

DETAILS KNOWING THE WORLD: FROM HIERARCHY TO CONTINUITIES

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Abstract Taking the early-modern Enlightenment or the Baroque Era as our conceptual and theoretical frame, we will look for the beginning of a new mode of integrating and understanding detail and, thus, the distribution of the responsibilities and the capacities to remember and to forget. The schema of thought we will follow in the texts we put together in the succession of the arguments is the fall of the hierarchical Neoplatonic model of the world into fragments, multiplicities and scattered perspectives which, after the inability to be regained by wholeness inside a system of the world, explode into what we will call the tragedy of infinite detail. Inside a pulverized universe, the task of forgetting becomes a strategy of the particular in re-composing the world from every single possible perspective. Constellations and abundances will replace hierarchic contribution in arranging and remembering the world from a finite condition. How is abandoned detail, as a rest of narratives, going to impair a Baroque world model that aimed at going beyond the surfaces in search of that deeper layer of reality? The ephemeral and obscurity come into discussion as changing perceptual categories that determine degrees of belonging and reality. Starting from one of Jorge Luis Borges' short-stories we will talk about the horror of infinity and the impossibility of totalization as they came to be inherited by modernism and post-modernism from the very roots of 17th century's disquiets. Thus, we will be able to trace a continuity between the Baroque way of formulating detail and the post-modern infinite free play of significance.

Keywords Details, Knowledge, Infinity, System, Multiplicity, Rest.

After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the cultural, religious and political European scene had been shaken by the Thirty Years' War that started as a religious war. In addition, the Scientific Revolution and the insinuation of the heliocentric model

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brought that “crisis of the center” which had already started the collision of paradigms. The 17th century is analyzed by Alexandre Koyré as the passage from a world understood as finite in its principle of sufficient reason to an indefinite or even infinite universe¹. Under the shadows of this background, we will engage a more particular shifting in the construction of significance which concerns the tension between what the world envelops and what it develops creating displacements and recuperation by means of the new separations operated by the fall of hierarchic models, in terms of spiritual and philosophical understanding. Milton's *Paradise Lost* seems to metaphorically emphasize the 17th century's religious reenactment of a fallen condition that lays right at the foundation of modernity. This new cultural fall stages, at the beginning, its own visual and perceptual promises of depth that will be later inherited by the new positions of detail inside existence and understanding.

The sense of incompleteness, marking a world that was forced to look for its position elsewhere, split the world into appearances and the presupposition of a truth that lays under its own effects. As William Egginton points in his book, *The Theater of Truth- The Ideology of (Neo)Baroque Aesthetics*, modernity's problem of thought opens with the Baroque's staging of a truth behind the “veil of appearances.”

“Modernity's fundamental problem of thought is that the subject of knowledge can only approach the world through a veil of appearances; truth is defined as the adequation of our knowledge to the truth thus veiled; hence, inquiry of any kind must be guided by the reduction of whatever difference exists between the appearance and the world as it is. The problem, or why the problem remains a problem, is that the subject of knowledge only ever obtains knowledge via his or her senses, via how things appear, and hence the truth thus sought will itself always be corrupted by appearances.”²

So, the metaphorically fallen condition at the root of modernity lies on the idea of being thrown into an irreducible inter-mirroring of appearances. Descartes and his “Quest for Certainty” symptomatically tried to cut off appearances by means of rational reduction, but in order to solve the question of whether life is a dream or not had to call upon a guarantor, meaning God. The Western fear of appearances emerged as an uncertainty of the multiple, which was not only visually sensed by the Baroque world, but also imaginatively. That is why, we consider the perception and understanding of detail to be of major importance for defining modernity's ability of breaking the continuum of appearances by means of the isolating and fragmentary forces of the detail. So, one of the questions leading us is how did the problem of

¹ Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1957).

² William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

appearance lead to a different layering of the Real and its elusive placing of disintegrated details.

We could argue that the distance between appearances and truth gives way to a new phenomenology of detail, inside which each minor aspect of seeing or experiencing marks the unknown it replaces or, in Jacques Derrida's own concepts, the unknown that is being *supplemented*. The anamorphic mirrors divide experience into pieces and these separated pieces seem to recompose the wholeness of presence by haunting it with the fragment's own share of individual truth. The represented object tends to be lost to its own segregated detail that robs reality for the new power of signs. Thus, remembering and forgetting become less a question of Platonic reminiscence, of recognizing reality for something higher than itself, but a matter of composing or erasing different chains of signs and their liberating or enclosing forces.

Michel Foucault also distinguishes a separation inside the understanding of the world that appeared in the 17th century, dictated by the need to name things and classify them according to the power of science:

“The division, so evident to us, between what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naïvely believe, the great tripartition, apparently so simple and so immediate, into Observation, Document, and Fable, did not exist. And this was not because science was hesitating between a rational vocation and the vast weight of naïve tradition, but for the much more precise and much more constraining reason that signs were then part of things themselves, whereas in the seventeenth century they become modes of representation.³”

Words or signs are no longer part of the essence of things and this distance between them gives rise to representation. The power to see is being replaced by the power to observe that which can be named, as Foucault shows. The birth of natural history responds particularly to this need of relating to things as if they are being looked at for the first time and we can cast a primal detailed look upon them. It is as if, through the eye of science and history, we see things because we can name them and by naming them, we restrict them to their own separability and finitude. Later, the invention of the microscope testifies for the existence of a whole universe inside finitude.

³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things-An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Translation of *Les mots et les choses*. (Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005), 140.

Thus, we could argue that details become the confirmation of the myth of that first look upon things reenacted by each perspective and each science every time a new nameable visibility appears on the surface of the world. Also, details seem to carry that nostalgia of the separation between words and things because they seem to inscribe things back to a one-layered reality, a reality of details and not a reality of signs. Details re-assert the discrete and quiet limits of things in a Baroque world that was restless about the limits of representation. The disquiet concerning the limits of representation reflects the concern related to the signs' power to encipher remembering and forgetting. But, the question of remembering and forgetting does not emerge from an established Real Foucault refers to by the "order of things," but from their capacity of disorder, fragmentation and dissociation of detail outside the power of signs. Thus, one of the ideas we will postulate concerns the power of details to generate possibilities of remembering and forgetting by means of their contradictory positions towards the systems or discourses which cannot integrate them.

Writing about how "things are tied to our collectives and to subjects"⁴ by means of the processes of hybridization and purification, meaning the significances, categories or values that mix subjects and things or differentiate them, Bruno Latour also finds it appropriate to start the discussion about the "modern constitution" beginning with the 17th century. It is the separation between humans and non-humans that Latour wants to emphasize by taking up the disagreement between Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes. Boyle's experiments with the vacuum pump, and the capacity of his installations to take out the air from a tube and, thus, prove the existence of the void, managed to create a new science that based its legitimacy on the agreement of witnesses inside a laboratory and the "testimony of non-humans" trailed inside this created space. Hobbes' unification of the social inside the *Leviathan* based itself on a different type of truth, one that could be accomplished by mathematics and arguments, but which could not be tested inside a laboratory. So, if Hobbes wanted a unified *Body Politic* that would relieve citizens of their state of nature, Boyle claimed the right to produce facts inside the closed space of a laboratory. For Latour, this moment marks the split of "truth" or knowledge inside the multiple private spaces of the laboratory. Thus, even at the level of the distribution of truth and knowledge things went from a hierarchic model towards a pluralist division inside private laboratories. Also, this division brought the power of translating the silence of objects and make them testify for themselves:

⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press Cambridge, 1993), 4.

“Yet the scientists declare that they themselves are not speaking; rather, facts speak for themselves. These mute entities are thus capable of speaking, writing, signifying within the artificial chamber of the laboratory or inside the even more rarefied chambers of the vacuum pump. Little group of gentlemen take testimony from natural forces, and they testify to each other that they are not betraying but translating the silent behavior of objects. With Boyle and his successors, we begin to conceive of what a natural force is, an object that is mute but endowed or entrusted with meaning.⁵”

We could argue that, inside the processes of hybridization opened by the separately defined sciences, human and non-human witnesses, deductive and empiric truths, details find themselves emerging at the cross-roads of these overlapping delineations. Details started to mark the stitches of hybridization and purification at the borders of scattered dispositions of observing and composing the world. And, most of all, they became able to testify, from within their own silence, for the dynamics of belonging and distances created by what Latour calls “the separation between humans and non-humans.”⁶

We have argued that the separation between appearances and truth, (observed by Egginton in relation to the Baroque world) which underlined Early-Modernism’s problem of thought, offered *details* the position of fragmentary obstacles inside the continuum of appearances, and, most of all, the position of *supplements* of the unknown. Following Foucault and his theory concerning representation as the separation between signs and things, we tried to raise the question of whether details function outside the order of signs having their own power of claiming realities. With Latour we discussed about the constructions of details as surface effects of processes of hybridization, which give birth to details in the in-between of the semantic separations created. As we saw, the double-layering of the Baroque world gives way to different models of integrating detail as an *exception* to already created orders and significances. The question we want to address is how details turned from residues of the fallen hierarchic model of the universe to separate units of significance inside a pulverized world?

Sealed interiorities

At the turn of paradigms, the “Baroque” tried to save Rational theology from collapse by means of the answers and systems of thought that could be formulated by thinkers and philosophers at that time. That is why, Gilles Deleuze writes a book

⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁶ Ibid., 13.

directly connected to the Baroque thought by analyzing Leibniz's system. For Deleuze, the Baroque is defined by the two stages of perception inherent in its specific construction of the Real: "the pleats of matter" and "the folds of the soul." In other words, the conception according to which "matter envelops the levels of the soul"⁷ is played out inside forms, images and systems from around the 17th century. The phenomenology of *folding* and *unfolding* depends on the conception of the spirit as unitary force diffused inside material multiplicity. However, it is not a reinvestment of Plotinus' emanationism, because, in this case, the One, with its enveloped multiplicities, can be found in every soul, in each point of view, in every single "unit of existence," not only in the highest level of the hierarchy. Leibniz termed it the *monad*, an independently sealed interiority which suffers the possibility of being reduced to a unitary part of the universe or infinitely expanded into variation, division and multiplicity. The monad is a "mirror of the universe" because it contains and composes that universe according to an encompassing point of view and inclination. All monads are integrated inside a holistic harmony, because "God has had regard for each part."⁸

Leibniz's system contains the transition from hierarchy to wholeness, trying to offer a legitimizing construct of a world that seemed unable to contain all its parts after the de-centralizing political, religious and scientific forces of the changing paradigm. Thus, in Leibniz's philosophy, distances become harmonies, imperfections become openings towards the possibility of reaction, souls become subjectivities and each *detail* becomes a position from which God thinks and sees the universe. This system paves the way for the autonomy of the interior and, thus, for the pulverization of the world into separated "points of inflection."⁹ Deleuze observes the overlapping world of closures opened up by Leibniz's monadology: "the world is an infinite series of curvatures or inflections, and the entire world is enclosed in the soul from one point of view"¹⁰ or "the surface stops being a window on the world and now becomes an opaque grid of information on which the ciphered line is written."¹¹ The Platonic stairway ascending back to the Idea is replaced by the dialectics of matter and soul, interior and exterior, spontaneity and determination, leading to what Deleuze calls "the transformation of the cosmos into 'mundus'.¹²"

Rational theology's project of rebuilding the world had to seal each atom of the universe into its own interiority in order to open up the question of God's

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold-Leibniz and the Baroque*, transl. by Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 4.

⁸ Nicholas Rescher (ed.), *G. W. Leibniz's Monadology* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1991), 60.

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold-Leibniz and the Baroque...*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

rationality as the dialectics between part and wholeness, finite and infinite. As Deleuze observed, following Leibniz's philosophy, there is also a dialectics between impossible worlds, that divide themselves into many possible worlds whose discords might or might not meet inside the same world. The "zones of expression" made possible by the impossible worlds and their interplay are similar to the processes of hybridization and purification Latour talks about. However, with Leibniz, we have a very interesting conceptual solution to the problem of composing finite and infinite inside the same object or subjectivity. Monads comprise their own infinite and finite because, as Deleuze points, "every monad expresses the entire world but obscurely because it is finite¹³" or "the infinite present in the finite self is exactly the position of Baroque equilibrium or disequilibrium.¹⁴" We can see that the finite is no longer regarded as limit, but as an inwardly opening to the infinite. For this reason, the economy of details inside existence has to be re-thought and becomes a field of indoors constructions of the Real, each cut and each separation crafting a new possibility of ciphering or deciphering meanings.

Relics and dust

But what kind of infinite does Leibniz refer to? It is not the infinite outside the world, the infinite born out of the image of the sky, but an *inwardly* infinite imagined inside the endless division of things. This infinite is also made up of "minute perceptions that go unnoticed¹⁵" because not all perceptions are separate enough to become distinguishable. The example Leibniz offers here is the unitary sea murmur we hear from the shore, but inside which we cannot hear or know each wave individually. Commenting on this idea of Leibniz, Deleuze sees this impossible disassemblage of unitary perception (what Kant calls the Intellect's synthesis of the sensible) as the deep but confused zones of the world: "Inconspicuous perceptions constitute the obscure dust of the world, the dark depths every monad contains.¹⁶" We could argue that details, or fragmentary perceptions become the suspicion of division behind unity, the intuition of depth or the power of apprehension in disunity. Details become the measure of an infinite interior that can only be seen through the soul's confusion. But the return to the silence of this pre-formation of the world inside the subject has the force to reclaim the lost significance of the "dust of the world" and give details not the power of representation, but that of pulverization.

In Deleuze words, "the task of perception entails pulverizing the world, but also one of spiritualizing its dust.¹⁷" Following this conception, we argue that the

¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹⁵ Nicholas Rescher (ed.), *G. W. Leibniz's Monadology...*, 19.

¹⁶ Deleuze, 90.

¹⁷ Ibid., 87.

“dust of the world” refers to obscurity and the ephemeral as perceptual categories necessary for the separation between the idea of an infinitely mixed world and a spiritual or rational force that raises and formulates it (the world) from its own dust. This represents for us a defining aspect of the Early-Modernism’s inquiries about the Real. This infinitely mixed world, with its materiality, pieces and micro-perceptions represents the obscurity we need to emerge from by means of rationality. The spiritual force that gathers this dust into forms becomes, actually, the rational subject. Details remain the relics of the “dust of the world,” meaning the ephemeral exceptions of the changing orders and formations.

New simplicities

How can we link the Baroque world's crisis with the modern and postmodern manifestations? How did these systems of thought, which formulated themselves as answers to a falling paradigm, influenced our world not only at the level of a history of ideas? In his book, *Modernism and Time-The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science and Culture 1880-1930*, Ronald Schleifer formulates a possible answer to such questions engaging the thesis that the crisis of European culture, in the first half of the 20th century can be explained as a “fulfillment and exhaustion of the liberal-secular Enlightenment project.”¹⁸ For Schleifer, as well as for Stephen Toulmin, the Enlightenment project or the beginning of modernity commences in the age of Descartes, Leibniz and Newton. “The Quest for Certainty” and a certain struggle for domination, based on an ideal of emancipation, constitutes only one side of the story about the first steps towards industrialization. But it is this side of the story that led to what Schleifer calls “the logic of abundance.” Abundance, at the level of wealth and knowledge, refers to an “apotheoses of contingency, meaningless repetition.”¹⁹ That is why abundances are defined in contrast with “transcendental simplicity” and they also brought a desacralized experience of the quotidian and all the diverse, daily and multiplied perspectives. Giorgio Agamben goes even further, in his essay, *Infancy and History-The Destruction of Experience*, talking about a destruction of experience for the modern man who is no longer able to translate into experience the juxtaposed and diverse series of events he comes across every day. For Schleifer, the “crisis of abundance” generates “new ways of making sense of experience.”²⁰ That is why, at the level of music and arts, the “logic of abundance” manifests itself as a “multiplication of parts, confusion of elements.”²¹

¹⁸ Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time-The Logic Of Abundance in Literature, Science and Culture 1880-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), x.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

²⁰ Ibid., 36.

²¹ Ibid., 25.

At the turn of the 20th century, this artistic or historical ideal of “holding things together” (Deleuze impossibles inside the same world) exhausted itself inside a “hopelessness of abundance.”²² For instance, Beckett and the return to a silence of language and incapacity of meaning, or Messiaen in music and his “modes of limited transposition,” including the truncation of removed notes. There was a need to find that bare interval where one could get out from the cluster of abundances and forget the idea of time as accumulation. The “noisy clamor of our world”²³ created an acuteness of time which made it impossible to go back to what Foucault saw as the bare interval between words and things. Following Lyotard, Schleifer observes that the spiritualizing and elevating Baroque aesthetics were part of a failed attempt of extracting atemporal essences out of multiplicities:

“Jean-François Lyotard's dark observation that in our time the «claim for simplicity» is barbarous precisely because mankind seems divided into two parts, one «confronted with the challenge of complexity; the other with the terrible ancient task of survival.» This bifurcation of what I am calling abundance and dearth, he says, is a major aspect of the failure of the project of Enlightenment modernity. That project, as Latour argues most cogently, was to comprehend abundances as «pure» simplicities, to imagine the possibility of erasure of contingency, to apprehend, beyond the increasingly noisy busy-ness of the temporal world, atemporal essences.”²⁴

Thus, we could say that the “claim for simplicity” emerged not as a need of reducing details perceived as accumulations of time, but, most of all, as a need of erasing the continuity of a chain of details that had nailed space and time inside continuities. We consider that the isolation of abandoned detail inside the thick textures of life could resist the “logic of abundance” by means of peeling off contingency back to details understood as that “unit of existence” Leibniz wanted to underline. The crowded multiplicities and impossibles held together could not have been erased completely in order to make room for gaps, silences and atemporalities. They were already woven in experience so the only way for “gestures of simplicity” to happen was to cut the continuity between details and elements. And the erasure of continuity breaks time and only then can details re-emerge as the under-structure of a clueless lost world. Details become traces of that which was not marked off by the abundance of signs. The infinite root of isolated detail claims that

²² Ibid., 29.

²³ Ibid., 27.

²⁴ Ibid., 24.

same power of singularization belonging to transcendental simplicity. New simplicities are rendered possible by the cuts of details and the “logic of abundance” is challenged by the separation of its own elements.

Faces of infinity

Jorge Luis Borges has a beautiful story about the pulverized dust of the world comprised by the details and micro-perceptions we have been talking about. We will engage *Funes the Memorious*, the short-story, through a (Neo)Baroque perspective that could witness the return of some of the early-modern 17th century's disquiets inside the 20th century's writings. Ireneo Funes is the character whom the narrator first encounters in 1884, when the peculiarity of Funes always knowing precisely what time it is strikes him. Three years later, the narrator returns to the town and finds out that Funes, the son of the ironing woman, had fallen off a horse and was left paralyzed. Lending him some Latin books, the narrator discovers that this condition of prisoner had endowed Funes with the power of superhuman perception and memory. The story begins with the words “I remember” which the narrator dissociates himself from:

“Lo recuerdo (yo no tengo derecho a pronunciar ese verbo sagrado, sólo un hombre en la tierra tuvo derecho y ese hombre ha muerto) con una oscura pasionaria en la mano, viéndola como nadie la ha visto, aunque la mirara desde el crepúsculo del día hasta el de la noche, toda una vida entera.”²⁵

“I remember him (I have no right to utter this sacred verb, only one man on earth had that right and he is dead) with a dark passion flower in his hand, seeing it as no one has ever seen it, though he might look at it from the twilight of dawn till that of evening, a whole lifetime.”²⁶

We do not know from the beginning what this metaphor about the infinity of perception inside the contemplation of a flower refers to. When the narrator first visits Funes, he hears him uttering a phrase from Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*. That sentence, *ut nihil non iisdem verbis redderetur auditum*, refers to the fact that nothing that was once said can be repeated with the same words or, more clearly, nothing that was once said can be heard in the same manner again. So, the question

²⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas 1923-1972* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1974), 485

²⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*. ‘Funes the Memorious’. transl. by James E. Irby, ed. Donald A. Yates & James E. Irby (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985 [1964]), 65.

is, if you cannot bring back the content of what was once said even if you use the exact same words, why is Borges writing a story about remembering? The idea that repetition is never the same also talks about what remembrance wastes in the process of recuperation, and, also, about the fact that there are always new perceptions for the same old words. Forgetting is performed by the words themselves, pretending to be able to recall with exactitude the repeated phrase. So, an entire culture based on reproduction is actually trying to hide from itself the forgetting which produced it. The story Borges writes is about the imaginary situation when someone could remember everything. But when haunted by the presence of details how can one think?

“Había aprendido sin esfuerzo el inglés, el francés, el portugués, el latín. Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos.”²⁷

“With no effort he had learned English, French, Portuguese and Latin. I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence.”²⁸

The pulverized world of Funes is one where details have become the insurmountable texture of contingency. The story of Funes is the schizoid formulation of a modern paradigm that submitted the idea that it is not the world that contains us, but it is us who contain the world. In Leibniz's philosophy the horror of infinity (the infinite inside the finite) is resolved inside the harmonious coexistence of the monads by means of God's wisdom in choosing the best possible world.

Nonetheless, the Baroque world was not only concerned by that *horror vacui* sneaking beyond representation, but also by a horror of infinity, which can be expressed in Hans Blumenberg's words as that divergence between “life-time” and “world-time,” the contradictory human and cosmic courses. As Blumenberg shows, there were different attempts to converge *lebenszeit* and *weltzeit*, one of them being the Enlightenment's idea of putting man in charge of history. But we could argue that the power of details continued to subversively reaffirm the disjunction of the “life-time” and the “world-time” by means of their contradictory ways of pointing towards time: as traces of man and “mirrors of the universe.” Funes' story

²⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 490.

²⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 71.

can be considered a psychotic experiment about the way in which the “world-time” cannot be contained by the “life-time,” because details will always lead back to their labyrinth of infinite contingency:

“Nosotros, de un vistazo, percibimos tres copas en una mesa; Funes, todos los vastagos y racimos y frutos que comprende una parra. Sabía las formas de las nubes australes del amanecer del treinta de abril de mil ochocientos ochenta y dos y podía compararlas en el recuerdo con las vetas de un libro en pasta española que sólo había mirado una vez y con las líneas de la espuma que un remo levantó en el-Río Negro la víspera de la acción del Quebracho. Esos recuerdos no eran simples; cada imagen visual estaba ligada a sensaciones musculares, térmicas, etc. Podía reconstruir todos los sueños, todos los entresueños. [...] *Mi memoria, señor, es como vaciadero de basuras.*²⁹”

“We, at one glance, can perceive three glasses on a table; Funes, all the leaves and tendrils and fruit that make up a grape wine. He knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on the 30th of April, 1882, and could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks on a book in Spanish binding he had only seen once and with the outlines of the foam raised by an oar in the Río Negro the night before the Quebracho uprising. These memories were not simple ones; each visual image was linked to muscular sensations, thermal sensations, etc. He could reconstruct all his dreams, all his half-dreams. [...] «My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap.»³⁰”

When “life-time” tries to grasp “world-time” it can only do it by means of the “logic of abundance,” inside which the most detailed picture of a moment is doomed to become a “garbage heap.” The “logic of abundance,” born out of the rationalist's trust in the capacity of the human subject to dominate the world and reconstruct it after having eliminated, like Descartes, all sensitive sources of deceit, is mocked inside Borges story about memory's incredible power of recognition and storage. The pulverizing forces of details, understood also as a horror of infinity, is what the rationalist feared in their preventive cautions against deceit. And the same subversive mechanisms of uncontainable detail came back to haunt the 20th century's imaginative resources.

²⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 488.

³⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 69.

"Funes- discernía continuamente los tranquilos avances de la corrupción, de las caries, de la fatiga. Notaba los progresos de la muerte, de la humedad. Era el solitario y lúcido espectador de un mundo multiforme, instantáneo y casi intolerablemente preciso. Babilonia, Londres y Nueva York han abrumado con feroz esplendor la imaginación de los hombres; nadie, en sus torres populosas o en sus avenidas urgentes, ha sentido el calor y la presión de una realidad tan infatigable como la que día y noche convergía sobre el infeliz Ireneo, en su pobre arrabal sudamericano."³¹

"Funes could continuously discern the tranquil advances of corruption, of decay, of fatigue. He could note the progress of death, of dampness. He was the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world. Babylon, London and New York have overwhelmed with their ferocious splendor the imaginations of men; no one, in their populous towers or their urgent avenues, has felt the heat and pressure of a reality as indefatigable as that which day and night converged upon the hapless Ireneo, in his poor South American suburb."³²

The unimaginable and the unknown as multiple layers of the same present become nightmarish. In doubting reality Descartes had to put in brackets the knowledge that comes by senses and this reality of sensitive detail came back empowered by the capacity of deconstructing Reason's safeguarded dominion. Modernism founded itself on Cartesian and empiricist systems that wanted to reduce uncontainable detail by creating, as Foucault showed in relation to the birth of Natural History, categories and subcategories of the nameable visible. Reality's suspicion and form of hiding under the gaze of the modern rational man was that abandoned detail which would not permit its own integration inside the system. The interlinked micro-structures of details that wove the horror of infinity inside the present gained its refined literary mechanism with the 20th century's *stream of consciousness*. Forgetting became the privilege of micro-structures and remembering turned into a *recherche* through the horror of mundane infinity.

In Borges' story, Funes considers the paralysis caused by his fall off the horse to be a reasonable price to pay for the newly gained ability of being awakened inside the perception of life. The time before the accident is, for Funes, like a swoon: "He told me that before that rainy afternoon when the blue-gray horse threw him,

³¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 490.

³² Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 70.

he had been what all humans are: blind, deaf, addlebrained, absent-minded.³³ (*Me dijo que antes de esa tarde lluviosa en que lo volteó el azulejo, él había sido lo que son todos los cristianos: un ciego, un sordo, un abombado, un desmemoriado.*³⁴) The veils of oblivion we live under seem, even to the narrator, as a continuous renunciation from reality, by means of all the things we ignore and surpass: “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.³⁵” (*Lo cierto es” que vivimos postergando todo lo postergable; tal vez todos sabemos profundamente que somos inmortales y que tarde o temprano, todo hombre hará todas las cosas y sabrá todo.*³⁶) So, the horror of infinity is counteracted by the consciousness of finite perception and the idea that each cut of reality is surrounded by all its missed features. Even Leibniz stops, in section 20, to talk about this state of swoon from which our soul emerges as something more than a simple monad:

“For we experience in ourselves a state where we remember nothing and have no distinct perception, as when we fall into a swoon or when we are overcome by a deep and altogether dreamless sleep. In this state the soul does not differ noticeably from a simple monad. But as this state is not at all durable, and the soul emerges from it, the soul is something more.”³⁷

The most interesting thing is that it seems that, according to Leibniz, the soul is born out of the oblivion operated by the position of its own monadic determination. Even if the monad is a “mirror of the universe” and can “point to all the rest,” its own perspective is crafted by oblivion, meaning by the in-reflective zones of that point of view. Funes is still a character incapable of universal knowledge and universal thinking, even though oblivion has been “cured.” That is because the world can only be reflected through the renunciation mechanisms of finite perception. This is what Leibniz’s system had already affirmed, by endowing each monad with its own way of knowing the universe. Each monad is capable of knowing the universe as none of the other monads can. Leibniz’s philosophy brings into discussion a fundamental, apparently simple idea: the part, the fragment has its own possibility of knowing, remembering and even constructing the whole. And the paradox is that precisely those in-reflective zones of the “part” or the unit make it

³³ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 68.

³⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 488.

³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 69.

³⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 489.

³⁷ Rescher, 19.

capable of knowing the world or thinking the universe from its own interiority. The inherited idea that the fragment can know the whole from its own point of view gave details a major role in modernism's modalities of expression and disintegration.

The dream of fragmentary individuation born out of the insufficiency of finite perception and the over-abundance of sensory input was expressed in the 17th century by all the sciences performing division. Foucault's discussion about the scientific power of naming things that started at the beginning of the modern age sheds some light into the system of differences and identities which wanted to distribute each thing its alliance and particularity. The example Borges uses in his story is the following:

“Locke, en el siglo xvn, postuló (y reprobó) un idioma imposible en el que cada cosa individual, cada piedra, cada pájaro y cada rama tuviera un nombre propio; Funes proyectó alguna vez un idioma análogo, pero lo desechó por parecerle demasiado general, demasiado ambiguo.³⁸”

“Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general to him, too ambiguous.³⁹”

Memory exhausts itself inside the principle of individuation and details can no longer function as a particularizing language, but as one which creates a generalization of the fragment. Schleifer's “logic of abundance” is resented inside language by the “dialectics of poverty and abundance” existent inside the power of signs themselves. Each naming carries that “too much” and “not enough” present in the mechanisms of language presenting things both as detail and as whole. The world of Funes is the imaginary untamed world that contains a vertigo of time, fossils and mutual responses inside each thing and name that he picks up. This unleashed world from behind sentences, classifications and validations is not only incomprehensible for the narrator, but also frightful:

“Entonces vi la cara de la voz que toda la noche había hablado. Ireneo tenía diecinueve años; había nacido en 1868; me pareció monumental como el bronce, más antiguo que Egipto, anterior a las profecías y a las pirámides. Pensé que cada una de mis palabras

³⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 489.

³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 70.

(que cada uno de mis gestos) perduraría en su implacable memoria; me entorpeció el temor de multiplicar ademanes inútiles.⁴⁰

"Then I saw the face belonging to the voice that had spoken all night long. Ireneo was nineteen years old; he had been born in 1868; he seemed to me as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids. I thought that each of my words (each of my movements) would persist in his implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures.⁴¹"

The impossibility of totalization is expressed in the lines above, including the uncontrollable echoes that each movement and gesture can manifest. It is not a fear of stored details and redundancies, but a fear of being incapable of foreseeing the perpetuation of one's tiny actions inside the free game of accumulated resonances. This brings us to Derrida and his concept of "play," defined in his essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. The idea Derrida develops refers to our metaphysical systems of thought which are all constructed in relation to a center. He sees these systems as structures which can be "thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center."⁴² But, after the history of metaphysics which proposed the many versions of a center as presence, there comes a "rupture" in the structure, brought by the fact that we started to think about the desire of a center and its possible destitution inside the free play of significances made possible by the absence of a center and its substitution with signs. The sign is understood by Derrida as *supplementing* that lack of center which opens the interchangeability of meanings. Absence is now supplemented by the "overabundance of the signifier."⁴³ Totalization becomes impossible, but it is no longer understood as that richness of the world which cannot be grasped by a finite subject, but as a territory of loose *play* no longer regulated by structurality:

«Si la totalisation alors n'a plus de sens, ce n'est pas parce que l'infinité d'un champ ne peut être couverte par un regard ou un discours finis, mais parce que la nature du champ — à savoir le langage et un langage fini — exclut la totalisation: ce champ est en effet celui d'un jeu, c'est-à-dire de substitutions infinies dans la clôture d'un ensemble fini. Ce champ ne permet ces substitutions

⁴⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras Completas...*, 490.

⁴¹ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths...*, 71.

⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Allan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001) Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005, 353.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 367.

infinies que parce qu'il est fini, c'est-à-dire parce qu'au lieu d'être un champ inépuisable, comme dans l'hypothèse classique, au lieu d'être trop grand, il lui manque quelque chose, à savoir un centre qui arrête et fonde le jeu des substitutions.⁴⁴»

“If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.⁴⁵”

Thus, we could say that the Baroque's disquiet of an unperceived infinite world, enclosed inside the finite representation, returns in postmodernism and post-structuralism as a different problem of thought generated by the same horror of infinity. This time, the infinite is not the multiplicity unfolded by the monad, but an infinite made possible by the absence that opens the *play* of substitutions. We are no longer talking about the infinite we need to synthesize in our perceptions, but the infinite we have to play with in order to avoid discovering the missing part, the gap inside the Real or the signifier. “The fear of multiplying useless gestures” marks the suspicion towards the free *play* of significances inside a mind that remembers everything, rendering all superfluous. Details become just an evidence of the wastefulness of the infinite when dissected by the memorious Funes. Thus, we can see that the “hopelessness of abundance” Schleifer was talking about, in relation to modernism, has its exhaustion mechanisms at work even inside a post-modern world, that seemed to celebrate abundance as freedom. The missing center turns the inter-mirroring of forms and details into a free *play*. Details can no longer contradict the systems of thought gravitating around a center, because they are now inside the free *play* of significances and they are no more an exception to the perfect assemblage. We could argue that, in post-modernism, details become residues of the continuously new emerging abundances. Their subversive positions seem to have been neutralized now that accumulated forms of time and space integrate back their excesses. Excesses cannot function as rests because they are re-elaborated inside the “logic of abundance” and details are no longer interruptions of continuities because they have been turned into redundancies. However, the

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1967), 423.

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference...*, 365.

residual signature of details, in post-modernism, still has the potential of reconfiguring the play, make one game fall into another or convoke new essentializations of the picture. The “uselessness” of accumulated details creates new forces of pulverization and new tangled configurations of that “dust of the world.” Although, the functionality of details in post-modernism has changed, their mechanisms of creating zones of relevance and irrelevance, clarity and obscurity, ephemeral and ever-lasting are still at play inside a world of fragmented, scattered memories.

Conclusion

As we have seen, details do have a personal logic of assembling and re-formulating the world not only at a visual and aesthetic level. In the Baroque world, the problematic of detail gave way to new modalities of imagining interiority. The interiority of detail became the infinite inside the finite and a horror of infinity started to structure the Real as a multilayer scene of the world. The newly claimed interiority was a symptom of the worlds of multiplicities that had crumbled after the fall of the hierarchic model of the universe based on layers of degraded reality. Details were no longer part of a degraded sensible reality, but became containers of interiorities. They could function as uncontainable elements of a system of representation or thought and, thus, could generate forces of distance and belonging inside the dialectics of significance. Singularization and individualization of the fragment turned details into “mirrors of the universe” with their own possibilities of knowing and remembering the whole. In post-modernism, the impossible task of totalization was no longer the impossibility of finite perception in grasping the world in all its detail, but the impossibility of encompassing the free *play* of significances generated by the absence of a center. Thus, we argued that details no longer function as the subversive exception to the perspective, but as residues of accumulated times and spaces.

In post-modernism, details do not work in relation to systems anymore, but in relation to the continuities they draw or contradict in their residual textures. The undistinguished “dust of the world,” represented by details, generates a new imaginary of waste that makes our forgetting mechanisms bury their uncontainable chains of continuity elsewhere. As Borges himself confesses “Funes el Memorioso” is a metaphor for insomnia. We could extrapolate this metaphor of insomnia at a cultural level and talk about the insomniac continuities of a world of unmarked intersections. New experiences emerge from the impression of an infinitely mixed world vulgarized or spiritualized by details, understood as inherited from an early-modern world which regarded them as the intersection between particularity and universality, spirit and matter, eccentricity and simplicity, ephemeral and ever-lasting etc. This is why we consider it of interest to compare and theorize our

relationship to details in different periods across the history of ideas. The question we need to raise is not a subjective one: which details do we remember when constructing narratives of time, but how do details know and remember the world. As we have seen, details nail down the world inside different types of temporalities generated by the dialectics between abundance and simplicity, infinite and finite.