not spontaneously expressing of minimal paradigmatic difference across a

continuum. In order for them to express difference they must in fact be supplemented by a definition. But what if we could conceive of a language that could map difference in full systematicity? A language where every minimal difference along a continuum could be expressed by the words themselves? The implication here is that, for such a language, every supplement would be redundant, and thus not a supplement. The exhaustion of difference makes the supplement impossible. There would be no supplement to the very same extent that there would be no possibility of novelty: language itself would have become the ultimate novelty, and through it nothing would any longer be exterior to consciousness. There would be no difference between thinking and being, and the difference between action and thought would have been reduced to a problem of mere utterance. Does this possibly solve Simone Weil's problem regarding the putting-into-work of political action? This was the dream of inverted Hegelianism.

Borges says that Wilkins set out to develop precisely this language in 1664 (222), that is, in a year that we can easily relate to the conventional beginning of European modernity (indeed, Wilkins's important roles in the promotion of Galilean science, the creation of the Royal Society, and his insistence on the opening of the English university in the wake of the Revolution make of him a prototypical figure of the modern. Even his doctoral degree in Divinity had something to do with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia on October 24, 1648.)⁵ But the problem immediately became obvious—and, as we can expect from Borges, the problem is not circumscribable to poor old Wilkins's project, but becomes a problem for modernity as such. In order to map the universe, you must map the mapping. This is not a trivial discovery, but rather the site of an aporia for philosophical thought. It would be true, Borges thinks, that a sufficiently developed, that is, a totally developed analytical language would immediately offer a total synthesis of the universe. But the problem is that, prior to the total synthesis, the originary

synthesis that could alone provide the analytical categories is not available. Descartes's cogito is not enough, as the Kantian determination of the originary synthesis of apperception would not be enough either, for the problem happens not at the level of the subject but at the level of language itself. The Kantian categories are already a reflection on language, they do not found language: they think of language, and not of the thing, which is precisely, already for Kant, that of which they cannot think. Say that you start off with a provisional division of the universe, of the thing in the universe, or of the thingly universe, into either ten or one hundred and thirty genera, so that your analytical language could proceed through setting and subsetting to assign reciprocal values to signs and divisions (for instance, b would mean "animal," and ba would mean "mammal," and bad would mean "man," and bada would mean "rough man," and badas "rough man with criminal tendencies," and badass would mean, well, "badass"). The problem would still be with your provisional division, since, in the necessary a priori absence of the final synthesis, it will forever remain "arbitrary and conjectural" (224), and then necessarily "an exercise in chaos" (223). The provisional division is a marker of the fact that every division is provisional, and this fact, if nothing else, is beyond the purview of language—of every natural language, and therefore of every analytical language as well, including mathematics. Yes, on the one hand, the provisionality of every division organizes the final idiomaticity of language. On the other hand, it limits every language to necessary idiomaticity.

Wilkins's project, in its very failure, anticipates therefore the catastrophe of every dialectics, as no dialectics is able to start off from divisions that are not already a result of the dialectic itself. In other words, every dialectics posits a provisional originary synthesis that is based on a provisional final synthesis, but the provisionality ungrounds its necessity: every dialectic, because finally ungrounded, is always provisional. As provisional, every dialectic is an exercise in chaos. Borges, through Wilkins, establishes his mark on language as the fold of

dialectics into itself, the end or disaster of dialectics through what we could call the synthetic aporia, or the aporia of synthesis. There is no originary synthesis without final synthesis, but there can be no final synthesis without originary synthesis. Things remain arbitrary and conjectural, in other words, because we do not know what the universe is, or “no sabemos qué cosa es el universo” (224)—it is the thing that remains beyond language. We cannot therefore establish a full analytical language. Irreducible originary ignorance dismantles the pretensions of the human to thorough self-constitution, to sameness, to ontological stability. There is no saying of the final referent, because the final referent remains concealed even as it lends itself to uncountable provisional translations. Knowledge opens the abyss whereby there is no such a thing as knowledge.

We must proceed, Borges concludes, to invent our own dictionaries because we lack “the words, the definitions, the etymologies, the synonyms in God’s secret dictionary” (224), that is, provided there is a God, provided that it is not the case that “there is no universe in the organic, unifying sense that such an ambitious word has” (224). This is precisely what we do not know, the thing, or whether there is a thing. We proceed with what Borges calls “human schemes” (224) in the impossibility of knowing (whether there is) a divine scheme. One of those human schemes is literature. Borges says that, beyond hopes and utopias, the most lucid words ever written on language are some words by G. K. Chesterton. They are skeptical words about the possibility of representation. Literature is always already the expression of a fundamental limitation: the belief that our words, our noises, can signify “all the mysteries of memory, all the agonies of longing” (225). Belief stands, of course, for originary synthesis—every system of beliefs is always a substitution of the (impossible) originary synthesis.

The problem is not therefore our difficulty or impossibility of saying anything new, or of encountering the new without immediately dissolving it as such. It is rather the overwhelming

triviality of ceaseless repetition within the limited combinatory of the substitute human schemes. The discovery of the impossibility of originary synthesis is in fact the beginning of European nihilism. Our languages are in fact analytic despite their lack of natural expressivity, but only because they cannot be anything else. We live in a second-order analytics enabled by our dictionaries. We live in the arbitrary and conjectural structure of supplementation created by our provisional syntheses. Within it, difference is always already exhausted because of the extreme predictability and circularity of our arguments. The problem always is that the stories we tell ourselves and others are the stories that can be told, whereas, perhaps, the only stories worth telling are those that remain outside our range, unreachable, on the side of the thing. If a story can be told, we have to assume that it has always already been told: language does fold upon itself. The fold in language is thus language's own fold: a recoil in the face of the absence of an originary synthesis, of a true encounter with the thing itself. Borges, who shows this to us throughout his work, and not just in "El idioma analítico de John Wilkins," thematizes his work on language as the encounter with language's mark. We live there, in our possibility to think or not to think of its implications. Borges's event may have been just that, a fold in language, the fold of language's fold: an analytic development. But it points to the problem of the epistemological justification of literature, of literary reflection, as a field of knowledge.

II. Othering and the Political

Gayatri Spivak's, Christopher Fynsk's, and Brett Levinson's new books are commensurate to the thought of language that Borges makes necessary. The point is not to say that Spivak, Fynsk, and Levinson are faithful to the Borgesian legacy. To the extent that their books are committed to a metacritical reflection on what Fynsk terms "fundamental research in the humanities," my interest is to explore some of their arguments in order to find orientation in

them for the development of our task. If our task is historically marked by Borges' work, the question is, how are we to develop fundamental research in the humanities starting from what I called the synthetic aporia, that is, the thought that the representational possibilities of language condemn us to a second-order analytic of endless repetition of the supplement? Is it possible to go from language into language? Can we keep the irreducible gap between language and the thing from dooming our attempts at putting political action into work by means of words and by means of a reflection on words? Must the humanities accept their ornamental role as mere producers or reproducers of dictionary supplements? Can we reply to Levinas' "impossible exigency"?

Many of us started our careers as literary critics in the mid 1980s and were forced to move into a kind of reflection that led us seemingly away from literary topics into what the profession generally calls theory. It is perhaps time to make the case that we did not abandon literature, rather that the literary expelled us from itself as a consequence of a certain historical exhaustion of the literary: from itself into itself, then, and that was, in a very minor way, our own event, the event of our profession, for at least some of us. My argument is of course that Borges brings that exhaustion into historical accomplishment. In the wake of that exhaustion of the literary through the discovery of the fundamental limitation of representation, what is fundamental research in the humanities today?

Spivak's initial formulation, which is far from demanding a return to the literary, that is, merely a return, or merely to the literary, is that we need a "new Comparative Literature, whose hallmark remains a care for language and idiom" (4). Spivak approves of Jacques Derrida's notion according to which "philosophical 'concepts [cannot] transcend idiomatic differences'" (10), so that the understanding of idiomatic differences in their radical linguisticity is a necessary dimension of the production of knowledge. Indeed, for Spivak the understanding of

idiomatic difference may be knowledge itself, a knowledge that is therefore postconceptual and posttheoretical, not based on an imperative of transcoding but rather on “othering . . . as an end in itself” (13). Othering imposes a fundamental concern for the “literary specificity [or idiomatic difference] of the autochthone” (13). There is, Spivak says, an “immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world” (16), and such a heterogeneity is our burden and our responsibility. Othering is the only possible non-suppressive response to heterogeneity. “Our own undecidable meaning is in the irreducible figure that stands in for the eyes of the other” (23). It was this figure that sent us into theory, into cultural studies, into subaltern studies—it was this figure that organized our professional event (for some of us). Now, rather than just following it, we have to think of it, Spivak says. In Borges’ essay, othering is of course the very principle of the originary synthesis: the fundamental reminder that there can be no capture of the real; hence, that attention to it is all that is possible. But what is this attention is not itself the figure of the relation without correlatives, beyond the pairing of noesis with noema, beyond the link of thinking and the thought, or of vision and the viseé in Levinas’ formulation?

This irreducible figure is language’s mark. According to Spivak, we have a choice: to heed the “clamor for the rational destruction of the figure, the demand not for clarity but immediate comprehensibility by the ideological average” (71), which is of course the fallen reproduction of the Hegelian dream, or “to learn to read” understood as “to learn to dis-figure the undecidable figure into a responsible literality” (72). To dis-figure the figure: what can this “responsible literality” mean as the event of a new Comparative Literature, that is, as the goal of fundamental research and the definition of what needs to be done? Responsible literality is the political task of the new Comparative Literature Spivak calls for. If the irreducible figure “stands in for the eyes of the other,” then to move towards a dis-figement of the figure means moving towards a non-capturing encounter with the other. Responsible literality is a strategy of

encounter. This is Spivak's response. Can it be read, as I think it should, as something other than mere wishful thinking, yet another pious call for respectful submission to the untamable but sacred identity of the wild man, the barbarian, the postcolonial, the poor, or, finally, he or she who is for whatever reason the image of the Christ, whereas we can really do not a lot more than assume our guilt like Pontius Pilate eventually did?

Literality as a political task implies a necessary abandonment of literality, as it implies an abandonment of language in the move towards the other. But it is a peculiar abandonment: an abandonment to language, in a sense, since what is abandoned is the mastering of figurality, which is what is meant by its "rational destruction." Attention to literality is rather an embrace of language in its ultimate idiomatic difference, there where language opens onto its condition of possibility: perhaps the collectivity that forms it or is undecidably formed by it, in any case the provisional originary synthesis that is precisely not ours, and hence manifests an other relation to the thing. Othering, in the sense of a move towards the radically idiomatic heterogeneity of the world, implies traversing the disfiguring figure of the literal, in order to reach the literal. But reaching the literal is, then, traversing the literal as well, in an affirmation of responsibility towards the other. What kind of responsibility? How is this consistent with what I have called Borges' mark?

Borges argued for the impossibility of a world language. Wilkins' attempt at constructing it was nothing but a somewhat admirable failure. The will to a world language was always already based on the belief in the existence of a universe, understood as an "organic and unifying" whole. The will to a world language was the will to discover God's secret dictionary. If there were a world language, then the possibility of a real exhaustion of difference through the total synthesis of universality would have been reached. But there is no world language—there is not one, there isn't one, or it is indiscernible. The exhaustion of difference is then no more

than rehearsed, in a fallen and derivative way, through the will to a world language, through the second-order analytics of our calculation, through the dogmatic establishment of provisional originary syntheses, which occupy, always and in every case, the role of ideology. Colonialism was nothing but the imposition of it, but it is perhaps more biting to note today that the problem is not reducible to coloniality. It is in this sense that Spivak says, remarkably twice in her last chapter, “identity politics is neither smart nor good” (84; 92). Every identity politics is the supplement of an attempt at world language: the possibility of another dictionary, or of finding the lost dictionary, or even the lost page in the chain of equivalences. In the face of the uselessness of every dictionary project, old and new, to overturn the problem of nihilism, in the face of the Borgesian discovery that every belief, every historical crystallization of the fetish, is the substitute for an unreachable originary synthesis, and nothing else, we need something else—something, Spivak says, other.

Spivak quotes Derrida as to the motivation of othering. Othering is a peculiar end as it can only be motivated by what exceeds any motivation, a requirement “for an increase or a supplement of justice” that responds to the “experience of an inadequation or an incalculable disproportion” (13). There is an experience of incalculability which is precisely the experience of the limits of the idea of a world language: that the world cannot be calculated, that its heterogeneity is beyond the reach of any possible language, that there is singularity, this is the experience of language itself, not just as an analytical machine that reaches the limit of its own capacity, but also of language on its other side, in its full idiomaticity, in the uniqueness of its every utterance. The experience of idiomaticity is the experience of othering: heimlich is unheimlich. “The Heimlich/Unheimlich relationship is indeed, formally, the defamiliarization of familiar space. But its substantive type does not have to be the entrance to the vagina. Colonialism, decolonialization, and postcoloniality involved special kinds of traffic with people

deemed 'other'—the familiarity of a presumed common humanity defamiliarized, as it were" (77). The inversion of the sign of coloniality is the dis-figuring of the figure: responsible literality is the conversion of the relation between idiomaticity and othering into a "planetarity" that no longer accepts the dialectics of us/them. "Alterity [must remain] underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away" (73). There is no dialectic, after a certain point: and that is the point that interests us.

Christopher Fynsk's The Claim of Language defines the practice of thought as "a practice of the limit—a passage to the very limits of the languages that constitute a multifold and discontinuous space of time and meaning" (9). Also for Fynsk we confront a choice in our use of the practice of thought: "as long as . . . thinking remains directed by a totalizing construction of the symbolic horizon of the language of Capital and Technik (as the horizon against which it unfolds), it can do no more than spin off versions of its sovereign, but properly impossible, task, and reproduce endlessly the nonpositive affirmation of its difference from that symbolic order" (18). The alternative is to give up on the notion of the transcendence of thought, always "beholden to the totalizing designs of critical theory and perhaps even the metaphysical dream of unity" (19), and proceed "from what exceeds the reach of these forces (starting with the facticity of human existence itself and that exposure of the human that grounds the ethical relation)" (22). Fynsk calls this second choice "the thought of the singular event (whereby existence is exposed)" (21). This thought of the singular event is—can be read—as the only possible response to Borges' mark; as the very wake of the injunction it imposes on us.

The exposure of existence, then, as an act of thought constitutes every time a performative event: "in every case, there is an engagement with the other, an interrupting exposition" (36). And for Fynsk, as for Borges, this can only be accomplished through an engagement with "the question of language at a fundamental level—i.e., where a question

concerning the being of language opens to the possibility of rethinking notions such as experience, material being, or ‘the human’ itself” (60). The thinking of the singular event is also an abandonment of humankind to language as a sort of radical “opening to alterity” (67). Language is what exceeds finite determination. It exposes the human as it establishes a relation to human finitude, as it in fact appropriates human finitude to its own limitation.

That radical alterity exists, and that it cannot be mastered, is for Fynsk, as for Spivak, the beginning of the way for fundamental research in the humanities today. This is again consistent with Borges’ synthetic aporia, in that the renunciation of totality that it imposes changes the sign of the task of thought from an attempt to capture or reproduce the organic and unifying universe—this is the self-defining task of the thought of Capital and Technik, but also the thought of theory, the thought of a world language insofar as it does not give up the “metaphysical dream of unity”—to a thinking of the exposure in the ethical relation. Language, insofar as it is a failed synthesis, nothing other than a second-order analytics, opens onto its own abyss, through idiomaticity, to the finitude that institutes it—from which a new thought of experience, materiality, or the human can spring. This organizes for Fynsk the need for a transformative pedagogy, a pedagogy of “usage” or of “originary exposure” which sets forth from the fact that “before any speech, there must be a kind of ‘yes,’ a ‘yes’ that remarks and assumes the originary exposure . . . of the human essence that is at the limits of language” (35; on pedagogy 73). Importantly, Fynsk quotes from the French version of Derrida’s “Force de loi” what amounts to Derrida’s first articulation of the notion of a “passive decision” in the name of justice: “Such a decision is at once super-active and suffered, it retains something passive about it, even unconscious, as though the deciders were free only to let themselves be affected by their own decision, and as though the latter came to them from the other” (Fynsk 87 n19). A pedagogy of originary exposure or of the passive decision is a radical pedagogy of idiomatic

heterogeneity in Spivak's sense: a necessary corollary of Borges' discovery that fallen human schemes can never substitute for the trace of the absence of a divine scheme, a necessary measurement of the consequences of the incalculable disproportion between the human and that which the human must fail to accomplish. This pedagogy of originary exposure is already the relation without correlatives that responds to Levinas's impossible exigency.

There is nothing mystical about this, or misty-eyed. Rather, it opens the radicality of the critical enterprise to its own limits, through a necessary effort at othering, which is not voluntaristic, charitable, or even particularly generous: it is simply that which we cannot fail to do, insofar as it also is what we cannot but fail to accomplish. Othering, as ontological rupture, is what we get in the absence of the onto-theological God, in the absence of a world-language, or in the absence of a belief in the dream of originary unity. We can call it justice, as Derrida does, or the practice of an interrupting exposition to the other, in Fynsk's formulation, or the responsible literalization of idiomatic difference, in Spivak's. It is also the opposite of market thinking, in Brett Levinson's formulation.

For Levinson, market occupies the very space of Borges' world language: "the market is not simply either an economic or a social field. Nor is it reducible to a site of media explosions and corruption, multinational corporations, unbridled technological development, Western expansion, cultural homogeneity, crass individualism, cybernetics, or teenagers milling about the mall. Instead, . . . the market is itself a way of comprehending, of knowing the globe. Better said, it is a 'sense of the world' that threatens to bring knowledge, even the need and desire for knowledge, to an end" (1). For Levinson, as for Spivak and Fynsk, and for Borges, "resistance to the market . . . hinges largely on the maintenance of language" (9). How so? I cannot do justice to the many analyses in Levinson's book, so I will concentrate on one of them: the analysis of Jacques Ranciere's notion of the political in chapter three.

Levinson's notion of the political, based on the maintenance of language, will give me the chance to bring my argument to an end. What is offered in Levinson's book is the principle of a radical political critique of knowledge formations on the basis of a "something else," a fold in language that is and remains irreducible to market/state thinking (every thought of the market, Levinson shows, is also a thought of the state). The main insights in Levinson's formulations are consistent with and advance the theses put forth by Spivak and Fynsk, and are also fully commensurate to the Borgesian legacy.⁶

The premises of Levinson's argument are given in Market and Thought's Introduction, in the critique of the so-called "linguistic turn." The argument is therefore historical, in the sense that Levinson wants us to consider a historical rather than an eternal state of affairs. The linguistic turn refers to the effects of poststructuralism in the human sciences. Levinson finds in it a fundamental limitation, a betrayal of language rather than language's embrace. The linguistic turn is, according to Levinson, responsible for the historical disclosure of "three matters:"

1. the arbitrariness, contingency, displaceability, and constructed character of all meanings, truths, and laws;
2. the fact that these conventional stances, acting as if essential, bar alternative truths, therefore alternative subjects, from emerging; and
3. the alternatives themselves, which, when liberated from the established or essentialist certainties that have concealed them, when emancipated from the signified or dominant discourse and added to the field of legitimacy, create not just another fact but a plurality of potentially valid statements and positions: plurality as synonymous, now, with the given, equality, truth, and universal freedom. (10)

The question that Levinson raises is whether the multiplication of sites of legitimacy forms an ultimately viable path for the “general emancipation of humanity” (11). Is it not rather the case that the radical opening to the signifier reduces the possibility of political emancipation to the very extent that it promotes an understanding of the social as a mere aggregation of selves, as a consequence of which “the equality of anyone and everyone becomes identical to the total distribution of the people into its parts and subparts?” (12). But the latter quotation is already from Jacques Rancière’s Disagreements. Levinson’s analysis of Rancière’s notion of the political starts off, therefore, with a question that is already fully within the Borgesian fold: Wilkins’ analytical language would have been a language of the signifier, where the difference between signifier and signified would have been erased, would have in every case gone without saying. Can a language of the signifier, that is, a fully analytical world language, without remainder, a language of the radical exhaustion of difference, preserve the possibility of language as such? Of politics? For Levinson the state/market duopoly, in the very opposition of the two terms, which mimics or represents the opposition between signified and signifier but ultimately assimilates it to the signifier’s logic, is the enemy of the political, and therefore bars the very possibility of emancipation precisely by assuring us of the fact that emancipation has always already been accomplished: that there are no longer any chains, that only a full deployment of the synthesis is missing. The state/market duopoly organizes language on the basis of an “it goes without saying” that is paradoxically the fullest historical incarnation or expression of Wilkins’ project: the artificial endowment of language—world language—with full self-expressivity.

Rancière says: “Politics exists wherever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part . . . Politics ceases . . . wherever the whole of the community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over” (Levinson

59). When the whole of community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over: this was the Wilkinsian dream of a world language. The region of the state/market duopoly, that is, our present, hegemonically characterized as “consensual postdemocracy,” is precisely the region where politics has ceased, since it names “an accumulation without limits, one that adds on indefinitely to itself, but whose additions never alter the whole. The sum is, or builds, an unlimited pluralism that conserves homogeneity, the One” (670), a world language where difference has been exhausted, and where no disagreement is possible. The end of politics is the beginning of a world language. Within consensual democracy, within the state/market duopoly, nothing thinkable, nothing possible has been left behind. Or, rather, what gets left behind is disagreement as such, in the form of language as idiomaticity, language that demands inscription as the limit of consensus and as the demand of politics. In consensual postdemocracy “the part of no part” can receive no inscription, as the wronged subjects “stand for . . . the sole material thing—language—that cannot be counted, that does not count, in any count. Language is the common, the equal sign of the equation that cannot itself be added in to the sum total. Stated differently, the part that is no part is neither a who nor a what but any who that embodies a thing that is not a what (all whats can be tallied), that is not an object of representation . . . Politics starts, in short, when a given who appears as language, as the disposable offense within a whole that is itself wrong” (72-73).

Language is the condition of the political, as language bars the conflation of signifier and signified through the very maintenance of their duopoly in state/market thinking. Language is the “/,” the bar itself: the inscribed possibility of inscription that remains, as such, without saying. Saying it, then, that is, saying the saying, or, what comes to the same, saying the unsayable: this encompasses Levinson’s project of a thinking opposed to market thinking on the basis of the sustainment and maintenance of language as idiomatic inscription; Spivak’s thought

of a responsible literality as radical othering; and Fynsk's thought of the singular event. It is also the sum total of that which cannot be summed up: the necessity that the realization of the synthetic aporia imposes on us. This is the task of fundamental research in the humanities today. Literality returns, as literarity, in a strategy of othering that comes to occupy the place of a politico-academic project in the wake of the failure of cultural studies as a substitute formation for world language. This is still within Borges' fold. But how can we be more precise in order to draw out an explicit program for our own work?

Levinas concludes "The Old and the New" by presenting the thought of "deportation" as the name for a thought "independently from consciousness, not according to the negative concept of the unconscious, but according to the perhaps most profoundly thought thought, that of dis-interestedness, which is a relation without hold on a being, or anticipation of being, but pure patience" (135). Deported thought is for Levinas the very possibility of exposure to the new. There is no exposure to the new without an interruption of ontology, without an interruption of the perseverance of sameness. Patience is the very humanity of the human, understood as "the putting back into question of the good conscience of being that perseveres in being" (135). A practice of patience, then, as an interruption of sameness, as the exposure to the interruption of sameness, but not for the sake of difference, rather for the sake of the concreteness of the other, of the other human. Levinas takes deportation to be the sign of the deep avowedness of the human to precisely that which no ordinary synthesis can ever capture—what is in language beyond language, what language conveys without offering, what is in idiomaticity beyond idiomaticity itself. Is this not what Spivak's literalization aims for, without aiming? Or Fynsk's notion of exposing existence to the singular event? Or Levinson's devotion to thinking whatever goes without saying every time that something, or somebody, "goes without saying"?

This might be then the program for a non-Hegelian or a-Hegelian reflection on the literary. No longer, as it was for instance in Fred Jameson's at the same time inaugural and epigonal 1986 essay "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism," the development of a world language, of a grammar for the understanding of world literature—but rather a patient attention to the deep idiomaticity of dis-interestedness, that is, no commerce, no interest, no capture, and no relation between names. Let us make it explicit: it is the impersonal and the anonymous that require attention through every idiomaticity, through every singularity, for only the impersonal and the anonymous, in every person, and in every text, safeguard the sacredness of the unnameable, that in the human that bears othering and that makes a claim, without which sameness, even the very sameness of difference, would shamelessly obtain. As Weil puts it in one of the last essays she wrote, "Human Personality," "at the bottom of the heart of every human being, from earliest infancy until the tomb, there is something that goes on indomitably expecting, in the teeth of all experience of crimes committed, suffered, and witnessed, that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being" (51). Attention to the impersonal demand of the other, and then patient articulation of it—this is the putting into work of our work in literary reflection.

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¹ The history of reflection on literature in the last two centuries is deeply marked by Transcendental Idealism, and the argument can be made that it never abandons its position as a running commentary, critical or not, on Hegel's The Philosophy of History.

² In the "Questions" that the publishers attached to De Man's "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator,'" De Man re-emphasizes the importance he attaches to Benjamin's apparent rejection of any real messianic interpretation of history in his endorsement of Ernest Bloch's denial of "the political significance of theocracy, . . . of the religious, messianic view" in the "Theological-Political Fragment:" "Unreserved approval of it, of the book which argues absolutely against the messianic. It's much better. Because at least a nihilistic stance at that moment is possibly preparatory to a historical act" (De Man, "Conclusions" 103).

³ "fundamental research diverges from much theory in that . . . it seeks to [respond to] those dimensions of experience and symbolic expression that summon it . . . and to which no concept will ever be adequate" (Fynsk xi); "fundamental research proceeds from encounter (always from a sense that something has happened to which it must answer), and it seeks encounter. In theory, there are no encounters" (Fynsk xi)

⁴ The Britannica's Eleventh Edition does indeed include an entry on John Wilkins that was later dropped. The note is not particularly informative about Wilkins's accomplishments, however, although it does include a brief bibliography of his work and says "The chief of his numerous works in an Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language (London, 1668), in which he expounds a new universal language for the use of philosophers" (Vol. 28, 646). A recent reprint of Wilkins' Essay (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002) seems to be a function of the new interest in Wilkins's work coming from the discipline of meta-mathematics, and its discussions concerning the function of the algorithm for an exhaustive definition of the real. See for instance on the latter topic Chaitin and Kurzweil. I thank Vincent Gugino for pointing me to these issues (and for having alerted me to the fact that Wilkins was not just a Borgesian invention; Borges is very clear that he is not, however, as he sends the reader to an explicit

secondary bibliography ["Idioma" 221]). In Wilkins's Essay, see its Second Part, where Wilkins tackles the problem of an exhaustive clarification of notions in all spheres of thought. It is interesting that the Roget's Thesaurus seems to be based on Wilkins' work. Also that Wilkins' massive volume was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666 and had to be rewritten from scratch—as if fate had in fact tried to interfere with a listing of every element of the real whose true function could only be the elimination of fate as such.

⁵ "On 13 April 1648 Wilkins was appointed Warden of Wadham College, Oxford. At this time he was still chaplain to the prince elector Charles Louis and was not, therefore, in a position to take the degree of doctor of divinity which was required of a Warden. Because of this he was allowed time to study for the degree which he obtained on 19 December 1648. That he was able to devote time to take his degree so soon was a consequence of the Peace of Westphalia having been signed on 24 October 1648. This ended the German phase of the Thirty Years' War and the Rhenish Palatinate was restored to Charles Louis who returned to Heidelberg. Wilkins seems to have traveled to a number of European destinations around this time, probably on returning from Heidelberg where he accompanied Charles Louis." (O'Connor and Robertson 2).

⁶ Would Borges have sponsored Levinson's definition of the political? I think the question must be left open, fairly irrelevant as it is. It is not in any case a matter of whether Borges himself, as a political subject, would have understood politics the way Levinson does, but rather whether Borges would have had a chance at understanding the political differently, had he had infinite time at his disposal.