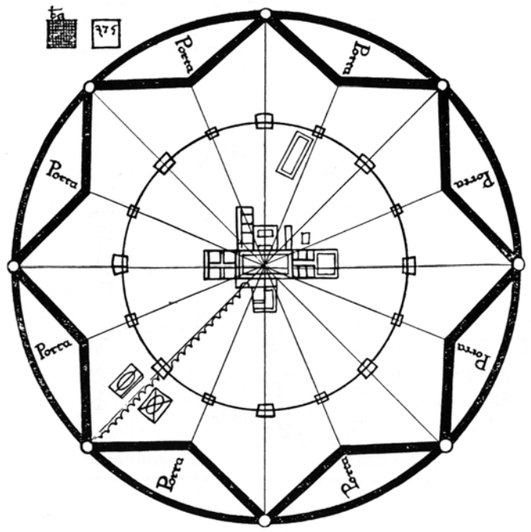
« Mon livre et moi ne faisons qu'un. »

—Montaigne



Plan of Filarete's ideal city of Sforzinda (from the 1465 Filarete treatise), illustrations from Leonardo Benevolo, **History of the City**, Frankfurt am Main/New York, 1983

I declare that the Library is endless. Idealists argue that the hexagonal rooms are the necessary shape of absolute space, or at least of our perception of space. They argue that a triangular or pentagonal chamber is inconceivable. (Mystics claim that their ecstasies reveal to them a circular chamber containing an enormous circular book with a continuous spine that goes completely around the walls. But their testimony is suspect, their words obscure. That cyclical book is God.) Let it suffice for the moment that I repeat the classic dictum: The Library is a sphere whose exact center is any hexagon and whose circumference is unattainable.

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," in **Collected Fictions**, translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin Book, New York, 1998

Anonymous, Kodak circular photograph, ca. 1890

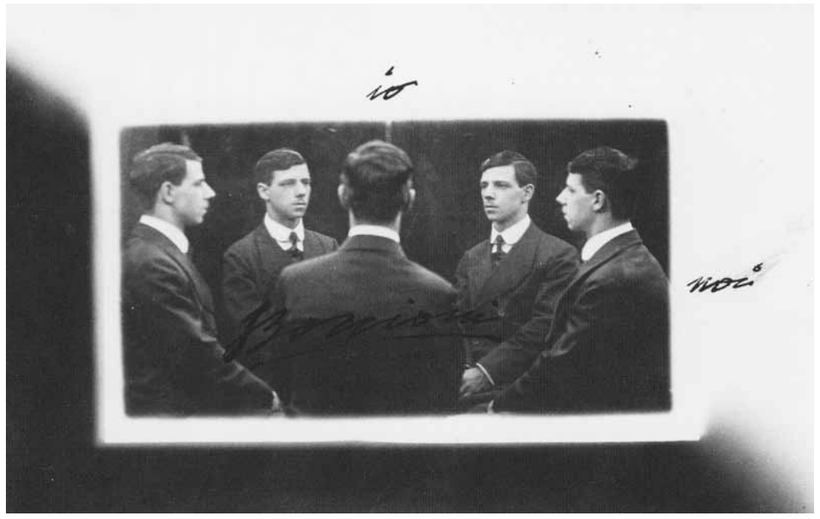
God is a circle whose centre is everywhere,
whose circumference is nowhere.

Anonymous, **The Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers** (12th Century)

Children's garden, Los Angeles, ca 1900, in **Cabinet**, A quartely magazine of art and culture, Issue 9 (Childhood), Brooklyn, NY, 2002-03

Robert Fludd (1574-1637), **The Intellectual, Imaginative, and Sensible Faculties of Mankind**, from Robert Fludd, *Itriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia.* CCA Collection

*In linguistics, ellipsis (from the Greek: élleipsis, “omission”) or elliptical construction refers to the omission from a clause of one or more words that would otherwise be required by the remaining éléments...or, the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding. An example of such omission: a mark or series of marks (. . . or * * * , for example) used in writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words...or ellipsis or ellipse (plurals -pses), the omission from a sentence of a word or words that would be required for complete clarity but which can usually be understood from the context. A common form of compression both in everyday speech and in poetry, it is used with notable frequency by T.S. Eliott as well as other poets of modernism. The sequence of three dots (...) employed to indicate the omission of some matter in a text is also known as an ellipsis.



Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916), **Io-noi**, 1907

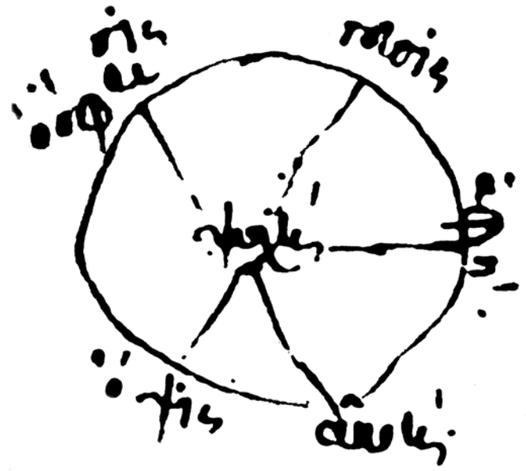
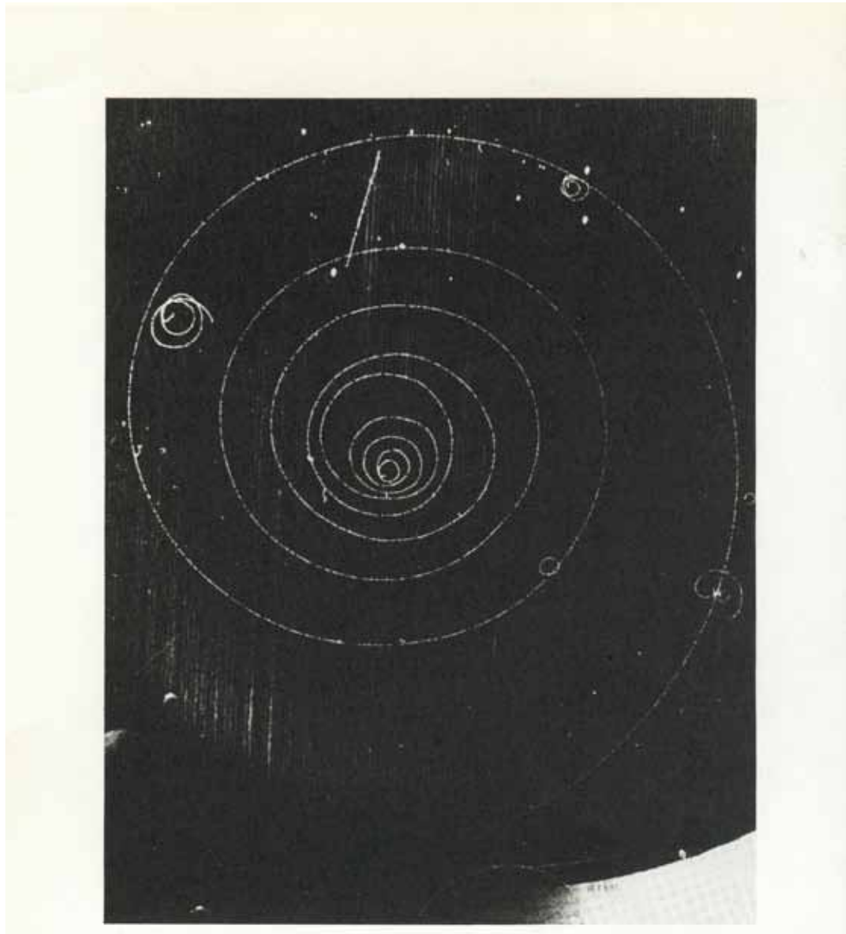


Schéma représentant l'âme entourée des cinq sens, en marge d'un manuscrit de *La République* XV^{e} siècle.

Comme l'ensemble de la pensée antique, la pensée platonicienne est fondée sur une conception analogique du monde qui établit un parallèle entre l'organisation de la cité et l'agencement de l'âme.
Le cosmos est une sorte de plan qui permet de penser l'univers politique aussi bien que la personne humaine. L'âme est un principe de mouvement; aussi est-elle destinée à animer le corps logé en elle.
L'âme du monde décrite dans le *Philèbe de Platon*, est ainsi un composé mixte de la limite et de l'illimité. Les cinq sens entraînent l'âme vers la démesure de l'illimité, des désirs contradictoires et des plaisirs multiples.



The spiral track made by an electron as it loses energy in the magnetic field of a bubble chamber

Georges Jean, **Voyage en Utopie**, Gallimard Découvertes, Paris, 1994

Anish Kapoor, **Void (#13)** 1991-92. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Warburg's Hermeneutic Circle

Today, philological and historical disciplines consider it (Warburg's *Mnemosyne*) a methodological given that the epistemological process that is proper to them is necessarily caught in a circle. The discovery of this circle as the foundation of all hermeneutics goes back to Schleiermacher and his intuition that in philology "the part can be understood only by means of the whole and every explanation of the part presupposes the understanding of the whole."(24) But this circle is in no sense a vicious one. On the contrary, it is itself the foundation of the rigor and rationality of the social sciences and humanities. For a science that wants to remain faithful to its own law, what is essential is not to leave this "circle of understanding," which would be impossible, but to "stay within it in the right way." (25) By virtue of the knowledge acquired at every step, the passage from the part to the whole and back again never returns to the same point; at every step, it necessarily broadens its radius, discovering a higher perspective that opens a new circle. The curve representing the hermeneutic circle is not a circumference, as has often been repeated, but a spiral that continually broadens its turns.

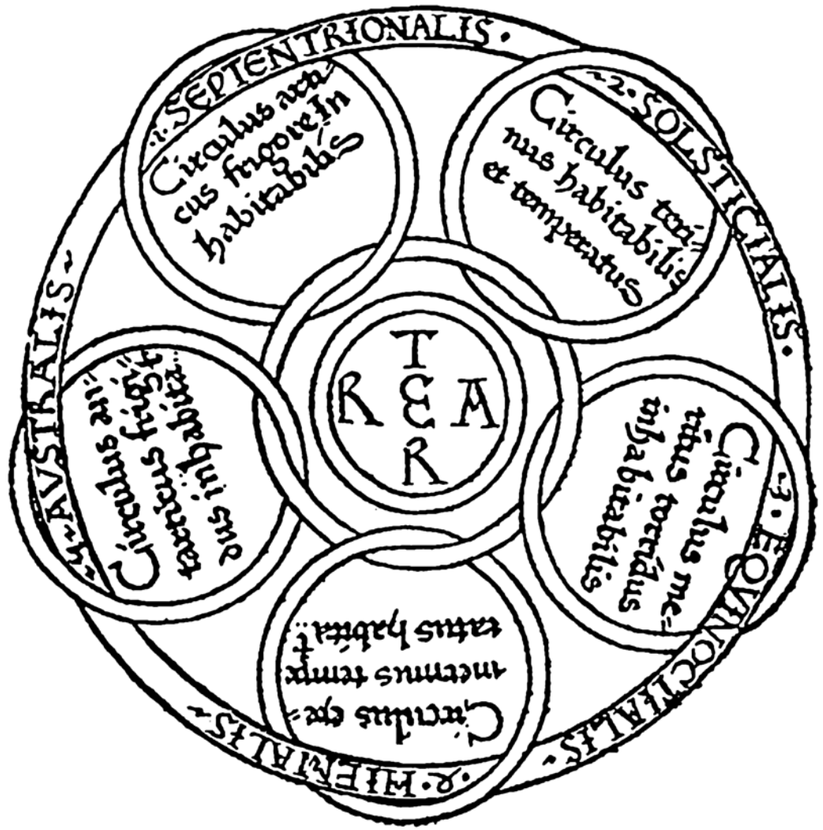
The science that recommended looking for "the good God" in the details perfectly illustrates the fecundity of a correct position in one's own hermeneutic circle. The spiraling movement toward an ever greater broadening of horizons can be followed in an exemplary fashion in the two central themes of Warburg's research: that of the "nymph" and that of the Renaissance revival of astrology.

In his dissertation on Botticelli's *Spring and Birth of Venus*, Warburg used literary sources to identify Botticelli's moving female figure as a "nymph." Warburg argued that this figure constituted a new iconographic type, one that makes it possible both to clarify the subject of Botticelli's paintings and to demonstrate "how Botticelli was settling accounts with the ideas that his epoch had of the ancients." (26) But in showing that the artists of the fifteenth century relied on a classical *Pathosformel* every time they sought to portray an intensified external movement, Warburg simultaneously revealed the Dionysian polarity of classical art. In the wake of Nietzsche, Warburg was the first to affirm this polarity in the domain of art history, which in his time was still dominated by Johann Joachim Winckelmann's model. In a still broader circle, the appearance of the nymph thus becomes the sign of a profound spiritual conflict in Renaissance culture, in which the rediscovery of the orgiastic charge of classical *Pathosformeln* had to be skillfully reconciled with Christianity in a delicate balance that is perfectly exemplified in the personality of the Florentine Francesco Sassetti, whom Warburg analyzes in a famous essay. And in the greatest circle of the hermeneutic spiral, the "nymph" becomes the cipher of a perennial polarity in Western culture, insofar as Warburg likens her to the dark, resting figure that Renaissance artists took from Greek representations of a river god. In one of his densest diary entries, Warburg considers this polarity, which afflicts the West with a kind of tragic schizophrenia: "Sometimes it looks to me as if, in my role as a psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization from its

images in an autobiographical reflex. The ecstatic 'Nympha' (manic) on the one side and the mourning river-god (depressive) on the other." (27)

An analogous progressive broadening of the hermeneutic spiral can also be observed in Warburg's treatment of the theme of astrological images. The narrower, properly iconographic circle coincides with the analysis of the subject of the frescos in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, which Warburg, as we have noted, recognized as figures from Abu Ma'shar's *Introductorium maius*. In the history of culture, however, this becomes the discovery of the rebirth of astrology in humanistic culture from the fourteenth century onwards and therefore of the ambiguity of Renaissance culture, which Warburg was the first to perceive in an epoch in which the Renaissance still appeared as an age of enlightenment in contrast to the darkness of the Middle Ages. In the final lines traced by the spiral, the appearance of the images and rivers of demonic antiquity at the very start of modernity becomes the symptom of a conflict at the origin of our civilization, which cannot master its own bipolar tension. As Warburg explained, introducing an exhibit of astrological images to the German Oriental Studies Conference in 1926, those images show "beyond all doubt that European culture is the result of conflicting tendencies, of a process in which—as far as these astrological attempts at orientation are concerned—we must seek neither friends nor enemies, but rather symptoms of a movement of pendular oscillation between the two distinct poles of magico-religious practice and mathematical contemplation." (28)

Warburg's hermeneutic circle can thus be figured as a spiral that moves across three main levels: the first is that of iconography and the history art; the second is that of the history of culture; and the third and broadest level is that of the "nameless science" to which Warburg dedicated his life and that aims to diagnose Western man through a consideration of his phantasms. The circle that revealed the good God hidden in the details was not a vicious circle, even in the Nietzschean sense of a *circo vitiosus deus*.



Notes

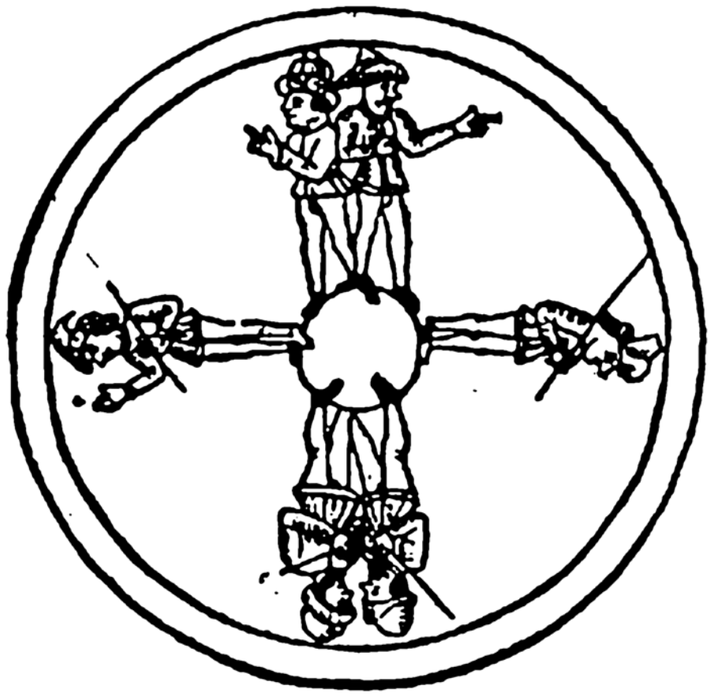
24. On the hermeneutic circle, see Spitzer's magisterial observations in the first chapter of Leo Spitzer, **Linguistics and Literary History** (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 1-29.

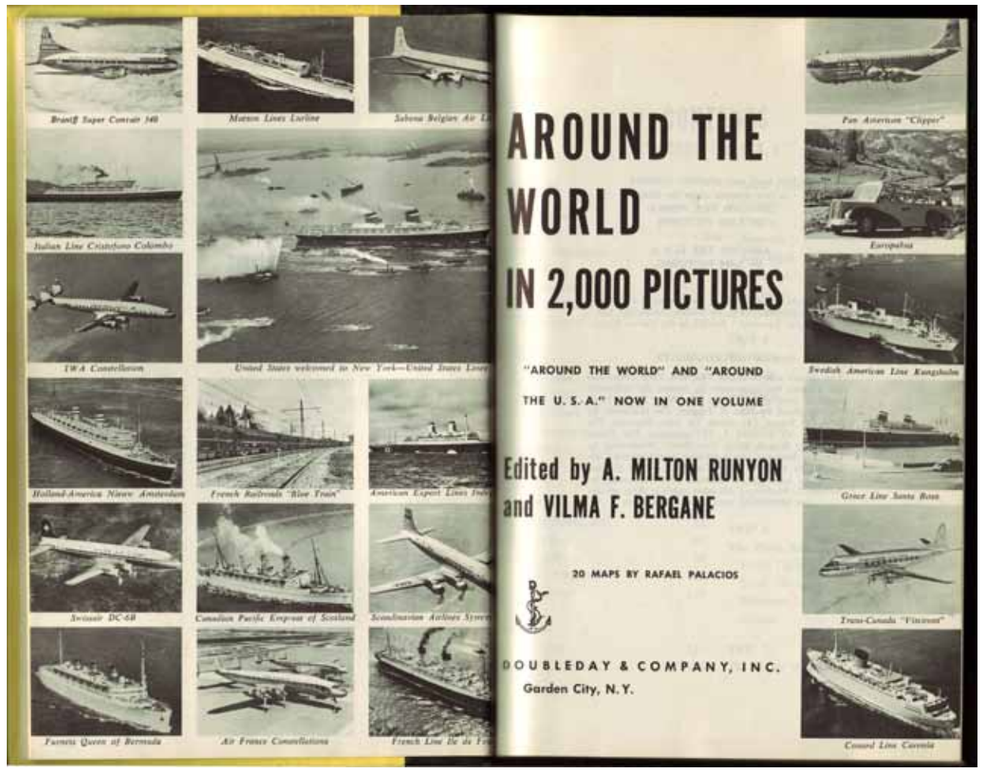
25. I take this observation from Martin Heidegger, who philosophically grounded the hermeneutic circle in **Sein und Zeit** (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1928), pp. 151-53; translated as Martin Heidegger, **Being and Time**, trans. John Mac-quarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 192-95.
26. Aby Warburg, Sandro Botticellis "Gehurt der Venus" und "Frühling" (Hamburg: Von Leopold Voss, 1893), p. 47; reprinted in Warburg, **Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen**, p. 61.

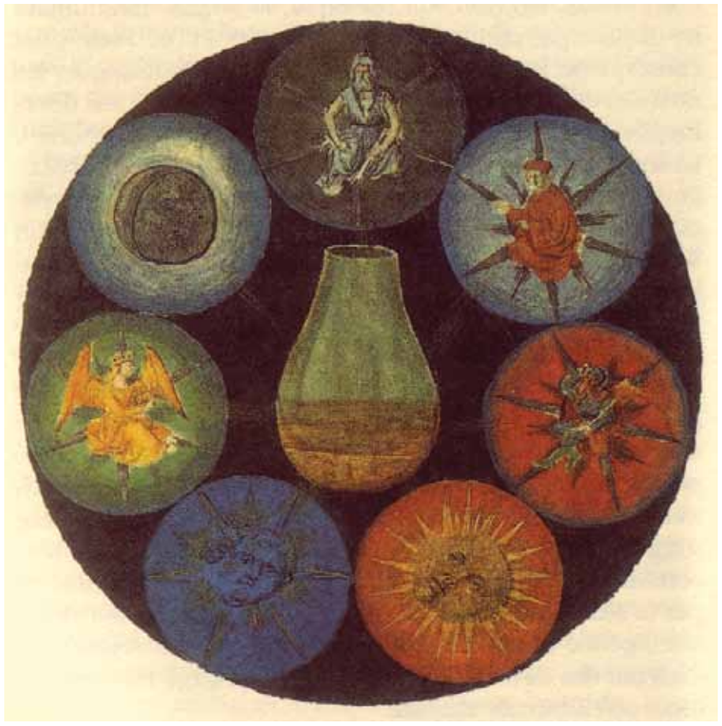
27. Quoted in Gombrich, Aby Warburg, p. 303.

28. Aby Warburg, "Orientalisierende Astrologie," **Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft 6** (1927). Since it is always necessary to save reason from rationalists, it is worth noting that the categories that Warburg uses in his diagnosis are infinitely more subtle than the contemporary opposition between rationalism and irrationalism. Warburg interprets this conflict in terms of polarity and not dichotomy. One of Warburg's greatest contributions to the science of culture is his rediscovery of Goethe's notion of polarity for a global comprehension of culture. This is particularly important if one considers that the opposition of rationalism and irrationalism has often distorted interpretations of the cultural tradition of the West.

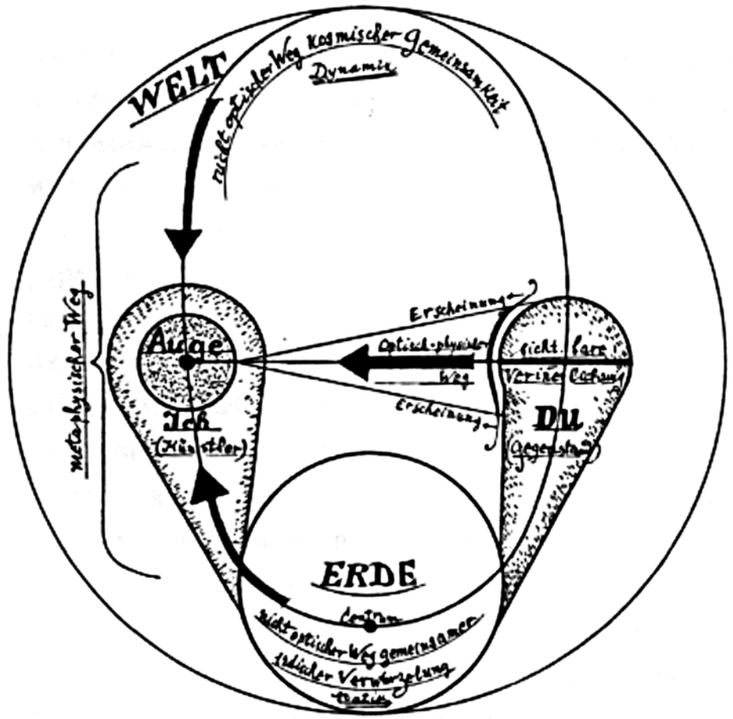
Giorgio Agamben, **Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy**,
Daniel Heller-Roazen, ed.&trans., Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1999




AROUND THE WORLD
IN 2,000 PICTURES
"AROUND THE WORLD" AND "AROUND THE U. S. A." NOW IN ONE VOLUME
Edited by A. MILTON RUNYON and VILMA F. BERGANE
20 MAPS BY RAFAEL PALACIOS
DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.
Garden City, N.Y.



Carte “Ch’on ha do—P’al sibil guk” extraite du livre *Tongguk chaido*, Corée, 17e siècle ou postérieur. Musée Guimet, Paris.



Paul Klee, **Eye, Centre, You**, illustration for the essay
Wege des Naturstudiums (Ways of Nature Study), Weimar: 1923

Umbo (Otto Umbehr) (1902-1980), **Untitled/Selfportrait**, 1935,
photograph: Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst

Umbo (Otto Umbehr) (1902-1980), **Die Himmelskamera**, 1937,
photograph: Berlinische Galerie, Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst

Illustration from K.C. Clark, **Positioning in Radiography,** 1939

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), **Rotorelief (Optical Disk)**, 1935

Several of Duchamp's cryptic statements on the transition from the space of everyday life to the four-dimensional continuum suggest that the series of overlapping circles superimposed upon these segments indicate entry into a fourth dimension. For Duchamp, the circle was a figure of dimensional collapse. In a text from *The Green Box* he demonstrated this conviction by describing the rotation of a horizontal dividing line, G, that intersects a vertical axis. This vertical line suggests a division into a left plane and a right, which are occupied by points A and B. Duchamp attempted to demonstrate the collapse of such a "left" and "right" by asserting that the dividing line G may rotate in three dimensions either to the left toward A or the right toward B, but in either case the continuous path of circular rotation—in which one end meets the other—destroys left and right, displacing them by two isomorphic but directionally opposite continuums:

And *on the other hand*: the vertical axis considered separately turning on itself, a generating line at a right angle e.g., will always determine a circle in the 2 cases 1st turning in the direction A, 2nd direction B.—

Thus, *if it* were still possible, in the case of the vertical axis at rest, to consider 2 *contrary directions* for the generating line G., the figure engendered (whatever it may be), can no longer be called left or right of the axis—

As there is gradually less differentiation from axis to axis, i.e. as all the axes gradually disappear in a fading verticality the front and the back, the reverse and the obverse acquire a circular significance: the right and the left, which are the 4 arms of the front and back, melt *along* the verticals.

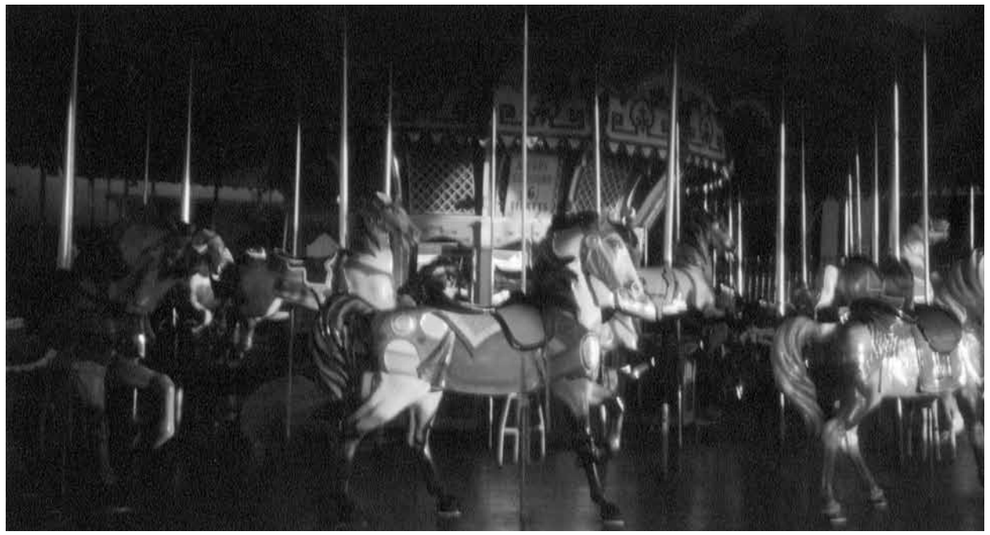
The interior and exterior (in a fourth dimension) can receive a similar identification, but the axis is no longer vertical and has no longer a *one*-dimensional appearance.

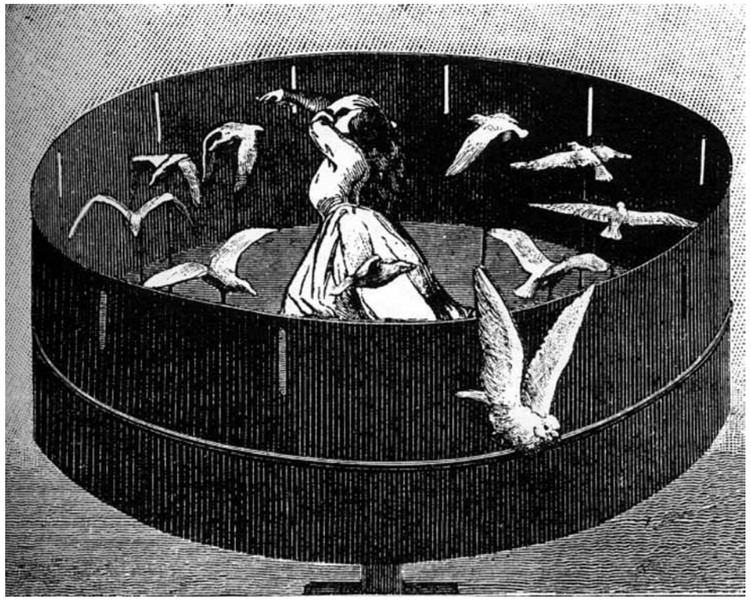
The collapse of interior and exterior, left and right, represented by the circle, indicates entry into a four-dimensional continuum. Duchamp's description of "four-dimensional lines" gives further evidence for reading the chains of circles along these segments in *Tu m'* as an image of dimensional transfer: "The *4-dim'l straight line* is defined by *the whole set of successive spheres with larger and larger radii* starting from point O.... This straight 4-dim' line = 3-dim'l space and does not get out of that space." Although the radii of all of the circles attached to a single multicolored segment in *Tu m'* are equal, the circles vary in radius from segment to segment, as does the spacing between them. Whereas the text specifies a line composed of successive spheres, *Tu m'* contains chains of circles. Nevertheless the resemblance between the "four-dimensional line" as theorized in Duchamp's writing and the segments covered in linked circles in the painting is sufficiently striking to suggest an identity between them.

David Joselit, **Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910-1941**, An October Book, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachussetts and London, England, 1998

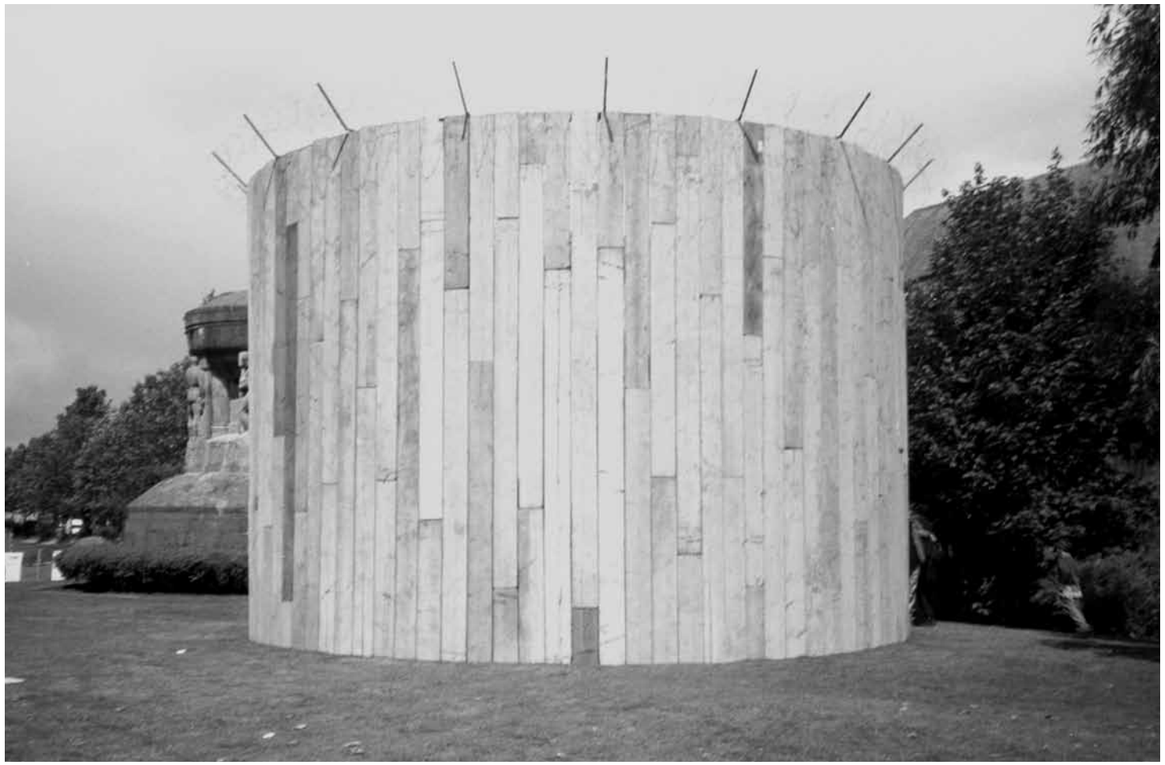
Unknown, **Five-Way Portrait of Marcel Duchamp**, private collection Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, 1917

Max Dean, **Pass it on**, vue d'installation (photographie polaroid souvenir), Montréal, 1981



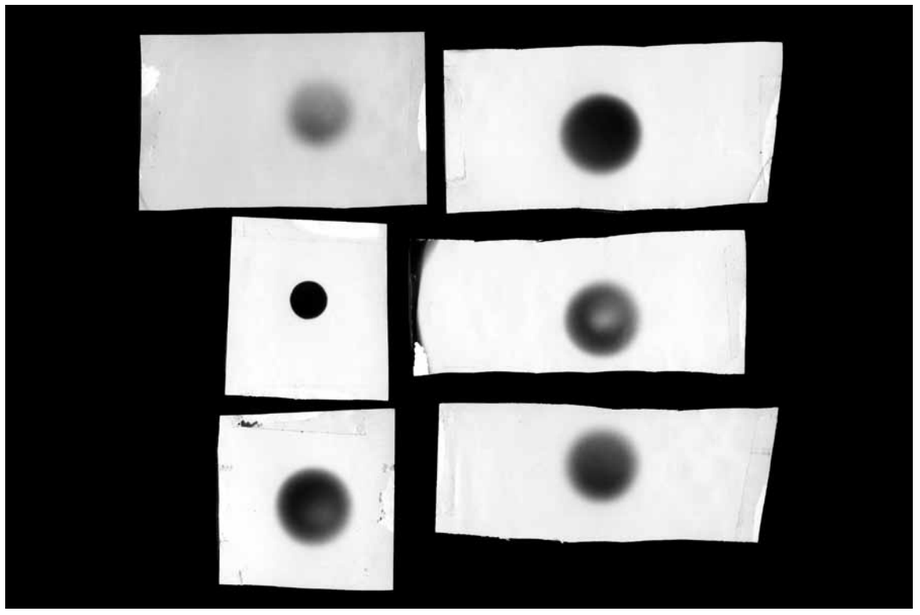


Max Ernst, **Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au carmel**, George Braziller, Inc., New York.



Hans Haacke, **Standort Merry-go-round**, Münster, 1997

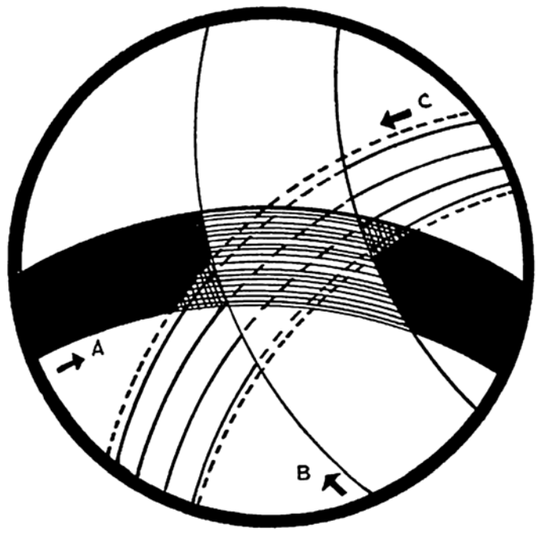
Elisabeth Ballet, **Trait pour trait**, Domaine de Kerguéhennec, Brittany, 1993



Susan Coolen, photographic work, courtesy of the artist.

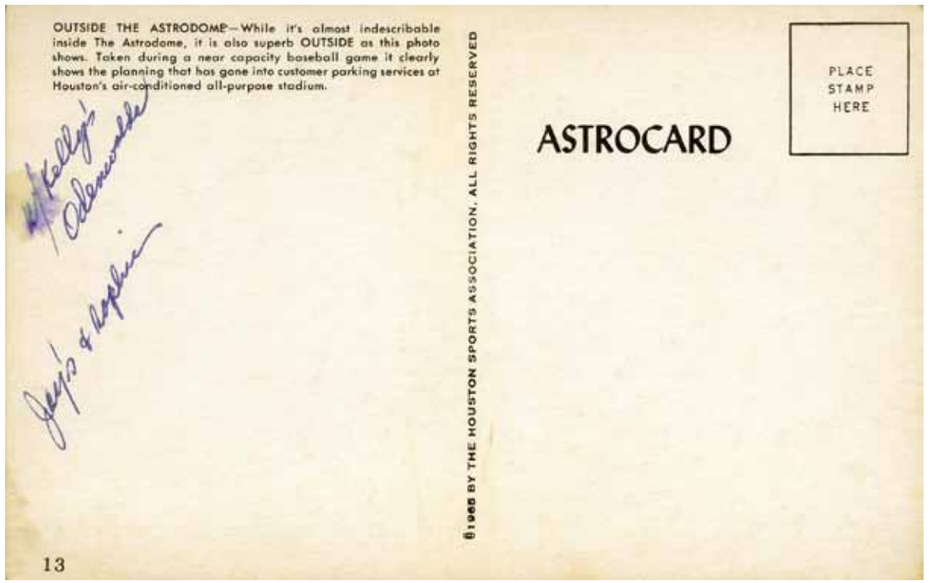
I give a schematic **drawing** to make my meaning quite clear :

The film about Mr **A** runs from left to right: birth, course of life. The film about the lady **B** runs from the bottom upwards: birth, course of her life. The projection surfaces of the two films intersect: love, marriage, etc. The two films can then either proceed by intersecting in translucent sequences of events or can run parallel; or a single new film about the two people may take the place of the original two. Another film, the third or fourth, about Mr **C** could run simultaneously with the episodes **A** and **B** from the top downwards or from right to left or even in another direction until it can properly intersect or merge with the other films, etc.



Such a **scheme** will, of course, be just as suitable, if not more so, for non-objective light-projections in the manner of the photogram. If colour effects are used, still richer creative possibilities will arise.

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), **Fotogramm**, ca. 1925/30

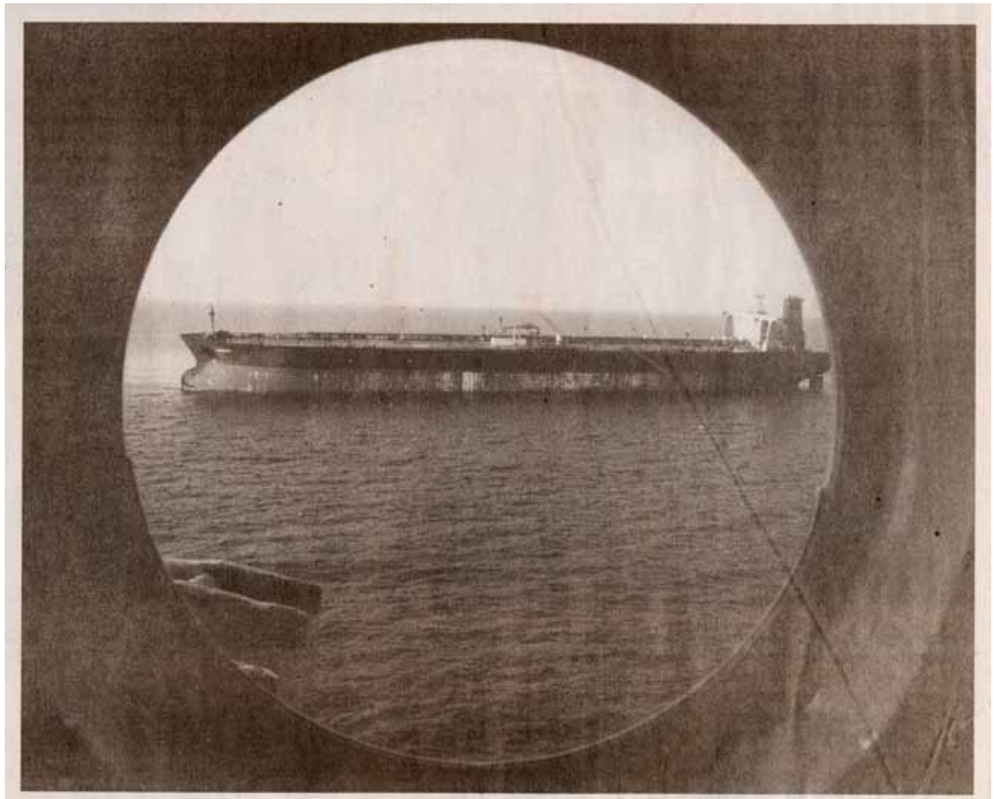

OUTSIDE THE ASTRODOME—While it's almost indescribable inside The Astrodome, it is also superb OUTSIDE as this photo shows. Taken during a near capacity baseball game it clearly shows the planning that has gone into customer parking services at Houston's air-conditioned all-purpose stadium.

ASTROCARD

PLACE STAMP HERE

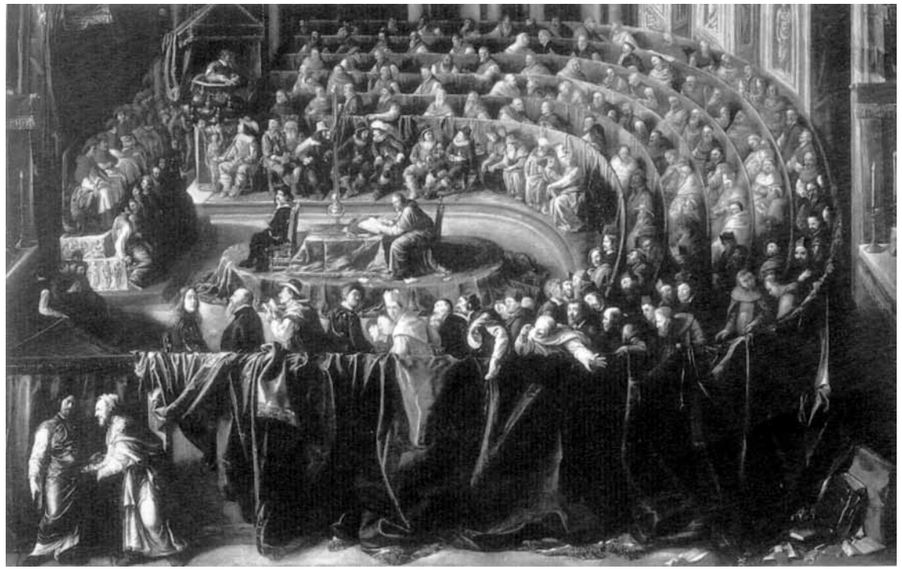
©1965 BY THE HOUSTON SPORTS ASSOCIATION, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

13



AMR NABIL ASSOCIATED PRESS

The French oil tanker Limburg, two days after an explosion ripped through its hold off the coast of Yemen last October. "We would have preferred to hit a U.S. frigate, but no problem, because they are all infidels," said a statement from the Islamic Army of Aden, which claimed responsibility.

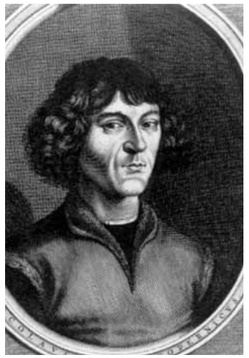


A painting of Galileo's trial at which he was forced to recant his Copernican opinions. The Catholic Church declared that his heresies were 'more scandalous, more detestable, and more pernicious to Christianity than any contained in the books of Calvin, of Luther, and of all other heretics put together.'

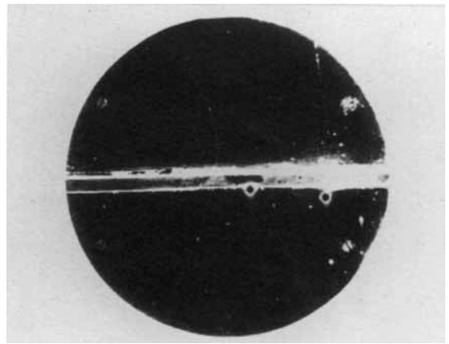
Anonymous, 1632. Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library, London

Copernicus

AIP Emilio Segrè Visual Archives



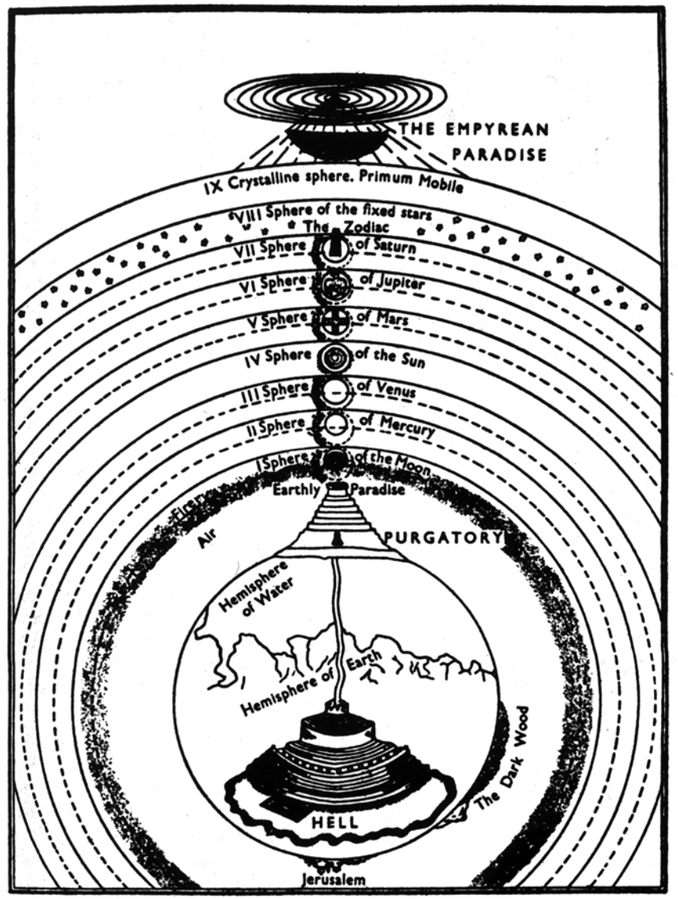
Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) spent most of his life as a canon at Frauenberg Cathedral. His idea of placing the Sun at the centre of the system of planets was the crucial first step that inaugurated the modern scientific revolution. The second step was taken by the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), who proposed that the planets move in elliptic, rather than circular, orbits. With Kepler's innovations, the Copernican system was significantly more accurate in astronomical prediction than the rival Earth-centred view. These developments occurred just before the telescope transformed our picture of the heavens.



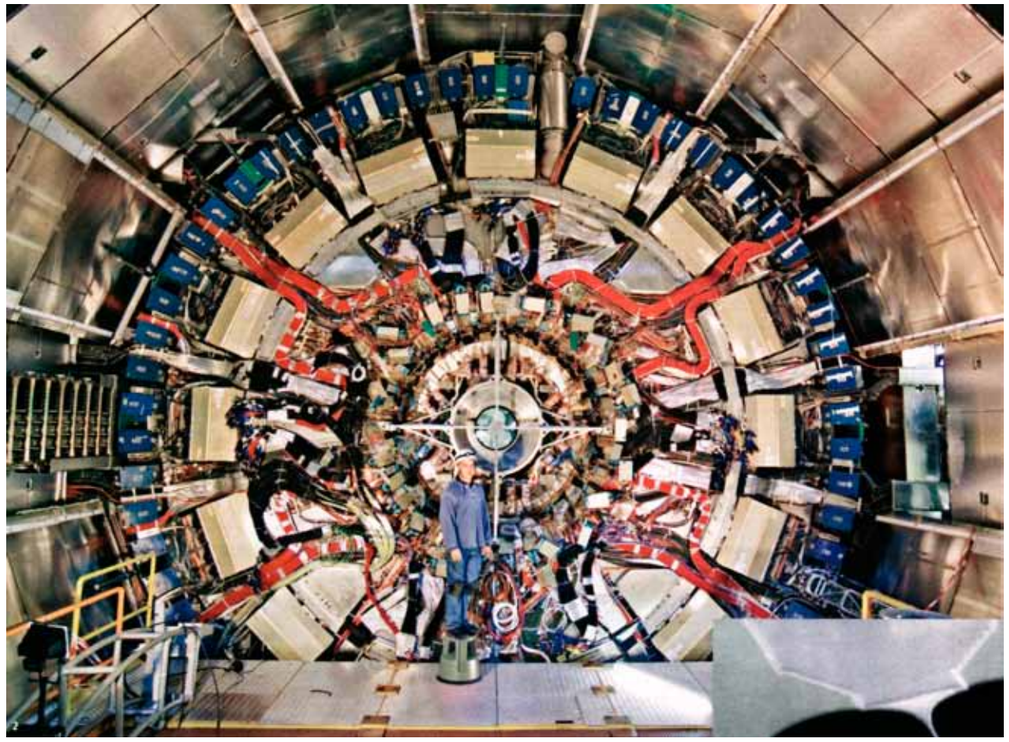
California Institute of Technology

This cloud chamber photograph taken by Carl Anderson provided the first evidence for the positron. Note that the curvature of the track in the top half of the photograph is greater than at the bottom, which means that the particle in the top half has less energy. The particle must therefore have travelled from the bottom to the top since a charged particle will lose energy in passing through the lead plate that Anderson had fixed in the chamber. This trick allowed Anderson to be sure that the charge of the particle was positive, and he was also able to determine that its mass was the same as that of the electron.

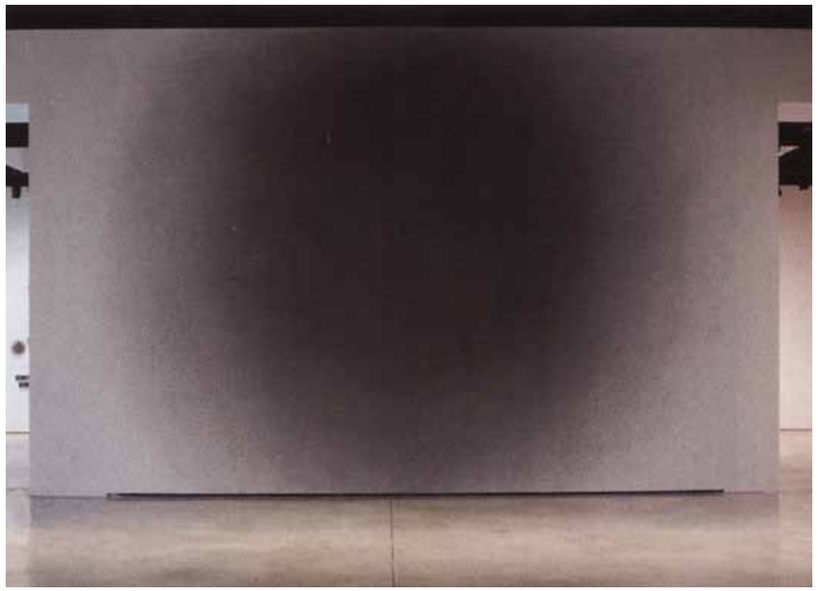
Dante



Dante's vision of the Medieval universe as depicted in The Divine Comedy had Hell at the centre of the Earth and the cosmos. Paradise was up beyond the system of planets. Life on Earth is precariously balanced between these two possible final fates, both geographically and morally.



Unidentified

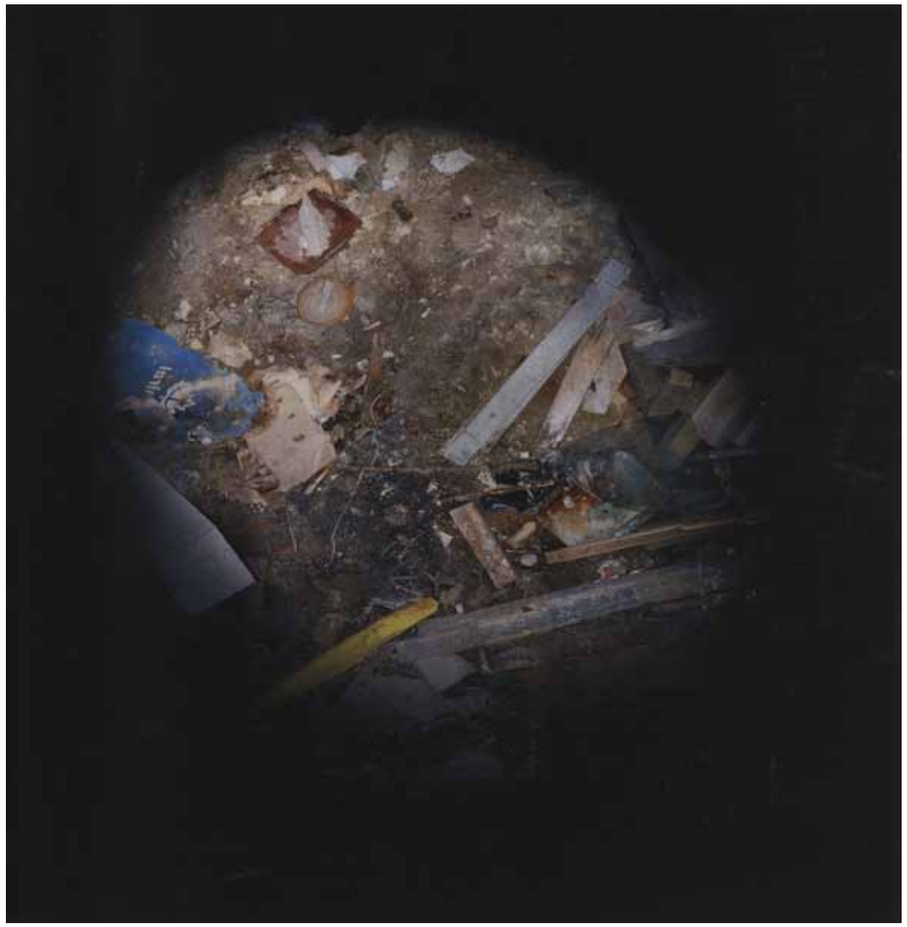


I.

In this book I seek to identify the ambiguities of present-day optical creation. The means afforded by photography play an important part therein, though it is one which most people today still fail to recognise: extending the limits of the depiction of nature and the use of light as a creative agent: chiaroscuro in place of pigment.

Ambiguities of present-day optical creation

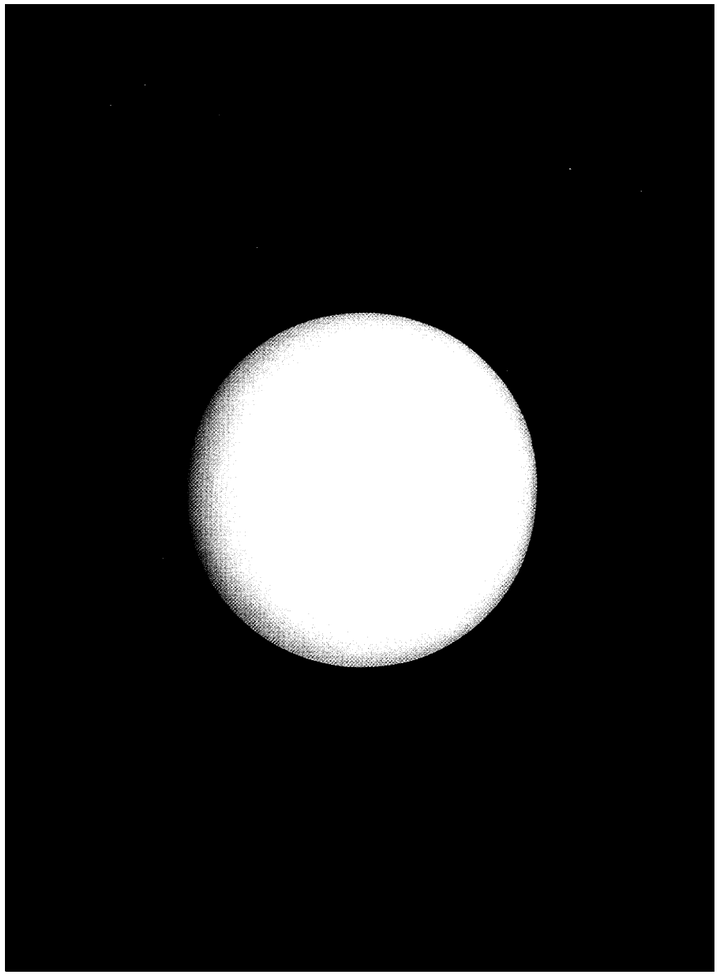
Irène F. Whittome, **Chateau d'eau : lumière mythique (Reservoir: Mythical Light),** 1997
Collection du Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. © SODART 2005



Alain Paiement, **Parages (cave / iris),** 2002

DAVE SIDAWAY THE GAZETTE

The Laval sur le Lac team works hard to sweep a rock behind guards and into the house during an early season tournament at the Longue-Pointe Curling Club.



Jamie Lee Byars (1932-1997)**, The Head of Plato,** 1986

The world, it is true, has not yet been destroyed, but from the beginning mankind has seen the end of many worlds. With the death of each and every human being a specific world ceases to exist. Views and conceptions of the world come and go with the emergence and disappearance of the generations of man. Owing to the reductionistic nature of the way mankind views and has viewed the world, it is necessary, today more than ever before, to put such mental attidudes behind us. The end of mankind's views of the world and the end of the world itself point one to the other. It is imperative to try and comprehend the world from the point of view of its end, doing so, however, before the eschatological catastrophe takes place.

The German word "Welt" (= world) has become an abstract temporal noun. It can be translated as the "life bearing circle of the human community" and refers to the times and spaces of human existence. There is no evidence of this meaning in the pre-Christian era; it serves, in fact, as a translation of the Latin word "saeculum." In the 10th and 11th centuries, it appears in the meaning of "epoch," "era" analogous to "aion," and in the meaning of "generation." Only gradually did the word "world" become the equivalent of "mundus" and "kosmos." World retains the meaning of "circle of the earth's inhabitants," "existence in this world," and refers to a "self-contained whole, to universal fullness of any kind whatsoever." The word "world" is also used to designate "an in itself self-contained domain of this or that kind which, in its independence and autonomy, represents, as it were, a mini-universe," "the entirety of a spiritual sphere," or "the totality of the phenomena and facts that can be grasped by the mind and senses".

In summary, then, for our context, we have the following results of our etymological analysis:

1. "World" serves to designate a period of time; it implies the emergence and passing away of time; "world" is equivalent to "time."
2. "World" specifies the human commmunity; the place where one lives in contrast to uninhabited areas and the times before man existed.
3. "World" signifies a self-contained entity, a reduction of complexity to the limited unity of a world-view.

"World" is a heuristic concept which has arisen by an approach which involves exclusion and inclusion, destroys complexity and puts limits on candor. It implies the reduction of realities to signs which make it possible under pressure to comprehend things quickly, to make them as much as possible one's own in the shortest possible time.

Christoph Wulf, "The Temporality of World-Views and Self-Images," in Dietmar Kamper & Christoph Wulf, eds., **Looking Back on the End of the World,** Semiotext(e) Foreign Agent Series, Columbia University, New York, 1989

GLOBE AND MAIL • FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2001

Comment

TOWER OF BABEL IN CONSTRUCTION/CORBIS/MAGMA

Get beyond Babel

Those who would preserve the world's disappearing languages would tongue-tie us all, says Nigerian-born writer **KEN WIWA**. Live and let die

Earlier this week I received compelling evidence that I am doomed to extinction. According to figures released by the Worldwatch Institute, half of the world's 6,800 languages face annihilation; that's because they are spoken by fewer than 2,500 people. Here in Canada, only three of 50 aboriginal languages may survive the coming cultural Armageddon. Lurking in the reaction to this news, I suspect, is the fear that we will end up speaking English in some monocultural flatland called "Disney."

There is an impassioned school of thought that says that unless we take active steps to preserve our "cultural diversity" — read "languages" — the human race is in danger. When we lose a language, these doomsday prophets say, we lose its knowledge base and world-view; this, they assure us, impoverishes us all.

As a member of an indigenous people, and as someone actively concerned about the fate of my culture, I used to subscribe to this view. I'd soak up the arguments of philologists and writers I admired warning about the implications of losing our languages. I bought all these arguments. Then I started examining my own community's experience.

I am Ogoni. We number an estimated 500,000, and speak six mutually unintelligible dialects — languages, by now — on an overpopulated but fertile floodplain in southern Nigeria. The Ogoni languages and culture are threatened by Nigeria's socioeconomic realities. Our environment has been compromised by aggressive and irresponsible oil exploration. Unemployment, inadequate health care and neglect by the country's rulers has ripped out my community's heart.

The young, the energetic and the ambitious have no option but to leave in search of better opportunities. The community is left in the care of the old and the infirm. A whole generation of Ogoni is growing up elsewhere, speaking English, forgetting our languages, exiled from our villages and our traditions. When the elders die, they take our traditions, our folktales, our myths, our history and our cultural memories with them. As we say in Africa, "When an old man dies it is like a library has been burned down."

Which is why I started looking into Ogoni history, thinking about my language, trying to shoehorn our myths and folktales into a compelling story to keep them alive for another generation. But the more I study our history, especially the way our culture and our language has evolved, the more I suspect that those of us who have set out with the intention of reviving a culture by fixing it in time and space may actually be doing more harm than good.

Take the development of my language. According to one of our creation myths, the original Ogoni settlement was at a place called Nama. Here the first Ogoni people cleared the surrounding forest, left one tree standing and established our roots. Over time our community grew, and people migrated westward into the rain forests until there were 128 villages in Ogoni. Because these settlements were isolated, the language altered subtly. If you go to Ogoni today you can still hear the effects. In the eastern villages we speak a different dialect from the villages on the western fringes.

The point I am making here is that language is in constant flux. To fix it in a particular time and place is to arrest the movement and vitality that shapes a language's evolution. The more I examine the way my language has evolved, the more I believe that the best a language can do in response is to go with the flow. As far as I know, no Ogoni language has a word for "computer," but we do say *faa-bu-yon* (car of the sky) — or airplane.

Unless we make a huge effort to open up the language and the culture to embrace our experience of contact with other cultures and the modern world, we will always be vulnerable. To say that is not to diminish the past or our culture, but to acknowledge a simple truth: Indigenous peoples must not turn inward and cling to nostalgia for sustenance. Though we look back, we must always go forward.

For me, that's the great poetic insight in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The community of Macondo begins amid vibrant energy, but ossifies into a parochialism trapped in a cycle of self-repeating prophecies that refuse to embrace or even acknowledge the passage of time. When Marquez delivers his verdict on Macondo (races condemned to 100 years of solitude do not get a second chance), it seems to me to be a warning to all the language curators and conservationists working to preserve our cultures in some cultural museum.

It is a warning that the guardians of the French language, the Academie Française, might heed. Once French was the international language of the world; thanks to the Academie's fastidious custody, it is becoming inflexible. English, on the other hand, has rarely been as neurotic about its purity. Most English words are borrowed from other languages; little Anglo-Saxon survives. Only an incurable romantic would attempt to revive Old English for general use. No, English has evolved, absorbed and adapted. Open to foreign influence, it borrows unashamedly. That's why English has more than 500,000 words in its vocabulary, while French has little more than 100,000.

For me the rise and preeminence of English is an example to all cultures about how a language survives and thrives. When Julius Caesar invaded Britain 2,000 years ago, English did not exist. Fifteen hundred years later, Shakespeare had a potential audience of only five million English-speakers. Over the next 400 years, English would come to be spoken by more than one billion people. According to *The Story of English* (by Robert McCrum and Robert MacNeil), English is now "more widely scattered, more widely spoken than any other language has ever been."

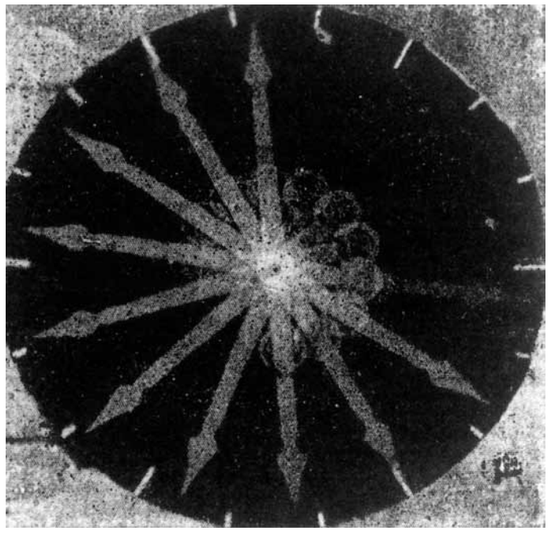
Thanks to its versatility, shameless habit of appropriation and the violence and aggression of its people, English is now the *lingua franca* of the world. What is more remarkable is that despite its mongrel nature, the English world-view has persisted. Through all the mutations and adaptations it has still managed to service and protect a small island's place in the world.

The English people and the English language have survived by picking up influences and adapting words from dead languages, like Latin and Ancient Greek, and grafting elements from their worldviews, religions and philosophies onto the English trunk.

English is both a lesson and an obstacle to the development of other languages and cultures. Which is why it strikes me that to lament the death of languages and to prescribe a solution that freezes language in time is to condemn a culture and a language to certain extinction.

If cultural diversity is so vital to our survival as a race, we must understand how languages work over time. After all, it only took English 400 years to achieve its current status. Who is to say that in another 500 years English will not go the same way as Greek, Latin or French? There is one more lesson that leaps out from my reading of the story of English. It is this: Languages and cultures don't die — they just get absorbed into something else.

Born in Lagos, Ken Wiwa is the author of In the Shadow of a Saint.



Successive positions of the hands on a chronometric dial showing the time intervals between successive exposures.

Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904), **Le mouvement**, 1894

Metamorphoses of the Circle

Throughout the recorded history of our culture, thinkers and poets have relied on the basic structural pattern of the circle in order to convey their respective views of being. (...)

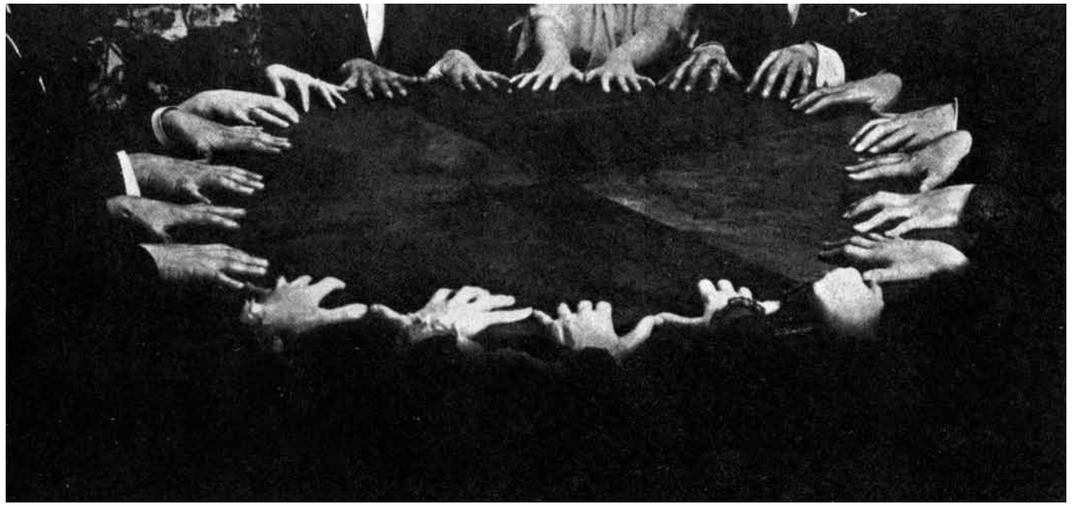
For the self exposed to the meaninglessness of existence, the circle is an orientational pattern that can impose coherence on the infinity of being: it transforms the infinite into unity, either through the beacon of a center, with reference to a potentially inclusive whole, or through the comprehensive totality of a circumference, with reference to a center thus potentially defined. (...)

The divine sphere, the circle in an absolute sense, is difficult to imagine. It may be easiest to think of it as describing the simultaneity of an outgoing motion from the center and the same movement in reverse. The infinity it encloses reflects, then, an ordered coherence insofar as each of its parts relates positively to the center, as one of its emanations, and negatively to the circumference, as lacking in its perfection. For the medieval worldview either the centricity or comprehensive capacity of the divine could be emphasized. The formula “deus est sphaera cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam” summarizes very succinctly this dual function of absolute unity, that is to say, of unity when that concept applies to all of being, which it does in its capacity as beginning, or uniform source, for everything, and end, or inclusive plenitude, the perfect whole. If God is conceived as center, the image is one of a point infinately expanded, an ever creative, so that it is entirely true to say “God is a sphere whose center is everywhere”; but then, conversely, anything created is, external to the productive center, and from its perspective the same motion is seen in reverse. Consequently, for everything created the infinite center becomes an infinite periphery, an infinity of being where the individual would drift in hopeless confusion if not for the point of orientation in the center, in the common ground of origin.

Within this context, each mode of being can be perceived as a positive manifestation of the divine, but only once the Creator God has been revealed in equally positive terms. When Faust, for instance, spurns medieval reliance on revealed truth and turns, instead, to the powers of the human intellect in his attempt to fathom “what holds the world together at its innermost core” (“was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhält”) (11. 381-82),(6) he has to admit defeat, and despair over the meaninglessness of existence that takes possession of him, until he sees no alternative but suicide. Faith in the revealed divinity is at the heart of established orthodoxies like the medieval Church; accordingly, Poulet finds many passages where God is depicted as the center radiant with infinite creativity, and he seems tempted to consider this construction the one most characteristic

for the manner in which a person would experience living as a meaningful enterprise during the Middle Ages.There is, however, the other half of the original formulation, which defines God as circumference, and that relationship is equally important, even though its exposition may not have been as prevalent in an age securely ruled by only one ecclesiastic orthodoxy with catholic claims to authority. The divine circumference can be imagined only in flux, as was the case with the center, because a static enclosure constitutes limitation, which would imply a force other than the center's expansive power. But there is nothing other than God: God is the fountainhead of all being and all of being is contained in God. Whereas the individual self assumed its position on the periphery with respect to the divine center, its relationship to the divine circumference can only be maintained if it were to function as that sphere's center: not in the absolute sense as source of the fullness of being but rather as its relative lack, as a point that exists only with reference to the comprehensive totality of being from which it is, however, separated by that same being's infinity. From this perspective, the universe surrounding each individual is not regarded as a positive manifestation of its origin; instead, it is a realm, of which the self is a part, that must be transcended if it is to be apprehended in its wholeness and perfection. The view from the circumference offers the ultimate vision, and there is no vantage point for it from within. No human acquisition of knowledge and experience can ever match the expansion of the divine center, unless the self were to become that very center and thus also the circumference, that is to say, unless it were to become God. Then the self could behold all things as they really are and become conscious of its own place within a true immutable order where, previously, it only ascertained the enigma of existence without direction or purpose. (...) Thus, the human quest for final comprehensive insight would appear to be hopeless from the start were it not for the very feeling of insufficiency that initiates it and furnishes the criterion of negation against which nothing short of the transcendental goal can prevail. In other words, the divine as perfection, as absolute unity and comprehension, is only negatively present, present only through its absence; however, negative presence is presence, nonetheless. It is a presence made manifest in a twofold fashion: first, by the self's sense of privation, of lacking what is most essential, which is at the core of all human motivation, and second, by the self's ability to say "no," to recognize the goal not for what it is, since that is precluded by its absence, but very definitely for what it is not.

Implicitly, this means that the positive reality of things, concepts, and words must ultimately be bypassed or rather negated since nothing they convey will prove adequate to reality itself. It cannot be revealed at all because the only reality we know is one that is forever replaced by another, except for the consciousness of self, the unmediated awareness of our own being. Oddly enough, however, the self, which seems to be the most immediate object and therefore, the least likely to elude us, remains unknown and refuses to be conclusively identified with any one or any sum of objects, with anything, in short, that can possibly be grasped by human knowledge. The self is experienced only



through its thoughts and actions, which appear to it as a continual process of expansion toward a circumference that is the fullness it lacks. (...)

Once the cosmos can no longer be regarded within an absolute sphere, unity becomes a relative concept applicable to any aspect of being contained by an infinity of being for which there is neither unity of origin nor unity of comprehension. Accordingly, Georges Poulet's chapters depicting subsequent metamorphoses of the circle reflect the loss of its absolute contours, which can be translated, for the individuals he cites, into confusion, despair, and lack of orientation mitigated by varied attempts to redraw the line that would again wrest meaning from the chaos of infinity. (...)

Poulet's chapter on romanticism, in which a great number of European authors are named—among them in prominent place Fichte and Goethe as well as Novalis—records an astonishing restablization of circular imagery. He perceives in the literature of the period a trend conveying a sense of the individual's function that represents a renewed appreciation of the self's true centricity or, in a paraphrase of his own words, of that centricity's inherently religious nature.(7) These features of similarity in self-conception are particularly conspicuous when they pertain to thinkers and writers of entirely different eras; not only are the Middle Ages several centuries removed from the "Age of Goethe," but the first is still steeped in the metaphysical security a living God could grant to people as diverse a time, place, and temperament as Meister Eckhart and Pico della Mirandola, whereas the second is without any such shelter against the cosmic void.

Notes

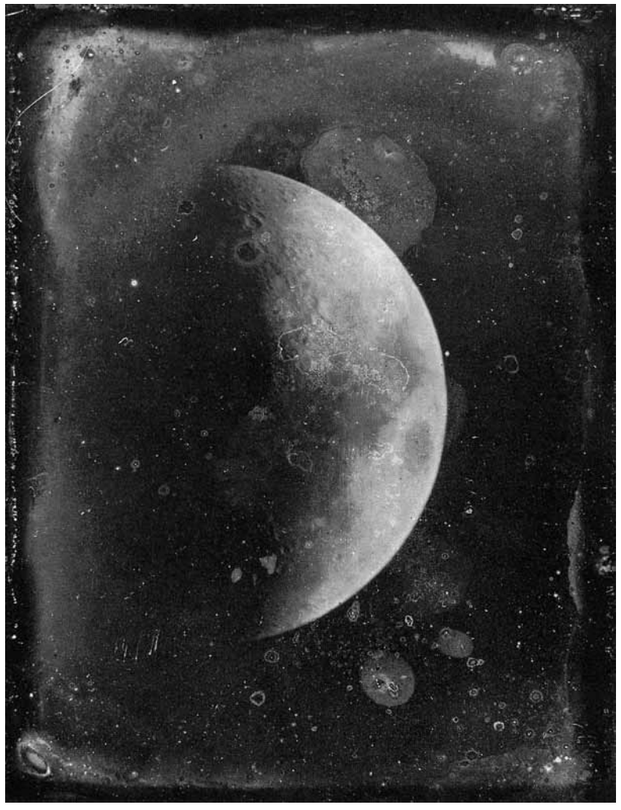
6. All references to Faust simply indicate line numbers, which pertain to the Hamburger Ausgabe of Goethe's **Werke**, vol. 3, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1949) and to the English version, occasionally supplemented by my own translation, in the **Norton Critical Edition of Faust**, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1976).

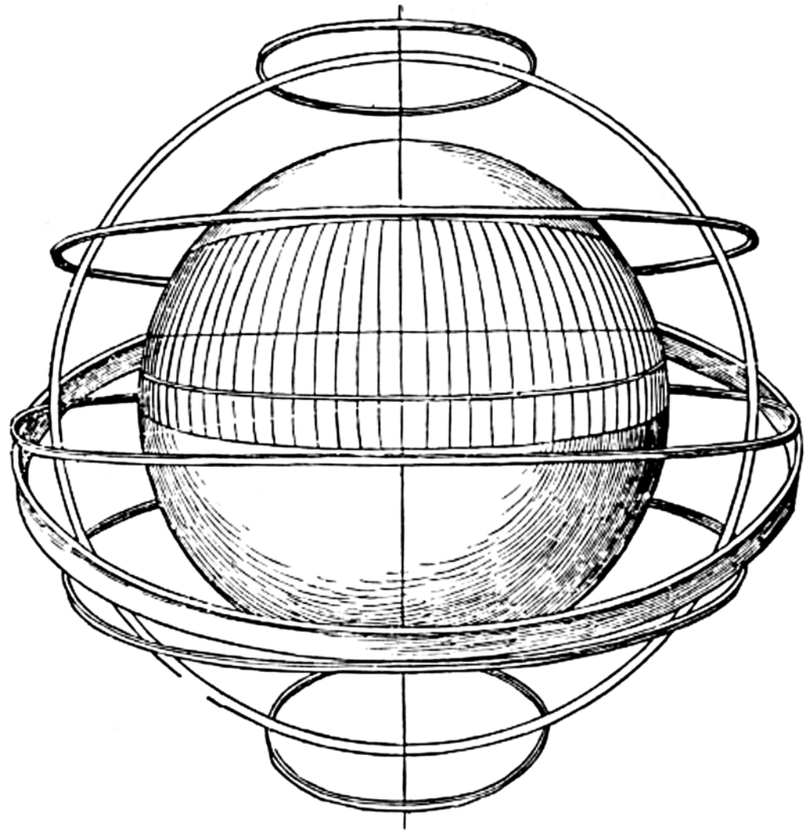
7. Georges Poulet, **Metamorphoses of the Circle** (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press,1966).

Géza Von Molnar, "Georges Poulet's Metamorphoses of the Circle: A Critical Reading," in **Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy**, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987

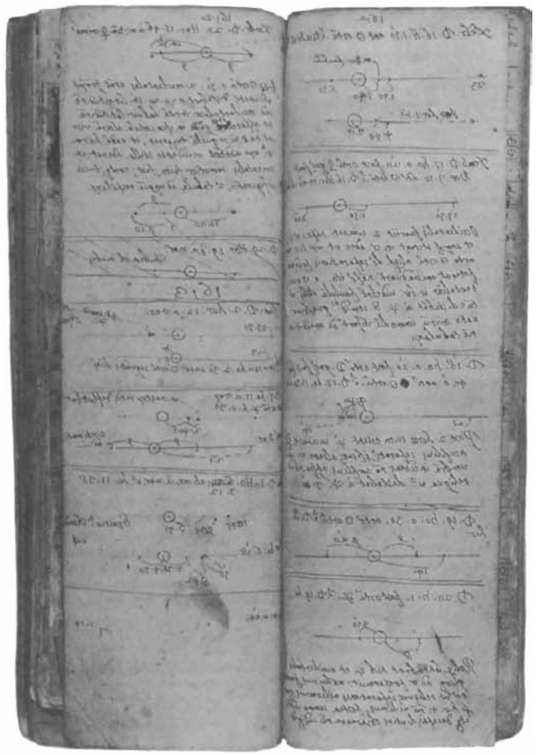
Photograph by Réjean Myette

Anish Kapoor, **Cloud Gate** "The Bean," 2004-2006, Millenium Park, Chicago.





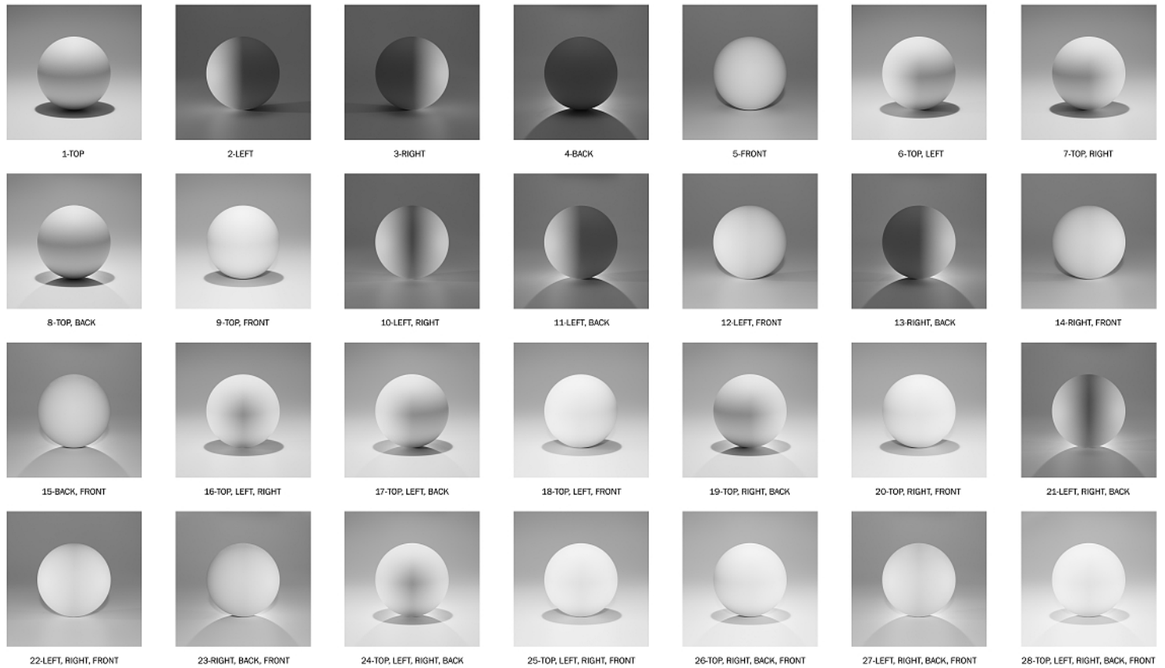
Je ne sais pas ce que c’est un livre. Personne le sait. Mais on sait quand il y en a un. Et quand il n’y a rien, on le sait, comme on sait qu’on est pas encore mort.



Margurite Duras, **Écrire**, Éditions Gallimard (Collection Folio), Paris, 1993

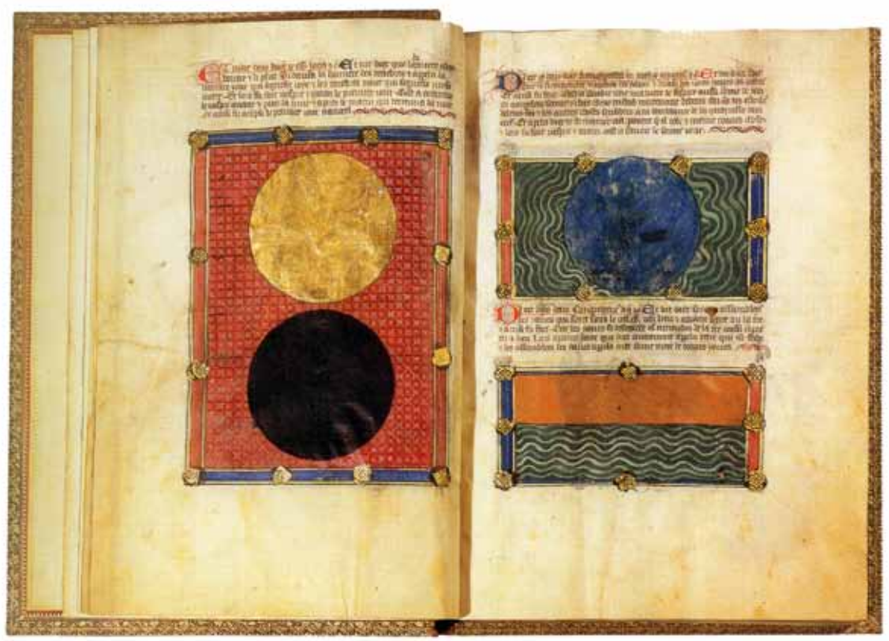
Un livre ouvert c’est aussi la nuit.

—Margurite Duras, **Écrire**



Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), **A Sphere Lit From the Top, Four Sides, and All Their Combinations,** edition of 19 and 6 artist proofs.
Published by Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, California, USA 2004. Photos by Jeremy Ziemann

Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939), **Multiple Portrait**, ca. 1916
Stephan Okolovicz et al., **Face au néant. Les portrait de Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz**,
Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes / Lyon, Éditions Fage, 2004

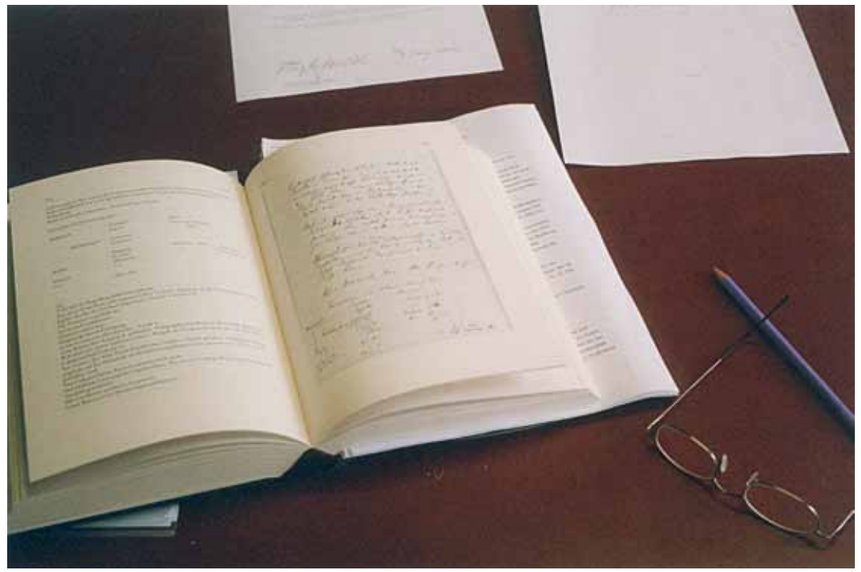


Bible historiée et vie des Saints, France, ca. 1300, New York Public Library.

DIE GROSSE GEMEINSCHAFT DER NATIONEN
Foto: New China Pictures Co.

GEBR. KÖNIG POSTKARTENVERLAG BREITE STR. 93 D-5000 KÖLN 1 PRINTED IN GERMANY

Serie 35 *Menschenbilder aus Rotchina und Menschenbilder von Thomas Bayrle*
Karte 4 von 10 Bestell-Nr. 35/4



Sedimentary Rock is formed over vast expanses of time, as layer upon layer of sediment is deposited on the sea bottom.

Being formed in this way, such rock is usually arranged in a succession of horizontal bands, or strata, with the oldest strata lying at the bottom.

Each band will often contain the fossilized remains of the plants and animals that died at the time at which the sediment was originally laid down.

The strata of sedimentary rock are like the pages of a book, each with a record of contemporary life written on it. Unfortunately, the record is far from complete. The process of sedimentation in any one place is invariably interrupted by new periods in which sediment is not laid down, or existing sediment is eroded. The succession of layers is further obscured as strata become twisted or folded, or even completely inverted by enormous geological forces, such as those involved in mountain building...

The strata of sedimentary rock are like the pages of a book...

Each with a record of contemporary life written on it...

Unfortunately, the record is far from complete...

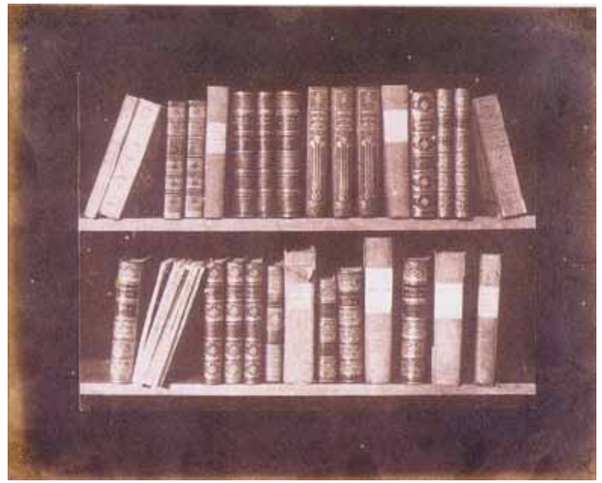
The record is far from complete...

Jeanette Winterson, **Weight – The Myth of Atlas and Heracles**, Albert A. Knopf Canada, 2005

T' ingrave a Moon, or *Morpheus* in a Theam
With Artists common, as it is to dream,
But to Interpret Dreams (as here) doth passe
All Workes that ever have been cut in brasse.

THE 87
INTERPRETATION
OF
DREAMES,
Digested into five books by that
Ancient and excellent *Philosopher*,
ARTIMEDORUS.
Compiled by him in *Greek*; and translated afterwards into the *Latine*, the *Italian*, the *French*, and *Spanish*, Tongues.
And now more exactly rendred into *English*.
It being a work of great esteem in all Ages, and pleasant and profitable to peruse, for all conditions of people whatsoever.
Et animam & mentem cum quo Dii nocte loquuntur.
Behold their minds with whom the dead of night,
Angels themselves to have discourse delight.
When good dreams fall, I do with Thy pursue them,
When bad ones fall, I pray I may eschew them.
The fourth Edition, newly corrected,
July by the *French*, and *Latine* Copy.
LONDON,
Printed by *Bernard Alsop*, 1644

Artimedorus, **The Interpretation of Dreams**, London, 1644 edition.



William Henry Fox Talbot, **A Scene in a Library**, ca. 1844, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

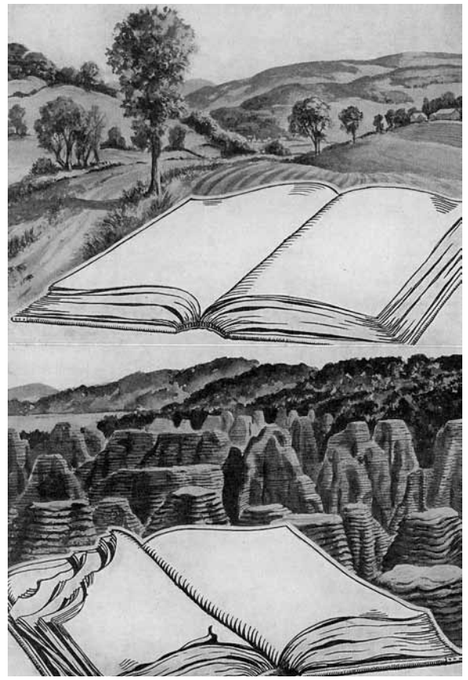
Here begins the book of the city of ladies, whose first chapter tells why and for what purpose this book was written.

One day as I was sitting alone in my study surrounded by books on all kinds of subjects, devoting myself to literary studies, my usual habit, my mind dwelt at length on the weighty opinions of various authors whom I had studied for a long time. I looked up from my book, having decided to leave such subtle questions in peace and to relax by reading some light poetry. With this in mind, I searched for some small book. By chance a strange volume came into my hands, not one of my own, but one which had been given to me along with some others. When I held it open and saw from its title page that it was by Mathéolus, I smiled, for though I had never seen it before, I had often heard that like other books it discussed respect for women. I thought I would browse through it to amuse myself. I had not been reading for very long when my good mother called me to refresh myself with some supper, for it was evening. Intending to look at it the next day, I put it down. The next morning, again seated in my study as was my habit, I remembered wanting to examine this book by Mathéolus. I started to read it and went on for a little while. Because the subject seemed to me not very pleasant for people who do not enjoy lies, and of no use in developing virtue or manners, given its lack of integrity in diction and theme, and after browsing here and there and reading the end, I put it down in order to turn my attention to more elevated and useful study. But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men— and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior. Not only one or two and not even just this Mathéolus (for this book had a bad name anyway and was intended as a satire) but, more generally, judging from the treatises of all philosophers and poets and from all the orators—it would take too long to mention their names—it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice. Thinking deeply about these matters, I began to examine my character and conduct as a natural woman and, similarly, I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience whether the testimony of so many notable men could be true. To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women. Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could

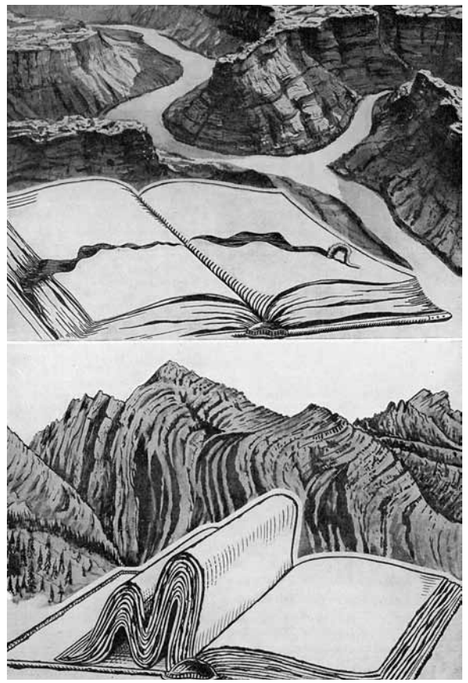
hardly find a book on morals where, even before I had read it in its entirety, I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was. This reason alone, in short, made me conclude that, although my intellect did not perceive my own great faults and, likewise, those of other women because of its simpleness and ignorance, it was however truly fitting that such was the case. And so I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew. I was so transfixed in this line of thinking for such a long time that it seemed as if I were in a stupor. Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities, whom I recalled one after another, came to mind, along with their opinions on this topic.

And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have deigned to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. And in my lament I spoke these words:

"Oh, God, how can this be? For unless I stray from my faith, I must never doubt that Your infinite wisdom and most perfect goodness ever created anything which was not good. Did You yourself not create woman in a very special way and since that time did You not give her all those inclinations which it pleased You for her to have? And how could it be that You could go wrong in anything? Yet look at all these accusations which have been judged, decided, and concluded against women. I do not know how to understand this repugnance. If it is so, fair Lord God, that in fact so many abominations abound in the female sex, for You Yourself say that the testimony of two or three witnesses lends credence, why shall I not doubt that this is true? Alas, God, why did You not let me be born in the world as a man, so that all my inclinations would be to serve You better, and so that I would not stray in anything and would be as perfect as a man is said to be? But since Your kindness has not been extended to me, then forgive my negligence in Your service, most fair Lord God, and may it not displease You, for the servant who receives fewer gifts from his lord is less obliged in his service." I spoke these words to God in my lament and a great deal more for a very long time in sad reflection, and in my folly I considered myself most unfortunate because God had made me inhabit a female body in this world.



Christine de Pizan, **The Book of the City of Ladies**, Persea Books, New York, 1982



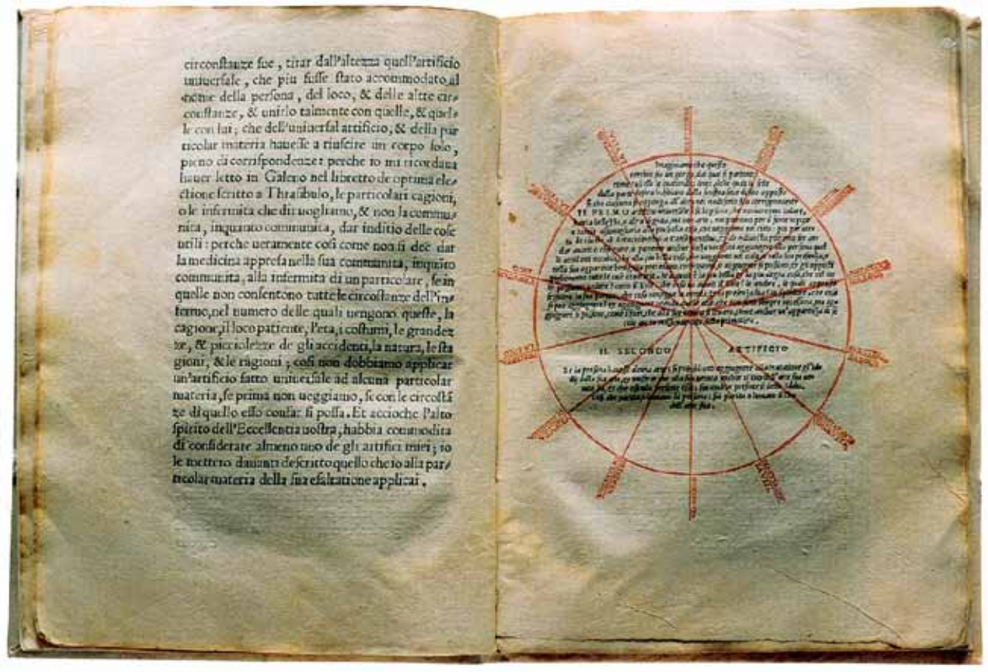
Ton acte toujours s’applique à du papier; car méditer, sans traces, devient évanescent, ni que s’exalte l’instinct en quelque geste véhément et perdu que tu cherchas.

Écrire—

L’encrier, cristal comme une conscience, avec sa goutte, au fond, de ténèbres relative à ce que quelque chose soit : puis, écarte la lampe.

Tu remarquas, on n’écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l’alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s’indique, ébauché ou interrompu; l’homme poursuit noir sur blanc.

Stéphane Mallarmé, **Igitur/Divagations/Un coup de dés**, Poésie Gallimard, Paris, 1976


circonſtanze ſue, tirar dall'altezza quell'artificio
uniuerſale, che piu fuſſe ſtato accommodato al
ſoggetto della perſona, del loco, & delle altre cir-
conſtanze, & unirlo talmente con quelle, & quel-
le con lui; che dell'uniuerſal artificio, & della par-
ticolar materia haueſſe a riuſcire un corpo ſolo,
pieno di corriſpondenze: perche io mi ricordava
hauer letto in Galeno nel libretto de optima ele-
ctione ſcritto a Thraſibulo, le particolari cagioni,
o le infermità che di uoglianno, & non la comma-
nità, inquanto communica, dar inditio delle coſe
utili: perche ueramente coſi come non ſi dee dar
la medicina appreſa nella ſua communità, inquiſto
communità, alla infermità di un particolare, ſe in
quelle non conſentono tutte le circoſtanze del'in-
fermo, nel numero delle quali uengono queſte, la
cagione, il loco patiente, l'eta, i coſtumi, le grandez-
ze, & piccolezze de gli accidenti, la natura, le ſta-
gioni, & le ragioni; coſi non dobbiamo applicar
un'artificio fatto uniuerſale ad alcuna particolar
materia, ſe prima non ueggiamo, ſe con le circoſtã-
ze di quello ello conſta: ſi poſſa. Et accioche l'alto
ſpirito dell'Eccellentia noſtra, habbia commodità
di conſiderare almeno uno de gli artifici miei; io
le mettero dauanti deſcritto quello che io alla par-
ticolar materia della ſua eſaltatione applicai,

Giulio Camillos (1480-1544), “Delle Materie” and “Della Imitatione,” published in 1544, the year of Camillos death, in which some of the ideas around the “teatro della Memoria” can be found.

The Library of Babel

By this art you may contemplate the variation of the 23 letters....
Anatomy of Melancholy, Pt. 2, Sec. II, Mem. IV

The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries. In the center of each gallery is a ventilation shaft, bounded by a low railing. From any hexagon one can see the floors above and below—one after another, endlessly. The arrangement of the galleries is always the same: Twenty bookshelves, five to each side, line four of the hexagon's six sides; the height of the bookshelves, floor to ceiling, is hardly greater than the height of a normal librarian. One of the hexagon's free sides opens onto a narrow sort of vestibule, which in turn opens onto another gallery, identical to the first—identical in fact to all. To the left and right of the vestibule are two tiny compartments. One is for sleeping, upright; the other, for satisfying one's physical necessities. Through this space, too, there passes a spiral staircase, which winds upward and downward into the remotest distance. In the vestibule there is a mirror, which faithfully duplicates appearances. Men often infer from this mirror that the Library is not infinite—if it were, what need would there be for that illusory replication? I prefer to dream that burnished surfaces are a figuration and promise of the infinite.... Light is provided by certain spherical fruits that bear the name “bulbs.” There are two of these bulbs in each hexagon, set crosswise. The light they give is insufficient, and unceasing.

Like all the men of the Library*, in my younger days I traveled; I have journeyed in quest of a book, perhaps the catalog of catalogs. Now that my eyes can hardly make out what I myself have written, I am preparing to die, a few leagues from the hexagon where I was born. When I am dead, compassionate hands will throw me over the railing; my tomb will be the unfathomable air, my body will sink for ages, and will decay and dissolve in the wind engendered by my fall, which shall be infinite. (...)

For many years it was believed that those impenetrable books were in ancient or far-distant languages. It is true that the most ancient peoples, the first librarians, employed a language quite different from the one we speak today; it is true that a

few miles to the right, our language devolves into dialect and that ninety floors above, it becomes incomprehensible. All of that, I repeat, is true—but four hundred ten pages of unvarying M C V's cannot belong to any language, however dialectal or primitive it may be. Some have suggested that each letter influences the next, and that the value of M C V on page 71, line 3, is not the value of the same series on another line of another page, but that vague thesis has not met with any great acceptance. Others have mentioned the possibility of codes; that conjecture has been universally accepted, though not in the sense in which its originators formulated it.

Some five hundred years ago, the chief of one of the upper hexagons came across a book as jumbled as all the others, but containing almost two pages of homogeneous lines. He showed his find to a traveling decipherer, who told him that the lines were written in Portuguese; others said it was Yiddish. Within the century experts had determined what the language actually was: a Samoyed-Lithuanian dialect of Guarani, with inflections from classical Arabic. The content was also determined: the rudiments of combinatory analysis, illustrated with examples of endlessly repeating variations. Those examples allowed a librarian of genius to discover the fundamental law of the Library. This philosopher observed that all books, however different from one anoth-er they might be, consist of identical elements: the space, the period, the comma, and the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. He also posited a fact which all travelers have since confirmed: In all the Library, there are no two identical books. From those incontrovertible premises, the librarian deduced that the Library is "total"—perfect, complete, and whole—and that its bookshelves contain all possible combinations of the twenty-two orthographic symbols (a number which, though unimaginably vast, is not infinite)—that is, all that is able to be expressed, in every language. All—the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalog of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogs, the proof of the falsity of those false catalogs, a proof of the falsity of the true catalog, the gnostic gospel of Basilides, the commentary upon that gospel, the commentary on the commentary on that gospel, the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language, the interpolations of every book into all books, the treatise Bede could have written (but did not) on the mythology of the Saxon people, the lost books of Tacitus.

When it was announced that the Library contained all books, the first reaction was unbounded joy. All men felt themselves the possessors of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal problem, no world problem, whose eloquent solution did not exist—somewhere in some hexagon. The universe was justified; the universe suddenly became congruent with the unlimited width and breadth of humankind's hope. At that period there was much talk of The Vindications—books of apologim and prophecies that would vindicate for all time the actions of every person in the universe and that held wondrous arcana for men's futures. Thousands of greedy individuals abandoned their sweet native hexagons and rushed downstairs, upstairs, spurred by the vain desire to find their Vindication. These pilgrims squabbled in the narrow corridors, muttered dark imprecations, strangled one another on the divine staircases, threw deceiving volumes down ventilation shafts, were themselves hurled to their deaths by men of distant regions. Others went insane.... The Vindications do exist (I have seen two of them, which refer to persons in the future, persons perhaps not imaginary), but those who went in quest of them failed to recall that the chance of a man's finding his own Vindication, or some perfidious version of his own, can be calculated to be zero.

At that same period there was also hope that the fundamental mysteries of mankind—the origin of the Library and of time—might be revealed. In all likelihood those profound mysteries can indeed be explained in words; if the language of the philosophers is not sufficient, then the multiform Library must surely have produced the extraordinary language that is required, together with the words and grammar of that language.(...)

We also have knowledge of another superstition from that period: belief in what was termed the Book-Man. On some shelf in some hexagon, it was argued, there must exist a book that is the cipher and perfect compendium of all other books, and some librarian must have examined that book; this librarian is analogous to a god. In the language of this zone there are still vestiges of the sect that worshiped that distant librarian. (...)

Infidels claim that the rule in the Library is not "sense," but "non-sense," and that "rationality" (even humble, pure coherence) is an almost miraculous exception. They speak, I know, of "the feverish Library, whose random volumes constantly threaten to transmogrify into others, so that they affirm all things, deny all things, and confound and confuse all things, like some mad and hallucinating deity." Those words, which not only proclaim disorder but exemplify it as well, prove, as all can see, the infidels' deplorable taste and desperate ignorance. For while the Library contains all verbal structures, all the variations allowed by the twenty-five orthographic symbols, it includes not a single absolute piece of nonsense. It would be pointless to observe that the finest volume of all the many hexagons that I myself administer is titled *Combed Thunder*, while another is titled *The Plaster Cramp*, and another, *Axaxaxas mlo*. Those phrases, at first apparently incoherent, are undoubtedly susceptible to cryptographic or allegorical "reading"; that reading, that justification of the words' order and existence, is itself verbal and, ex hypothesis, already contained

*In earlier times, there was one man for every three hexagons. Suicide and diseases of the lung have played havoc with that proportion. An unspeakably melancholy memory: I have sometimes traveled for nights on end, down corridors and polished staircases, without coming across a single librarian.

somewhere in the Library. There is no combination of characters one can make—dhcm-rlchtdj, for example—that the divine Library has not foreseen and that in one or more of its secret tongues does not hide a terrible significance. There is no syllable one can speak that is not filled with tenderness and terror that is not, in one of those languages, the mighty name of a god. To speak is to commit tautologies. This pointless, verbose epistle already exists in one of the thirty volumes of the five bookshelves in one of the countless hexagons—as does its refutation. (A number of the possible languages employ the same vocabulary; in some of them, the symbol "library" possesses the correct definition "everlasting, ubiquitous system of hexagonal galleries," while a library—the thing—is a loaf of bread or a pyramid or something else, and the six words that define it themselves have other definitions. You who read me—are you certain you understand my language?)

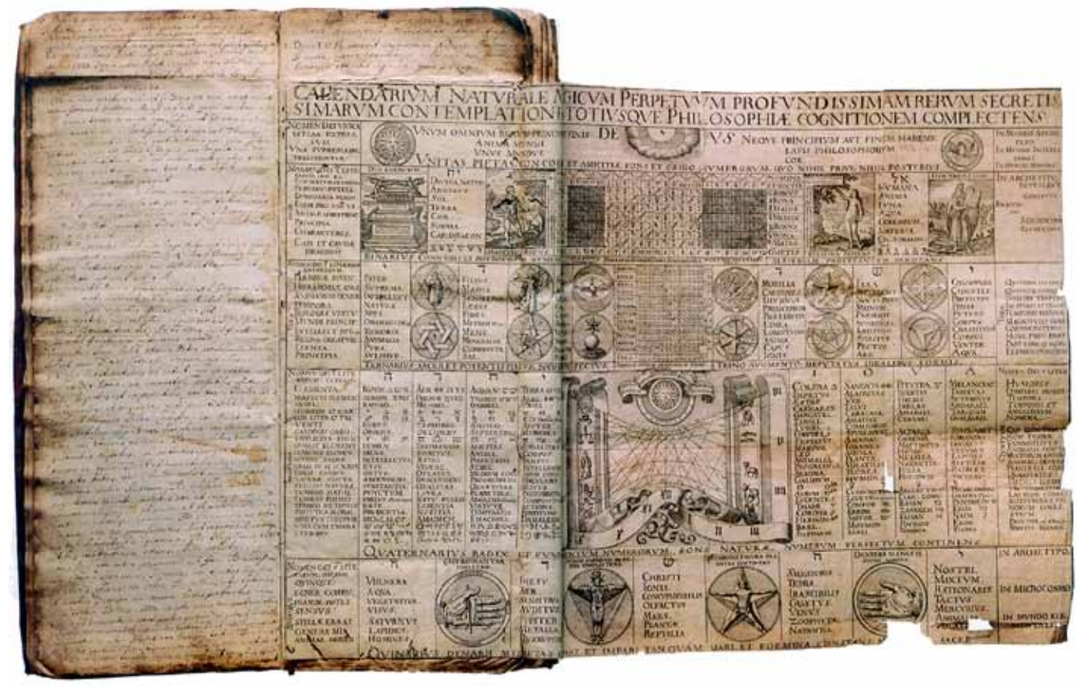
Methodical composition distracts me from the present condition of humanity. The certainty that everything has already been written annuls us, or renders us phantasmal. I know districts in which the young people prostrate themselves before books and like savages kiss their pages, though they cannot read a letter. Epidemics, heretical discords, pilgrimages that inevitably degenerate into brigandage have decimated the population. I believe I mentioned the suicides, which are more and more frequent every year. I am perhaps misled by old age and fear, but I suspect that the human species— the only species—teeters at the verge of extinction, yet that the Library— enlightened, solitary, infinite, perfectly unmoving, armed with precious volumes, pointless, incorruptible, and secret—will endure.

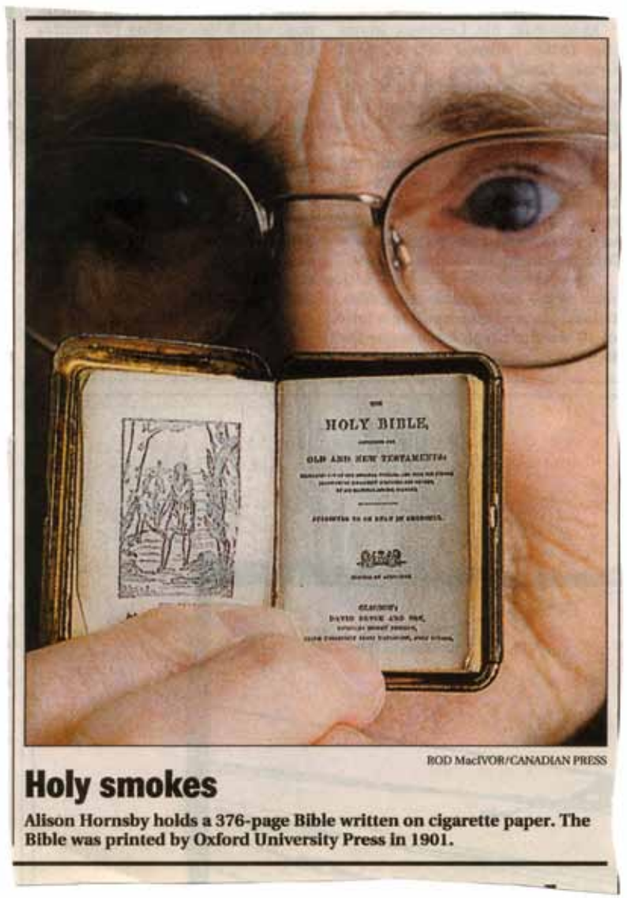
I have just written the word "infinite." I have not included that adjective out of mere rhetorical habit; I hereby state that it is not illogical to think that the world is infinite. Those who believe it to have limits hypothesize that in some remote place or places the corridors and staircases and hexagons may, inconceivably, end—which is absurd. And yet those who picture the world as unlimited forget that the number of possible books is not. I will be bold enough to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: The Library is unlimited but periodic. If an eternal traveler should journey in any direction, he would find after untold centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder—which, repeated, becomes order: the Order My solitude is cheered by that elegant hope.*

Mar del Plata, 1941

*Letizia Alvarez de Toledo has observed that the vast Library is pointless; strictly speaking, all that is required is a single volume, of the common size, printed in nine- or ten-point type, that would consist of an infinite number of infinitely thin pages. (In the early seventeenth century, Cavalieri stated that every solid body is the super-position of an infinite number of planes.) Using that silken vademecum would not be easy: each apparent page would open into other similar pages; the inconceivable middle page would have no "back."

Jorge Luis Borges, **Collected Fictions**, translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin Book, 1998





During the past few years, no French writer has received more serious critical attention and praise than Edmond Jabès. ... Beginning with the first volume of *Le Livre des Questions*, which was published in 1963, and continuing on through the other volumes in the series, Jabes has created a new and mysterious kind of literary work—as dazzling as it is difficult to define. Neither novel nor poem, neither essay nor play, *The Book of Questions* is a combination of all these forms, a mosaic of fragments, aphorisms, dialogues, songs, and commentaries that endlessly move around the central question of the book: how to speak what cannot be spoken. The question is the Jewish Holocaust, but it is also the question of literature itself. By a startling leap of the imagination, Jabes treats them as one and the same:

I talked to you about the difficulty of being Jewish, which is the same as the difficulty of writing. For Judaism and writing are but the same waiting, the same hope, the same wearing out.

(...)

What happens in *The Book of Questions*, then, is the writing of *The Book of Questions*—or rather, the attempt to write it, a process that the reader is allowed to witness in all its gropings and hesitations. Like the narrator in Beckett's *The Unnamable*, who is cursed by "the inability to speak [and] the inability to be silent," Jabès's narrative goes nowhere but around and around itself. As Maurice Blanchot has observed in his excellent essay on Jabès: "The writing ... must be accomplished in the act of interrupting itself." A typical page in *The Book of Questions* mirrors this sense of difficulty: isolated statements and paragraphs are separated by white spaces, then broken by parenthetical remarks, by italicized passages and italics within parentheses, so that the reader's eye can never grow accustomed to a single, unbroken visual field. One reads the book by fits and starts—just as it was written.

At the same time, the book is highly structured, almost architectural in its design. Carefully divided into four parts, "At the Threshold of the Book," "And You Shall Be in the Book," "The Book of the Absent," and "The Book of the Living," it is treated by Jabès as if it were a physical place, and once we cross its threshold we pass into a kind of enchanted realm, an imaginary world that has been held in suspended animation. ... Mythical in its dimensions, the book for Jabès is a place where the past and the present meet and dissolve into each other. There seems nothing strange about the fact that ancient rabbis can converse with a contemporary writer, that images of stunning beauty can stand beside descriptions of the greatest devastation, or that the visionary and the commonplace can coexist on the same page.

(...)

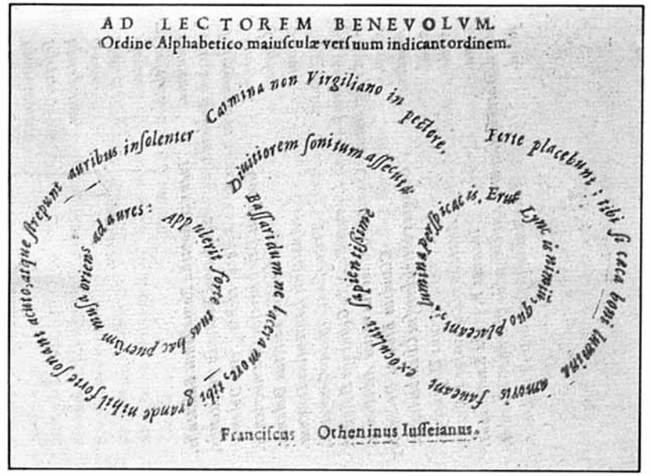
The book "begins with difficulty—the difficulty of being and writing—and ends with difficulty.'' It gives no answers. Nor can any answers ever be given—for the precise reason that the "Jew," as one of the imaginary rabbis states, "answers every question with another question." Jabès conveys these ideas with a wit and eloquence that often evoke the logical hairsplitting—pilpul—of the Talmud. But he never deludes himself into believing that his words are anything more than "grains of sand" thrown to the wind. At the heart of the book there is nothingness.

(...)

Although Jabès's imagery and sources are for the most part derived from Judaism, *The Book of Questions* is not a Jewish work in the same way that one can speak of *Paradise Lost* as a Christian work. While Jabès is, to my knowledge, the first modern poet consciously to assimilate the forms and idiosyncrasies of Jewish thought, his relationship to Jewish teaching is emotional and metaphorical rather than one of strict adherence. The Book is his central image—but it is not only the Book of the Jews (the spirals of commentary around commentary in the Midrash), but an allusion to Mallarmé's ideal Book as well (the Book that contains the world, endlessly folding in upon itself). Finally, Jabès's work must be considered as part of the on going French poetic tradition that began in the late nineteenth century. What Jabès had done is to fuse this tradition with a certain type of Jewish discourse, and he has done so with such conviction that the marriage between the two is almost imperceptible

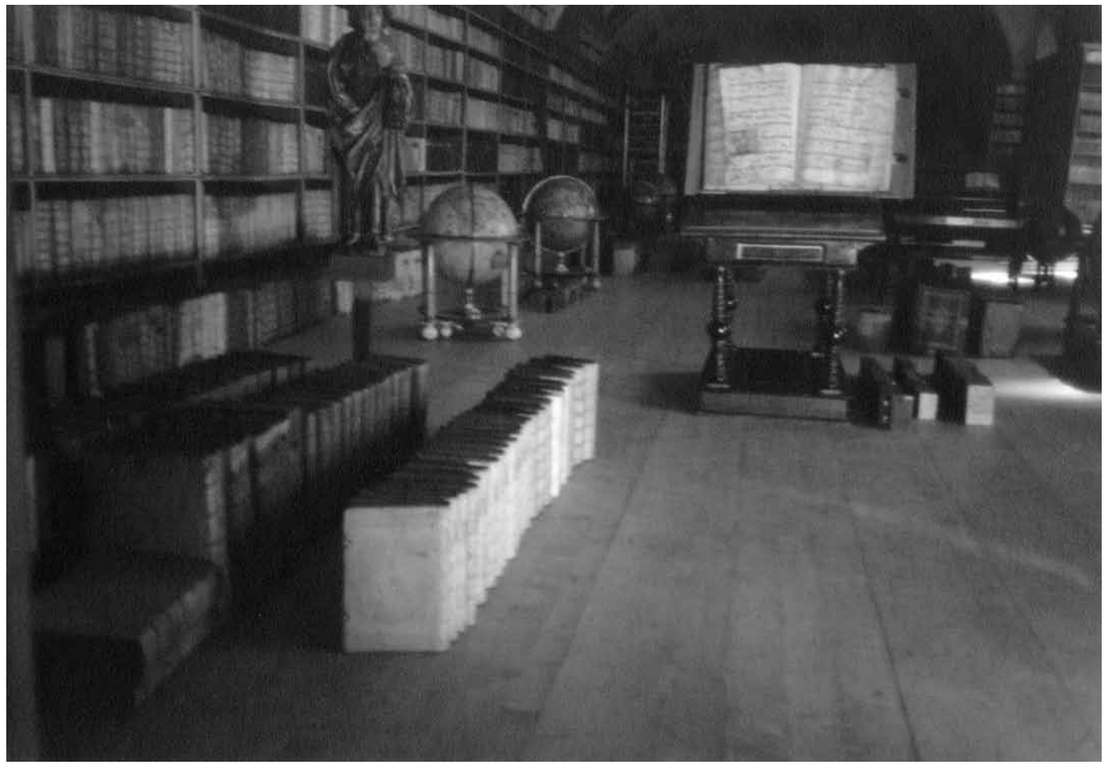
The Book of Questions came into being because Jabès found himself as a writer in the act of discovering himself as a Jew. Similar in spirit to an idea expressed by Marina Tsvetaeva—"In this most Christian of worlds / all poets are Jews"—this equation is located at the exact center of Jabès's work, is the kernel from which everything else springs. To Jabès, nothing can be written about the Holocaust unless writing itself is first put into question. If language is to be pushed to the limit, then the writer must condemn himself to an exile of doubt, to a desert of uncertainty. What he must do, in effect, is create a poetics of absence. The dead cannot be brought back to life. But they can be heard, and their voices live in the Book.

Paul Auster, "The Book of the Dead," in **The Art of Hunger**, Penguin Book, 1996



Les lunette de François Othein, Sylvœ des collégiens de Dole, 1592

Library in Prague



FRONTIERS LOST CLASSICS

‘The most romantic document ever’

Eureka! The manuscripts of Archimedes, discovered underneath the text of a medieval prayer book, are rewriting mathematical history

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two views (above and upper left) of a 10th-century copy of the ancient thinker's notebooks, overwritten with Greek Orthodox pieties in the 13th century. Having survived a millennium, it's now the subject of ultra-high-tech detective work.

BY KRISTA FOSS

“It was painfully immature.”

This is Reviel Netz, ancient-science scholar, mathematics historian and Stanford professor, on how he reacted to an e-mail two years ago telling him he could go study a medieval prayer book at a Baltimore art museum.

For a brief moment, the young but sober academic became a one-man melee, “shouting and flailing about” in the seat of his cubicle.

This might seem to be over-the-top excitement for a 13th-century Greek Orthodox service book, which, though ancient and intact, is not remarkable for its exorcisms, blessings for Easter breads, marriage ceremonies or prayers for spoiled wine.

Netz's fit of glee came because of what the prayers were written on or, more precisely, over.

Eight hundred years ago, a frugal Constantinople monk, facing a scarcity of parchment, took apart an old mathematical text, scrubbed off its iron-gall-ink equations and diagrams, cut it into smaller pages, inscribed prayers on top and bound it anew with leather and glue.

Little did the reverent man know or care that his piety had obscured a detailed 10th-century copy of seven seminal works by Archimedes, the last of the great Greek mathematicians.

And now scholars such as Netz are grappling with how traces of the little prayer book's original text — the earliest known copy of Archimedes's work — will rewrite the modern world's understanding of his mathematics genius.

Archimedes was an astronomer's son in the third century B.C. He invented prodigiously, but loved theoretical problems best. He famously ran naked through the streets of Syracuse, Sicily, yelling “Eureka!” after realizing how to calculate volume from the water his body displaced in the bath.

He was the first to approximate pi, and to calculate the areas bounded by curves. And these new copies of his work suggest he was also ahead of his time in understanding mathematical infinity — a bedrock notion for modern physics.

“His thinking is much richer and more complicated than we thought. . . . [He used] a way of counting infinite magnitudes that is different from anything we knew about antiquity before this,” Netz said from Geneva this week.

What's remarkable is that the odds were stacked against this knowledge about “the great geometer” of the ancient world ever being revealed. By the time the monk's little prayer book reached the 20th century, it had survived 600 years in a monastery in the Judean desert, a German art dealer who ripped out a page in 1846, a smuggling junket from Turkey to Athens after the First World War, an attempt to increase its value by doctoring it with fake illustrations in the 1930s, nearly 70 years with the family of a Parisian civil servant, irreverent encounters with glue, sticky tack and a rusted paper clip, and 1,000 years of pernicious mould.

It was Johan Ludvig Heiberg, a revered Danish math historian, who in 1906 first discovered that the text beneath the prayer book writing was an ancient copy of Archimedes's treatises. But Heiberg could only translate what was visible to the naked eye beneath the 13th-century prayers, and he ignored the diagrams explaining how Archimedes arrived at his results. Another scholar wouldn't get a chance to study the Archimedes palimpsest (layers of text and erasures) until after an anonymous and mysterious American entrepreneur bought the manuscript for $2-million (U.S.) in 1998.

By that time, the parchment was rapidly deteriorating. When Will Noel, a curator of manuscripts at the Baltimore-based Walters Art Museum, home to an extensive rare-manuscript collection, heard about the sale, he contacted the agent who acted on behalf of its wealthy U.S. benefactor.

He hoped to borrow the palimpsest for an exhibition. “It is the most fascinating, romantic document ever, with a great story behind it,” Noel said.

To his surprise, the entrepreneur came by the museum in 1999, took the palimpsest out of a satchel and handed it over. Today, the anonymous owner funds an international effort, based at the Walters museum, to recover the text while preserving the palimpsest.

Netz had already begun the work of producing a translation of the entire works of the master mathematician for University of Cambridge Press when Noel asked him to help lead the transcription and translation efforts.

But first the Walters team has to retrieve the text itself. “We are moving forward methodically and slowly,” Noel said. “It is taking a long time to stabilize the book, and disbind the book to prepare the leaves for imaging.”

The museum has contracted out for an impressive array of technology to capture images of the 10th-century text beneath the 13th-century prayers without damaging the parchment. (Though scrubbed off, the original ink left impressions in the parchment.)

Multispectral imaging, a method of photographing ultraviolet and infrared wavelengths, and even something called confocal microscopy — which creates the equivalent of a topographical map of the parchment — have been deployed. So far, the team has captured 8,000 images of just one eighth of the book. To begin analyzing the images, they are using the same software used to decipher satellite pictures.

It could take two more years just to finish documenting the book in digital images, and years of transcription and translation of the Archimedes treatises after that. But eventually Archimedes will be accorded the full attention, and reverence, he deserves.

“Among the absolutely great mathematicians, he might be the most neglected, because he wrote in Greek,” Netz said. “But this is going to change.”

Borges's library comes alive

French artist's etchings capture ineffable quality of a master

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

Thus begins The Library of Babel, a novella by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), one of Latin America's greatest writers and a major figure in modern literature.

A mystical tale of an endless, circular repository of universal knowledge, it takes the reader on an allegorical journey, each step devised with great intellectual virtuosity and imagination.

DOROTA KOZINSKA

In Borges's universe, we are all travelers in this vast interior, forever seeking that one book that explains its mystery, and that of our own existence.

"Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have wandered in search of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues; now that my eyes can hardly decipher what I write, I am preparing to die just a few leagues from the hexagon in which I was born," wrote Borges, who was blind for the last 30 years of his life.

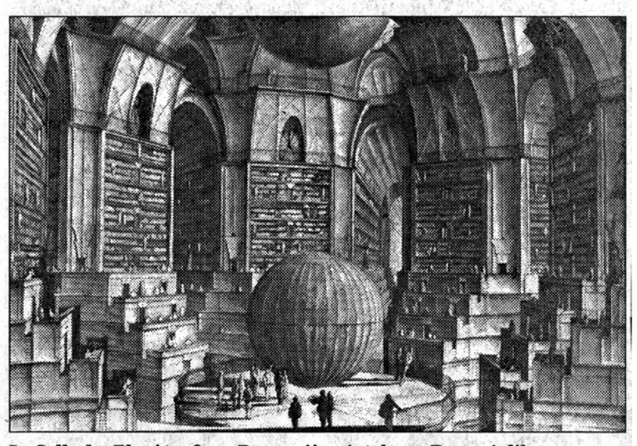
An irrepressible bibliophile, he had spent a long time in libraries, and at one time was employed by one, becoming, in 1955, the director of Argentina's National Library.

Borges's obsession with books and knowledge seeped into his work, and the hereditary blindness that finally robbed him of the joy of reading and writing was devastating.

(He continued to dictate his short stories, however, and by the time of his death in Geneva, had produced 30 volumes of writings, which had been translated into 20 languages.)

The mystery of the library, and the fantastic, Kafkaesque world created by the Argentinian writer, proved irresistible to Erik Desmazières, a French printmaker.

Born in Rabat, Morocco, in 1948, he is a virtuoso draftsman, whose fascination with interiors made him the perfect candidate to fall under the spell of Borges's allegorical interiors.



La Salle des Planètes from Desmazières's take on Borges's library.

Last year, he produced a series of illustrations to The Library of Babel, and, together with some of his earlier works, their enlarged versions are on view at Galerie d'Art Sous le Passe-Partout.

Borges's imaginary, complex constructions, reminiscent of the mind-bending images of Dutch printmaker M.C. Escher, lend themselves marvelously to Desmazières precise cross-hatching.

His prints are magical, detailed, almost ornate in the intricacy of the gesture, featuring mesmerizing, twisting, hexagonal interiors, with tiny human figures scuttling among the towering bookshelves.

Some are climbing tall ladders, reaching for the upper shelves, while others hurry across narrow overpasses suspended high above the rest. Others still, laden with books like mules, are making their way on all fours, blindfolded, oblivious to the riches stacked on their backs.

In La Salle des Planètes, an enormous bright orb sits in the middle of the interior, surreal, its proportions incongruous with the surroundings.

"Light is provided by some spherical fruit which bear the name of lamps," Borges writes in The Library of Babel. "The light they emit is insufficient, incessant."

In Desmazière's etchings, darkness lurks in the corners, the corridors turn and dim, and the giant ball at the centre of the hexagonal chambre offers no glow.

Yet for all the mystery and enigma of the images, his prints avoid the optical illusion inherent in Escher's work, allowing the viewer to wander these strange interiors with ease.

Desmazières won the coveted Grand Prix de la Ville de Paris in 1978. His works can be found in public collections in Europe, the U.S, and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

In addition to the works inspired by Borges's novella, Desmazière's earlier prints of Paris scenes are also on display.

There are several of his magnificent enlarged views of city streets and interiors, towering arched ceilings and columns, with minute human figures lost in this vast, imaginary space.

Also in the show are Desmazière's prints of his art dealer's atelier, including a lovely, elongated picture with a stuffed crane in the foreground, an easel and a can of brushes. As we look, details continue to surface, sheets of paper on a table, paint peeling from the ceiling, an open window with a view.

These works of superb draftsmanship and imagination are irresistible. At times dark, images evoke the virtuosity of a Piranesi or Goya.

✤ *Erik Desmazières's works are at the Galerie Sous Le Passe-Partout, 5276 Notre Dame de Grâce Ave., until Jan. 23. Open Wednesday to Friday 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., or by appointment. Call (514) 487-7750.*

THE GAZETTE, MONTREAL, SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2002

1493 book turns up in Maine

It's a history of the world with 1,800 illustrations

ANN S. KIM
Associated Press

CAMDEN, Me. – Book dealer Barrie Pribyl knew she had something special when she took the old book out of the farmhouse and loaded it into her car with the hundreds of others.

Her client was in Maine to settle his parents' estate. They weren't collectors of rare books, but they did own a few of value.

"He said to us, 'I think we have a Guttenberg Bible,' " Pribyl said. But he was wrong. It wasn't the Bible of Johann Guttenberg, believed to be the first major book printed in the West. Back in Pribyl's Camden shop, a query on the Internet revealed the book, printed about 50 years later, in 1493, was the Nuremberg Chronicle, a history of the world widely considered the greatest illustrated book of its time.

"All you have to do is type in 'books published in 1493.' There are not a whole lot of them," Pribyl said.

Starting with Genesis, the Nuremberg Chronicle relates the history of the world in nearly 600 pages of Gothic text and 1,800 pictures.

Compiled by physician Hartmann Schedel, it was produced by Anton Koberger, a Nuremberg publisher considered one of the time's most important in Europe. The book features the woodcuts of Michael Wohlgemuth, his stepson Wilhelm Pleyenwurff and Albrecht Dürer, a masterful artist who elevated the status of graphic arts.

GOD COMES FIRST

The first illustration in the book shows God's hand emerging from a fluffy sleeve and gesturing over the cosmos, depicted as concentric rings. The ones that follow include biblical and classical scenes, genealogies and maps of the world as seen through late-15th-century eyes.

The illustrations were made from 645 woodcuts, some of which are repeated throughout the work. For example, the same 49 cuts were used to portray more than 200 kings and emperors, and 28 were used for nearly 200 popes.

Twenty-two cuts depict 69 different cities. "There are an awful lot of things that sort of look like Nuremberg," Pribyl noted.

Koberger printed 2,500 copies of the book, one version in Latin and the other in German. About 1,200 in all are believed to remain in existence today.

Recent prices have ranged from less than $60,000 to $125,000 U.S., but the asking price for single pages can be as low as $10 on eBay.

Pribyl believes her client intends to keep his book, which was appraised at $60,000-$80,000. The client, not surprisingly, doesn't want his identity known.

The owner's identity isn't the only mystery surrounding the book. The client, who is middle-aged, said his parents never talked about the book, which was protected from light with other books stacked on top of it, Pribyl said. He believes his parents bought it before his birth.

A STEAL 40 YEARS AGO

Forty years ago, before the prices of rare books skyrocketed, a copy could be bought for about $1,500, said Terry Belanger, founder of the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia.

Many original copies of the Nuremberg Chronicle remain in private hands and they were widely collected by individuals until fairly recently, Belanger said.

At the time of its publication, the book would have been popular with a wealthy, non-scholarly audience as one of the first comprehensive histories of the world and because of its pictures.

"To this day, the illustrations march right off the page. There's an immediacy to them that has charmed people for more than five centuries," Belanger said. "It's a book everybody likes."

Bibliophiles at the Camden Public Library, where the owner allowed the book to be displayed before taking it home, certainly were charmed. Some gathered around as Ellen Dyer, the library's archivist, donned white cotton gloves and turned the rag-paper pages.

None of those present could read the Middle High German that was rendered in type mimicking the script of medieval manuscripts. But the viewers responded with delight to the hand-coloured illustrations.

Kathryn Adamsky of Union had stopped by more than once to see the different pages displayed each day. "I should have come by more often," she said. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Closeup of an illustration in the Nuremberg Chronicle.

PHOTOS: JOEL PAGE, AP

Ellen Dyer of the Camden Public Library poses with the Nuremberg Chronicle, which was on display at the library last month.

Short Cuts

Last year, 116,415 new books were published in the UK, of which 10,860 were works of fiction. Even reading at a rate of one novel or collection of short stories per day, it would take you 29 years, 8 months and 24 days to get through them all. By which time a further 322,900 would have appeared, and – many of them – disappeared. And that's not taking into account the year on year increase: 10,860 is a rise of 10.8 per cent on 1999's 9800. If that rate of growth persists, in the same year that you turn the last mouldering page of the last novel at the bottom of your millennial stack (2028, assuming you began in 2000), 191,840 new works of fiction will be published. Such an implausible figure suggests that the current rate of growth is unsustainable, a slump inevitable.

Well, maybe. And maybe it wouldn't be such a bad thing. 'The novel' – it's said in certain quarters, and louder than usual, the perennial murmur swelling to a growl – is currently in crisis (again). Earlier this year, Andrew Marr certified it dead. (He was announcing the shortlist for the Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction at the time. His verdict may prove to be no less premature than Johnson's pronouncement on Sterne: 'Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last.') Responding to Marr's comments, Ian Jack, the editor of *Granta*, suggested that it would be more accurate to say there was a 'lull'. Since, then, Robert McCrum, the literary editor of the *Observer*, has discussed the question more than once in his column, 'The World of Books'. And in a recent issue of the *Guardian*, Stephen Moss, that paper's former literary editor, has asked: 'Why do Rushdie, McEwan, Barnes and Amis still dominate Britain's literary scene?'

Without so much as a flutter of irony, Moss quotes an anonymous 'leading critic' denouncing 'the media's obsession' with Rushdie etc for 'blocking the emergence of new writers'. The media's obsession reflects a combination of idleness and herd instinct, or – to put it more kindly – caution. Everyone (in a certain narrow sense of the word) knows who Amis, Barnes, McEwan and Rushdie are, knows they're known to be 'critically acclaimed', knows they all know each other. It's nice and cosy in the cabin, while outside the ghosts of the year's ten thousand other novels howl in the night. Except they don't; that's just the simple way to tell it. It's much easier to say that 'the novel' is in irons, or even sinking, than it is to say something interesting.

The perceived problem is bound up in the perception of the problem, and both are connected to the sheer number of novels published each year. Whatever crisis there may be is as much to do with the concept of 'the novel' as it is with whatever that concept may refer to. How is it possible to distil 'the novel' from ten thousand? Obviously some – the overwhelming majority, in fact – have to be disqualified, but how do you decide on the lucky few that are to count? Moss's point has more to do with celebrity than quality of writing; he's talking about the type who, 'as far as press and public are concerned, is not merely a writer but a Writer. We only have the mental space for about half a dozen (as with pianists, poets and painters).' And if those half dozen all know each other, it makes it much easier, especially if you take into account what Moss calls 'their chums from other disciplines – Clive James, Craig Raine, James Fenton, Christopher Hitchens, Redmond O'Hanlon'. Together, novelists and 'chums' are not unlike a coterie of window-cleaners crowded onto a single boatswain's chair (or rather bench): each time one of them tugs on his rope, they all move a little higher up the skyscraper of fame; each time one applies his chamois cloth to the glass, the rest of us, peering out from the gloom inside the building, see all their faces a little more clearly. Amis and Co aren't the only gang of this kind, they're just the oldest and the biggest. And it would be a mistake to assume that the biggest celebrities write the most interesting books: Robert Browning's *Pauline*, for example, was self-published and, Browning later boasted, didn't sell a single copy. Moss says that Rushdie and McEwan's new books 'will be the publishing events of September', but that's not the same thing as the best novels, and I would read *The Devil's Larder* by Jim Crace before Rushdie's *Fury* (they'll both be published on the same day).

In 1980, Bill Buford, then the magazine's editor (he's now fiction editor of the *New Yorker*), wrote a piece for *Granta* – included in *Granta: The First 21 Years* (Granta, £9.99) – called 'The End of the English Novel'. He attacked the publishing industry for being insular and archaic, accusing it of continuing to practise as it had in the 19th century, when 'the reading public was . . . the same throughout the country' and 'its members read in the same accent.' But his conclusion is upbeat:

> The old divisions and the old generalisations are no longer usable. The fiction of today is testimony to an invasion of outsiders, using a language much larger than the culture. The English novel has been characterised by the self-depictions of its makers' dominance: the novel of sense and sensibility is informed by the authority of belonging. Today, however, the imagination resides along the peripheries; it is spoken through a minority discourse, with the dominant tongue reappropriated, re-commanded, and importantly re-invigorated. It is, at last, the end of the English novel and the beginning of the British one.

This is a distinction that, Rushdie aside, seems to have passed Moss by. He doesn't refer to Seth or Ishiguro or Kureishi, all famous men, often praised. Irvine Welsh and Andrew O'Hagan are mentioned in passing, in quotes from Matt Thorne and someone unnamed at *Granta*, but Moss himself is strangely silent on the subject of Scottish fiction; James Kelman's name, for example, doesn't come up. And what about women? Jeanette Winterson, not exactly unfamous, isn't featured; nor is Hilary Mantel; though Zadie Smith inevitably is.

Most published works of fiction are not particularly good, as has surely always been the case (and the situation must seem worse now, whenever now is, because the mediocrities of the past are soon remaindered and forgotten). But there are good novels being written, too, by writers who are not in the window-cleaning business – and if they are excluded from the 'literary scene', I'd like to think it doesn't bother them unduly. As Browning put it, 'What porridge had John Keats?'

Thomas Jones

NOTEBOOK

Women's Library to reopen in London

London's renowned Women's Library reopens in new premises Jan. 31, on the 75th anniversary of its founding. It began life in a converted pub as the Library of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, and became known as the Fawcett Library, after its founder Millicent Fawcett. The library's new home, dating from 1846, is the former Whitechapel Public Baths and Wash Houses, in Old Castle Street, Aldgate East.

Its unique collection of social history includes more than 60,000 books and pamphlets from 1632 onwards, covering subjects from feminism and fashion to science and society. There are more than 2,500 periodical titles of the past 250 years and nearly 400 archival collections, primarily on women's suffrage organizations and campaigning groups.

The library will stage three exhibitions a year, starting with Cooks and Campaigners: Selections from the Women's Library Collections. Web site: www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk. *Staff*

The Globe and Mail, Saturday, December 1, 2001

Holland House Library, London, after a German raid in October 1940.

"Smoke and mist both obscure shadows more than they do light, But when I am speaking of smoke, I cannot forget that beautiful yet pitiable morning, the 12th of September, 1666. It was Sunday, and I was busy working amidst my books in White Street in London, when I became amazed at how red and glowing the rays of the sun shone in my room. Whereupon I went to the window and saw that a pink smoke, which I mistook for clouds, was blowing toward the southwest."

[Van Hoogstraten-Dutch perspective painter]

One of the lasting impressions the Great Fire of 1666 seems to have left with Londoners caught up in it was the physical vulnerability of books. Because St. Paul's was the printing and bookselling sector of old London, books—in bulk—were a major casualty of the conflagration, and seem to have been at the forefront of the minds of those caught up in the catastrophe. Pepys recorded that the Sunday after the fire he heard a sermon preached in which the Dean of Rochester said that "at this time the City is reduced from a large Folio to a Decimo tertio."

It is striking how many of the Royal Society circle were preoccupied, after 1666, with building significant collections of books, and guarding them assiduously against the ravages of time—both in the care with which they were housed, and the attention given to wills and inventories of personal effects, in the hope that their libraries might be preserved for posterity.

[Two weeks after the fire, on 19 September 1666, Pepys brought] all his "fine things" back from Bethnal Green and Deptford, where he I had sent them for safety as the fire spread. To his consternation, several of his precious books were missing. He was "mightily troubled, and even in my sleep, at my missing four or five of my biggest books—Speed's

Chronicle—and maps, and the two parts of Waggoner, and a book of Cards." The following day he was "much troubled about my books." In the evening, as he reshelved and organised his library he was "mightily troubled for my great books that I miss. And I am troubled the more, for fear there should be more missing than what I find."

Not everyone, however, was so lucky. The booksellers in St. Paul's churchyard, the heart of the London book trade, lost their entire stock, which they had stored for safety in the Stationers' Hall, St. Faith's Church and Christ Church, all of which burned to the ground. Pepys wrote on 26 September:

Here by Mr. Dugdale [Sir William Dugdale's son] I hear the great loss of books in St. Paul's churchyard, and at their hall also [Stationers' Hall, where newly registered book stock was housed] - which they value at about 150,000 pounds; some booksellers being wholly undone; and among others, they say, my poor Kirton. And Mr. Crumlum, all his books and household stuff burned; they trusting to St. Fayths, and the roof of the church falling, broke the Arch down into the lower church,and so all the goods burned—a very great loss. Sir William Dugdale hath lost about 1000 pounds in books.

In addition to the entire print run of Wilkins's *Essay towards a Real Character and Philosopbical Language*, an English version of Galileo's *Dialogue Of Two World Systems* (translated from Mersenne's French edition) was apparently totally lost.

All the great booksellers almost undone – not only these, but their warehouses at their hall, and under Christchurch and elsewhere, being all burned.

The Royal Society's programme of regular publications was directly affected by the fire. In late September Oldenburg wrote to Boyle, concerning disruption of the usual arrangements for printing and distribution of the *Transactions*:

I shall find it very difficult to continue the printing of the Transactions, Martyn and Allestry being undone with the rest of the stationers at Paul's church-yard, and all their books burnt they had carried for safety into St. Faith's church, as they call it; besides that the city lying desolate now, it will be very hard to vend [sell] them at the present."

Why Mir's demise will be 'the ultimate book-burning'

MARCIA DUNN
Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. – When Mir plunges into the Pacific next week, more than metal will rain down in flames. Lots more.

Like Shannon Lucid's books, all 100 of them. Michael Foale's running shoes. Andrew Thomas' nail file. Norman Thagard's spare uniform.

The American astronauts who lived aboard the Russian space station wish they could salvage some of the things they left behind, as well as some Russian items and even pieces of the 15-year-old spacecraft itself.

Thomas said yesterday from the international space station that if he could, he would bring back the picture of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, that hangs above Mir's galley.

Another picture has hung there for years, but Mir's first American resident, Thagard, isn't sure it's worth saving.

"It was almost a pornographic sort of thing that was hanging from the toilet ... one of those that would probably be offensive to some women," he recalled from Tallahassee, where he is an electronics professor at Florida State University.

The X-rated drawing – and Gagarin's portrait and a Russian icon – will join Lucid's library for what she calls "the ultimate book burning." Russian space officials are targeting next week for Mir's fiery finale. Unless cosmonauts smuggled them off, the pictures should all be there.

Lucid's books were gifts from her daughters. They were mostly used, half-price paperbacks. The covers of the hardbacks were torn off before launch to save weight.

Lucid neatly arranged the books on shelves during her six-month stay in 1996, which remains a U.S. space endurance record. But the books were inside Spektr, a section of Mir that was ruptured by a runaway cargo ship in 1997 and had to be sealed off.

"I really felt sort of bad when they had to close Spektr off because that's where all my books were," said Lucid, who is working at Mission Control for the current shuttle mission. "I liked the thought of leaving a library up in space."

The locked-up Spektr also contains Foale's personal belongings. His running shoes and clothes, and even his toothbrush, were inside when the collision occurred.

Altogether, seven Americans took turns living aboard Mir from 1995 through 1998. They were practicing for the international space station, now circling Earth with space shuttle Discovery.

Jerry Linenger, who helped battle a severe fire aboard Mir in 1997, said he would save the window where he gazed out at the heavens.

"It's pretty symbolic of what Mir really was," he said from Suttons Bay, Mich., where he lives. "You see the heavens above. You see the stars, sort of the future out there. ... That was a time when you could look out, sort of reflect on the big picture."

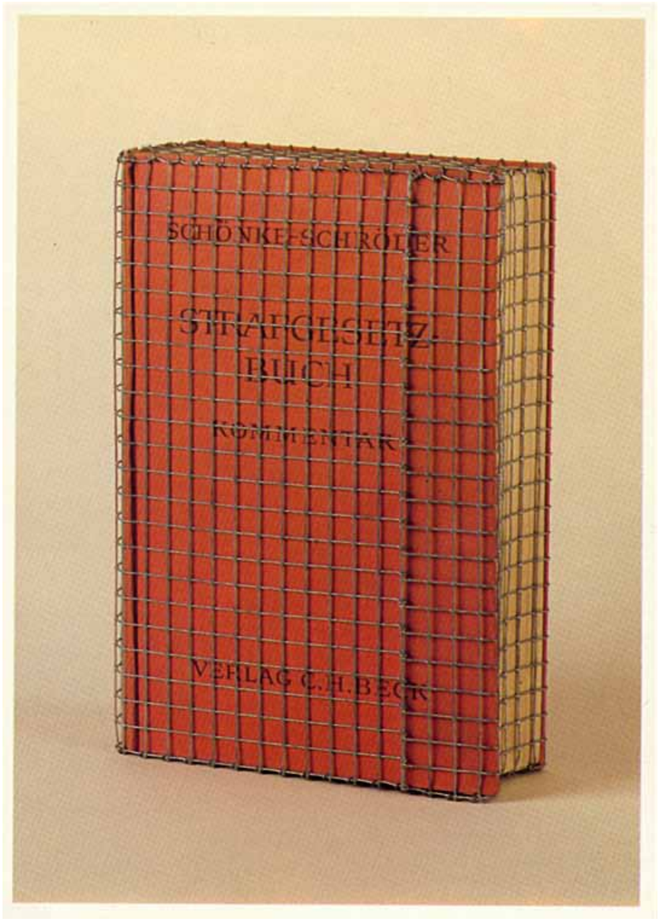
Thomas would not mind salvaging Mir's galley. It provided sustenance, though some Russian cuisine, like fish aspic, did not exactly go down easy.

Thagard would settle for his unused blue uniform and Mir's toilet.

"When I give presentations, one of the questions you get asked, especially by kids, is: 'What are space toilets like?'" he said. "It would be actually not a bad display item."

How Mir will die. *Page J8*

Lisa Jardine, **Ingenious Pursuits: Building the Scientific Revolution**, Nan A Talese / Doubleday, New York, 1999



Too Loud a Solitude

For thirty-five years now I've been in wastepaper, and it's my love story. For thirty-five years I've been compacting wastepaper and books, smearing myself with letters until I've come to look like my enclyclopedias—and a good three tons of them I've compacted over the years. I am a jug filled with water both magic and plain; I have only to lean over and a stream of beautiful thought flows out of me. My education has been so unwitting can't quite tell which of my thoughts come from me and which from my books, but that's how I've stayed attune to myself and the world around me for the past thirty five years. Because when I read, I don't really read; I pop a beautiful sentence into my mouth and suck it like a fruit drop, or I sip it like a liqueur until the thought dissolves in me like alcohol, infusing brain and heart and coursing on through the veins to the root of each blood vessel. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've been compacting old paper and books, living as I do in a land that has known how to read and write for fifteen generations. (...)

For thirty-five years I've been compacting it all in my hydraulic press, and three times a week it is transported by truck to train and then on to the paper mill, where they snap the wires and dump my work into alkalis and acids strong enough to desolve the razor blades I keep gouging my hands with. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've been compacting old paper in my hydraulic press. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've been compacting old paper, and I've had so many beautiful books tossed into my cellar that if I had three barns they'd all be full. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've been throwing each bale into a high-stress situation, crossing off every year, every month, every day in the month until we both retire, my press and I. I've been bringing home books every evening in my briefcase, and my two-floor Holesovice apartment is all books: what with the cellar and the shed it long since packed and the kitchen, pantry, and even bathroom full, the only space free is a path to the window and stove. Even the bathroom has only room enough for me to sit down in: just above the toilet bowl, about five feet off the floor, I have a whole series of shelves, planks piled high to the ceiling, holding over a thousand pounds of books, and one careless roost, one careless rise, one brush with a shelf, and half a ton of books would come tumbling down on me, catching me with my pants down. And when there was no room for even a single addition, I pushed my twin beds together and rigged a kind of canopy of planks over them, ceiling high, for the two additional tons of books I've carried home over the years, and when I fall asleep I've got all those books weighing down on me like a two-ton nightmare. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've been compacting wastepaper, and if I had it all to do over I'd do just what I've done for the past thirty-five years. Even so, three or four times a year my job turns from plus to minus: the cellar suddenly goes bad, the nags and niggles and whines of my boss pound in my ears and head and make the room into an inferno; the wastepaper, piled to the ceiling, wet and moldy, ferments in a way that makes manure seem sweet, a swamp decomposing in the depths of my cellar, with bubbles rising to the surface like will-o'-the-wisps from a stump rotting in the mire. And I have to come up for air, get away from the press, but I never go out, I can't stand fresh air anymore, it makes me cough and choke and sputter like a Havana cigar. (...)

I compact wastepaper, and when I press the green button the wall of my press advances, and when I press the red button it retreats, thereby describing a basic motion of the world, like the bellows of a concertina, like a circle, which must return to its point of departure. (...)

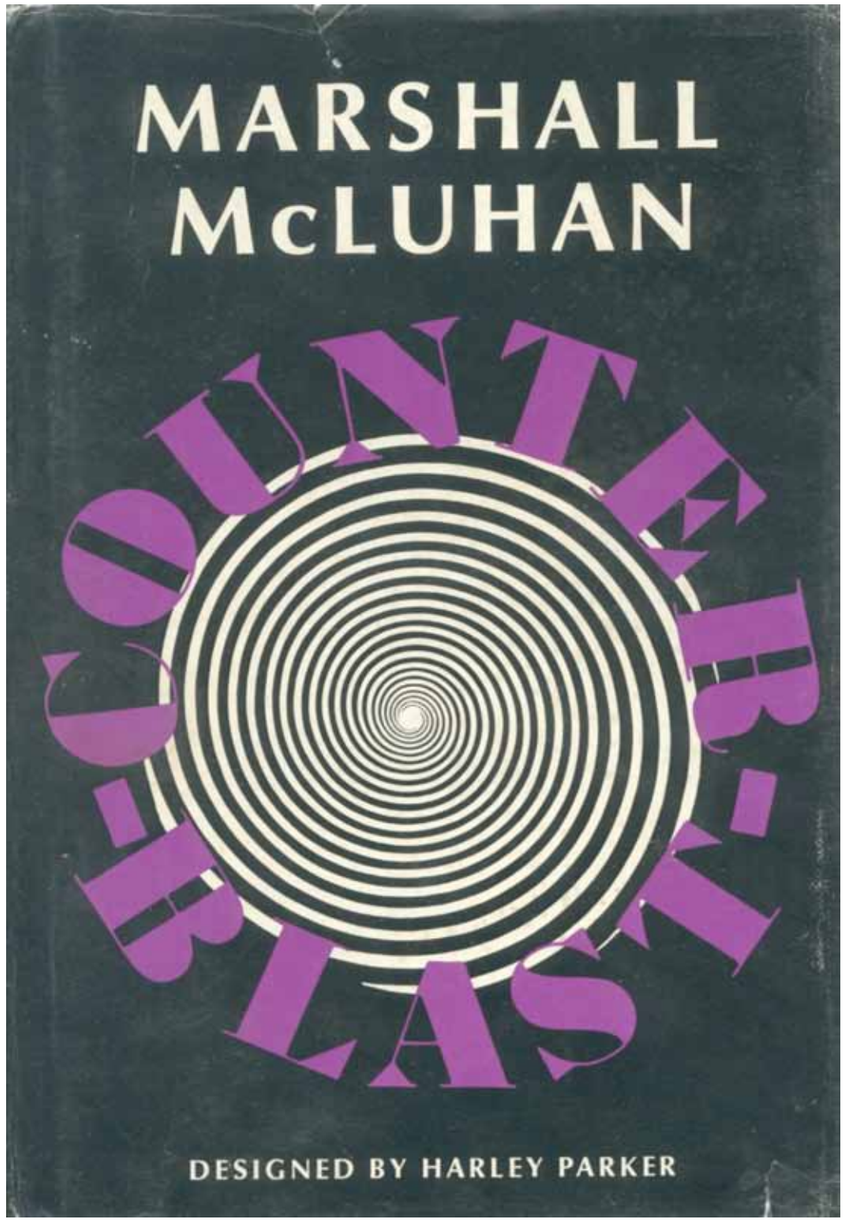
And so everything I see in this world, it all moves backward and forward at the same time, like a blacksmith's bellows, like everything in my press, turning into its opposite at the command of red and green buttons, and that's what makes the world go round. I've been compacting wastepaper for thirty-five years, a job that ought to require not only a good classical education, preferably on the university level, but also a divinity degree, because in my profession spiral and circle come together and *progressus ad futurum* meets *regressus ad originem*, and I experience it all firsthand: I, unhappily happy with my unwitting education, ruminate on *progressus ad futurum* meeting *regressus ad originem* for relaxation, the way some people read the *Prague Evening News*. (...)

For thirty-five years now I've compacted wastepaper in a hydraulic press, for thirty-five years I thought there was no other way, but then I began hearing about a new press over in Bubny, a gigantic press that did the work of twenty, and when eyewitnesses reported it made bales of seven and eight hundred pounds, bales delivered directly to the train by forklift, I said to myself, "This is something you've got to see, Hant'a, with your own eyes. It's time for a courtesy call." And when I got to Bubny and saw the enormous glass structure and heard the press booming away, I was so shaken I couldn't look at the machine, I just stood there and turned my head away, fumbled with my shoelaces—anything to keep from looking that machine in the face.

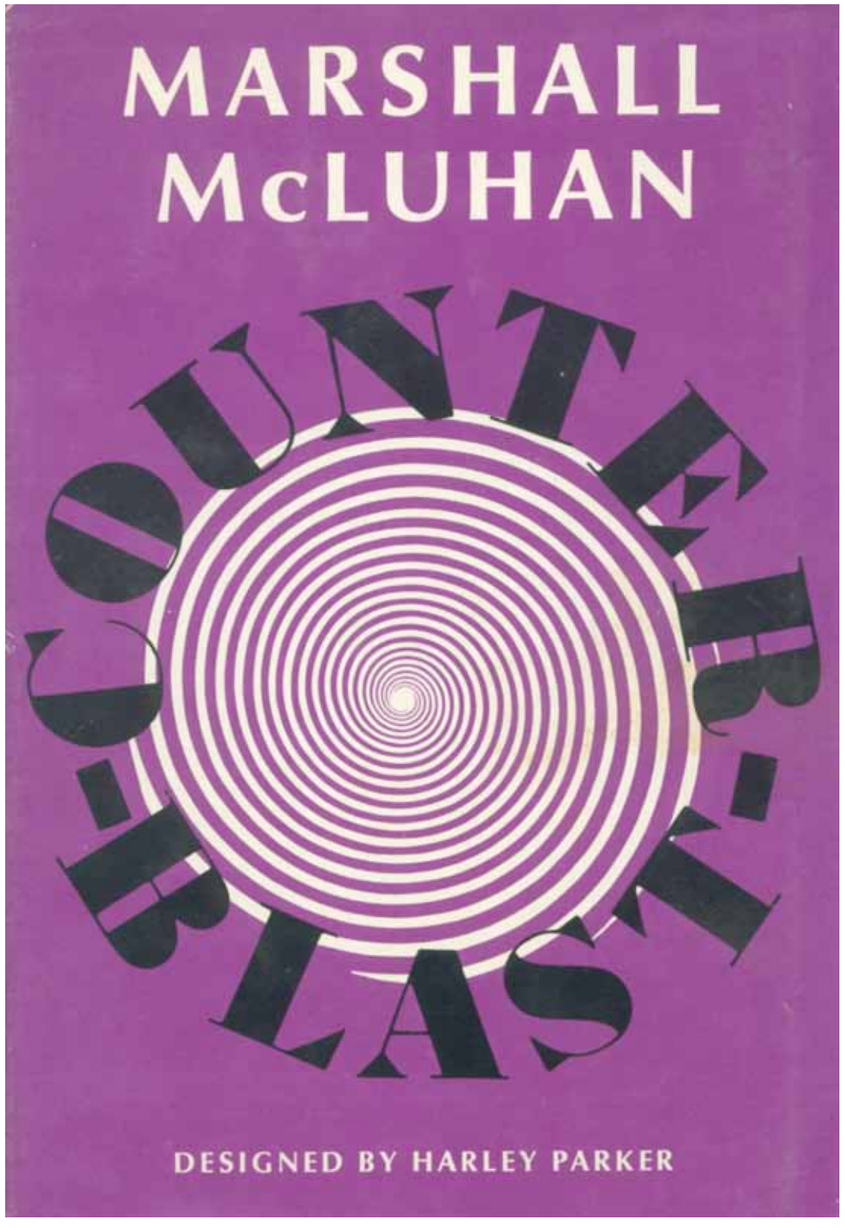
To peer into the mass of wastepaper and find the spine and boards of a rare book has always been a special treat for me. (...)

For thirty-five years I'd compacted wastepaper in my hydraulic press, never dreaming it could be done any differently, but two days after I laid eyes on the gigantic press in Bubny, the dreams I never dreamed came true. That morning when I got to work, who should I find in the courtyard but two of the Socialist Labor youngsters in their orange gloves, nipple-high blue overalls, suspenders, green turtlenecks, and yellow baseball caps, as if on the way to a game. My boss took them triumphantly down to my cellar and showed them my press, and in no time flat they had covered my table with a sheet of clean paper for their milk and made themselves at home, while I just stood there humiliated, stressed and strained, knowing all at once, knowing body and soul, that I'd never be able to adapt; I was in the same position as the monks who, when they learned that Copernicus had discovered a new set of cosmic laws and that the earth was no longer the center of the universe, committed mass suicide, unable to imagine a universe different from the one they had lived in and by up to then.

Bohumil Hrabal, **Too Loud a Solitude**, Harvest / HBJ Book, San Diego, London, New York, 1976



Anne Hamilton, **Untitled,** (filament), detail of installation view, 1996. Photo by Thibauld Jeanson.



Why Literature

(...) This brings me to Bill Gates. He was in Madrid not long ago and visited the Royal Spanish Academy, which has embarked upon a joint venture with Microsoft. Among other things, Gates assured the members of the academy that he would personally guarantee that the letter "n" would never be removed from computer software—a promise that allowed four hundred million Spanish speakers on five continents to breathe a sigh of relief, since the banishment of such an essential letter from cyberspace would have created monumental problems. Immediately after making his amiable concession to the Spanish language, however, Gates, before even leaving the premises of the academy, avowed in a press conference that he expected to accomplish his highest goal before he died. That goal, he explained, is to put an end to paper and then to books.

In his judgment, books are anachronistic objects. Gates argued that computer screens are able to replace paper in all the functions that paper has heretofore assumed. He also insisted that, in addition to being less onerous, computers take up less space and are more easily transportable, and also that the transmission of news and literature by these electronic media, instead of by newspapers and books, will have the ecological advantage of stopping the destruction of forests, a cataclysm that is a consequence of the paper industry. People will continue to read, Gates assured his listeners, but they will read on computer screens, and consequently there will be more chlorophyl in the environment.

I was not present at Gates's little discourse; I learned these details from the press. Had I been there I would have booed Gates for proclaiming shamelessly his intention to send me and my colleagues, the writers of books, directly to the unemployment line. And I would have vigorously disputed his analysis. Can the screen really replace the book in all its aspects? I am not so certain. I am fully aware of the enormous revolution that new technologies such as the Internet have caused in the fields of communication and the sharing of information, and I confess that the Internet provides invaluable help to me every day in my work; but my gratitude for these extraordinary conveniences does not imply a belief that the electronic screen can replace paper, or that reading on a computer can stand in for literary reading. That is a chasm that I cannot cross. I cannot accept the idea that a nonfunctional or nonpragmatic act of reading, one that seeks neither information nor a useful and immediate communication, can integrate on a computer screen the dreams and the pleasures of words with the same sensation of intimacy, the same mental concentration and spiritual isolation, that may be achieved by the act of reading a book.

Perhaps this is a prejudice resulting from lack of practice, and from a long association of literature with books and paper. But even though I enjoy surfing the Web in search of world news, I would never go to the screen to read a poem by Gongora or a novel by Onetti or an essay by Paz, because I am certain that the effect of such a reading would not be the same. I am convinced, although I cannot prove it, that with the disappearance of the book, literature would suffer a serious blow, even a mortal one. The term "literature" would not disappear, of course. Yet it would almost certainly be used to denote a type of text as distant from what we understand as literature today as soap operas are from the tragedies of Sophocles and Shakespeare.

There is still another reason to grant literature an important place in the life of nations. Without it, the critical mind, which is the real engine of historical change and the best protector of liberty, would suffer an irreparable loss. This is because all good literature is radical, and poses radical questions about the world in which we live. In all great literary texts, often without their authors' intending it, a seditious inclination is present. (...)

How could we not feel cheated after reading *War and Peace* or *Rememberance of Things Past* and returning to our world of insignificant details, of boundaries and prohibitions that lie in wait everywhere and, with each step, corrupt our illusions? Even more than the need to sustain the continuity of culture and to enrich language, the greatest contribution of literature to human progress is perhaps to remind us (without intending to, in the majority of cases) that the world is badly made; and that those who pretend to the contrary, the powerful and the lucky, are lying; and that the world can be improved, and made more like the worlds that our imagination and our language are able to create. A free and democratic society must have responsible and critical citizens conscious of the need continuously to examine the world that we inhabit and to try, even though it is more and more an impossible task, to make it more closely resemble the world that we would like to inhabit. And there is no better means of fomenting dissatisfaction with existence than the reading of good literature; no better means of forming critical and independent citizens who will not be manipulated by those who govern them, and who are endowed with a permanent spiritual mobility and a vibrant imagination. (...)

Good literature, while temporarily relieving human dissatisfaction, actually increases it, by developing a critical and nonconformist attitude toward life. It might even be said that literature makes human beings more likely to be unhappy. To live dissatisfied, and at war with existence, is to seek things that may not be there, to condemn oneself to fight futile battles, like the battles that Colonel Aureliano Buendia fought in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, knowing full well that he would lose them all. All this may be true. Yet it is also true that without rebellion against the mediocrity and the squalor oflife, we would still live in a primitive state, and history would have stopped. The autonomous individual would not have been created, science and technology would not have progressed, human rights would not have been recognized, freedom would not have existed. All these things are born of unhappiness, of acts of defiance against a life perceived as insufficient or intolerable. For this spirit that scorns life as it is—and searches with the madness of Don Quixote, whose insanity derived from the reading of chivalric novels—literature has served as a great spur.

Let us attempt a fantastic historical reconstruction. Let us imagine a world without literature, a humanity that has not read poems or novels. In this kind of atrophied civilization, with its puny lexicon in which groans and apelike gesticulations would prevail over words, certain adjectives would not exist. Those adjectives include: quixotic, Kafkaesque, Rabelaisian, Orwellian, sadistic, and masochistic, all terms of literary origin. To be sure, we would still have insane people, and victims of paranoia and persecution complexes, and people with uncommon appetites and outrageous excesses, and bipeds who enjoy inflicting or receiving pain. But we would not have learned to see, behind these extremes of behavior that are prohibited by the norms of our culture, essential characteristics of the human condition. We would not have discovered our own traits, as only the talents of Cervantes, Kafka, Rabelais, Orwell, de Sade, and Sacher-Masoch have revealed them to us. (...)

The inventions of all great literary creators open our eyes to unknown aspects of our own condition. They enable us to explore and to understand more fully the common human abyss. When we say "Borgesian," the word immediately conjures up the separation of our minds from the rational order of reality and the entry into a fantastic universe, a rigorous and elegant mental construction, almost always labyrinthine and arcane, and riddled with literary references and allusions, whose singularities are not foreign to us because in them we recognize hidden desires and intimate truths of our own personality that took shape only thanks to the literary creation of Jorge Luis Borges. The word "Kafkaesque" comes to mind, like the focus mechanism of those old cameras with their accordion arms, every time we feel threatened, as defenseless individuals, by the oppressive machines of power that have caused so much pain and injustice in the modern world—the authoritarian regimes, the vertical parties, the intolerant churches, the asphyxiating bureaucrats. Without the short stories and the novels of that tormented Jew from Prague who wrote in German and lived always on the lookout, we would not have been able to understand the impotent feeling of the isolated individual, or the terror of persecuted and discriminated minorities, confronted with the all-embracing powers that can smash them and eliminate them without the henchmen even showing their faces.

The adjective “Orwellian,” first cousin of “Kafkaesque,” gives a voice to the terrible anguish, the sensation of extreme absurdity, that was generated by totalitarian dictatorships of the twentieth century, the most sophisticated, cruel, and absolute dictatorships in history, in their control of the actions and the psyches of the members of a society. In *1984*, George Orwell described in cold and haunting shades a humanity subjugated to Big Brother, an absolute lord who, through an efficient combination of terror and technology, eliminated liberty, spontaneity, and equality, and transformed society into a beehive of automatons. In this nightmarish world, language also obeys power, and has been transformed into “newspeak,” purified of all invention and all subjectivity, metamorphosed into a string of platitudes that ensure the individual’s slavery to the system. It is true that the sinister prophecy of 1984 did not come to pass, and totalitarian communism in the Soviet Union went the way of totalitarian fascism in Germany and elsewhere; and soon thereafter it began to deteriorate also in China, and in anachronistic Cuba and North Korea. But the danger is never completely dispelled, and the word “Orwellian” continues to describe the danger, and to help us to understand it.

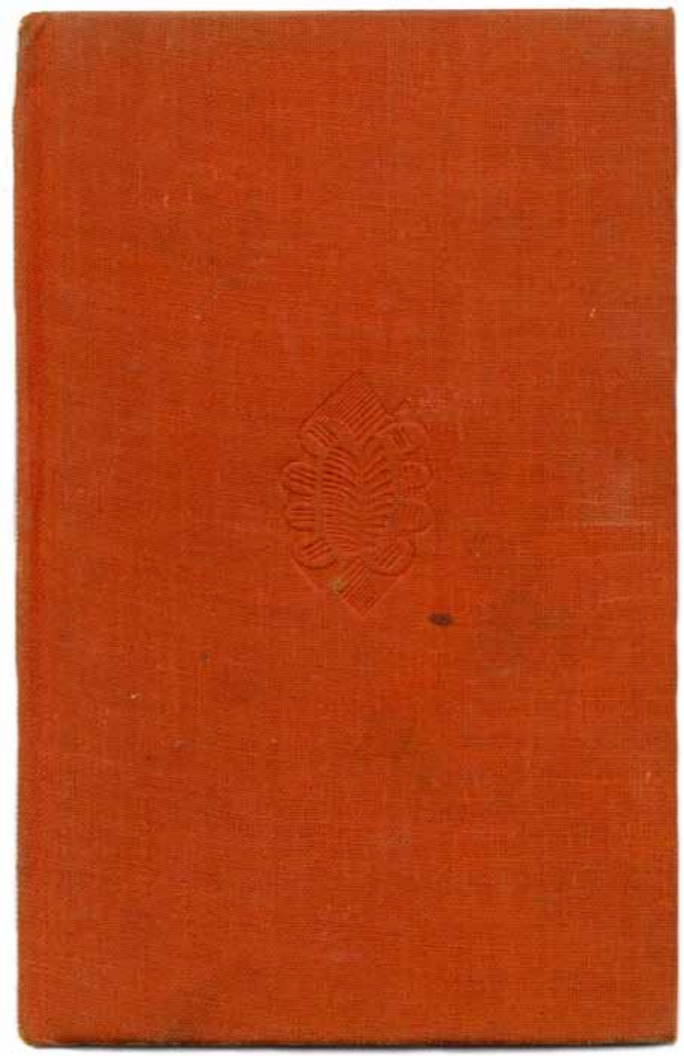
So literature’s unrealities, literature’s lies, are also a precious vehicle for the knowledge of the most hidden of human realities. The truths that it reveals are not always flattering, and sometimes the image of ourselves that emerges in the mirror of novels and poems is the image of a monster. This happens when we read about the horrendous sexual butchery fantasized by de Sade, or the dark lacerations and brutal sacrifices that fill the cursed books of Sacher-Masoch and Bataille. At times the spectacle is so offensive and ferocious that it becomes irresistible. Yet the worst in these pages is not the blood, the humiliation, the abject love of torture; the worst is the discovery that this violence and this excess are not foreign to us, that they are a profound part of humanity. These monsters eager for transgression are hidden in the most intimate recesses of our being; and from the shadow where they live they seek a propitious occasion to manifest themselves, to impose the rule of unbridled desire that destroys rationality, community, and even existence. And it was not science that first ventured into these tenebrous places in the human mind, and discovered the destructive and the self-destructive potential that also shapes it. It was literature that made this discovery. A world without literature would be partly blind to these terrible depths, which we urgently need to see.

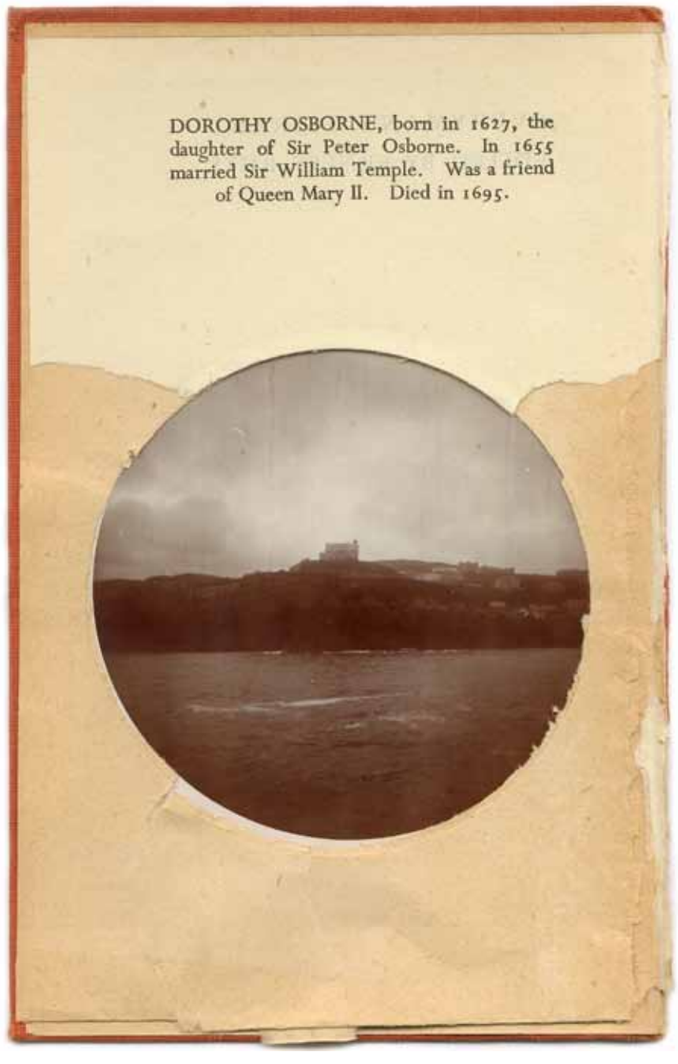
Uncivilized, barbarian, devoid of sensitivity and crude of speech, ignorant and instinctual, inept at passion and crude at love, this world without literature, this nightmare that I am delineating, would have as its principal traits conformism and the universal submission of humankind to power. In this sense, it would also be a purely animalistic world. Basic instincts would determine the daily practices of a life characterized by the struggle for survival, and the fear of the unknown, and the satisfaction of physical necessities. There would be no place for the spirit. In this world, moreover, the crushing monotony of living would be accompanied by the sinister shadow of pessimism, the feeling that human life is what it had to be, and that it will always be thus, and that no one and nothing can change it.

When one imagines such a world, one is tempted to picture primitives in loincloths, the small magic-religious communities that live at the margins of modernity in Latin America, Oceania, and Africa. But I have a different failure in mind. The nightmare that I am warning about is the result not of under development but of over development. As a consequence of technology and our subservience to it, we may imagine a future society full of computer screens and speakers, and without books, or a society in which books—that is, works of literature—have become what alchemy became in the era of physics: an archaic curiosity, practiced in the catacombs of the media civilization by a neurotic minority. I am afraid that this cybernetic world, in spite of its prosperity and its power, its high standard of living and its scientific achievement would be profoundly uncivilized and utterly soulless—a resigned humanity of postliterary automatons who have abdicated freedom.

It is highly improbable of course, that this macabre utopia will ever come about. The end of our story, the end of history, has not yet been written, and it is not predetermined. What we will become depends entirely on our vision and our will. But if we wish to avoid the impoverishment of our imagination, and the disappearance of the precious dissatisfaction that refines our sensibility and teaches us to speak with eloquence and rigor, and the weakening of our freedom, then we must act. More precisely, we must read.

Mario Vargas Llosa, “Why Literature,” in **The Best American Essays**, Stephen Jay Gould ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston/New York, 2002




DOROTHY OSBORNE, born in 1627, the daughter of Sir Peter Osborne. In 1655 married Sir William Temple. Was a friend of Queen Mary II. Died in 1695.

The Green Globe, ca. 1506, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Banned books reprinted in China

OLIVER AUGUST
London Times

BEIJING – The first of 300 secret books copied millions of times by hand during the Cultural Revolution has been published in China to great critical acclaim. The novel, The Embroidered Shoe, was originally a folk tale told in the late 1960s when all book-publishing came to a halt during Mao Zedong's misguided mass campaign.

Too frightened to publish anything in a climate of constant ideological shifts and purges, Chinese writers opted to pass on their stories orally. Eventually, 300 of these stories were written down by hand and passed around in underground meetings. The manuscripts were repeatedly copied by hand.

After Mao's death in 1976, the new Chinese leadership declared the Cultural Revolution a mistake.

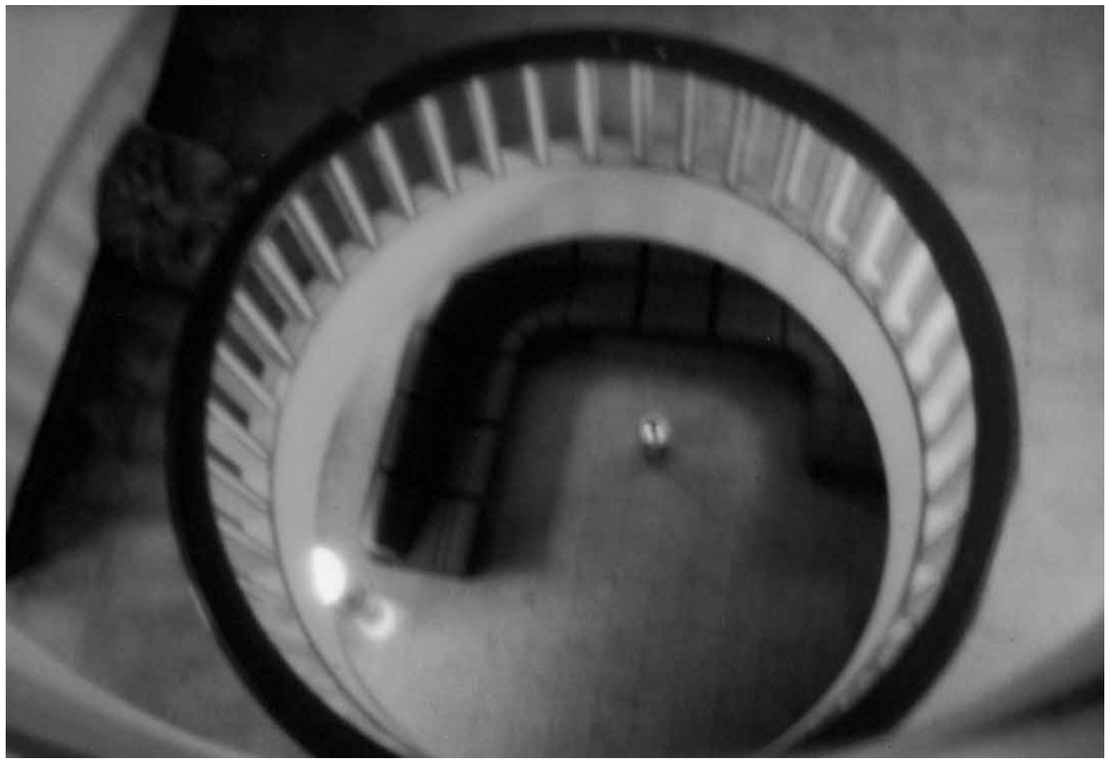
The publication of The Embroidered Shoe appears to indicate a new readiness to confront the more uncomfortable historical truths. Zhang Baorui, the original author of the story that became The Embroidered Shoe, is now a member of the China Writers' Association. He said: "Over the last 30 years, China has seen great political changes. Today, many kinds of literature can be published as long as the content is clean."

The novel passed the Chinese censors' watchful eye earlier this year even though it questions the Communist Party's position of power. The Embroidered Shoe tells of an attempted coup by secret agents from Taiwan. They are eventually found out because of their choice of footwear.

A Beijing bookseller said: "I get a new supply of copies every morning but it's always sold out by the evening. Many young people buy the handwritten book. They have heard from their parents about these mysterious tracts but they have never seen one. Now is their chance."

After the book's great success, Zhang, 48, wants to publish several other stories written by hand 30 years ago. He has collected dozens of manuscripts. "Many people have tried to buy the manuscripts from me but I declined. I hope that one day China will have a Cultural Revolution museum where they can be displayed.

"Every time these stories were copied people added something. Writing by candlelight late at night, the story grew ever more complex and dramatic," he said.



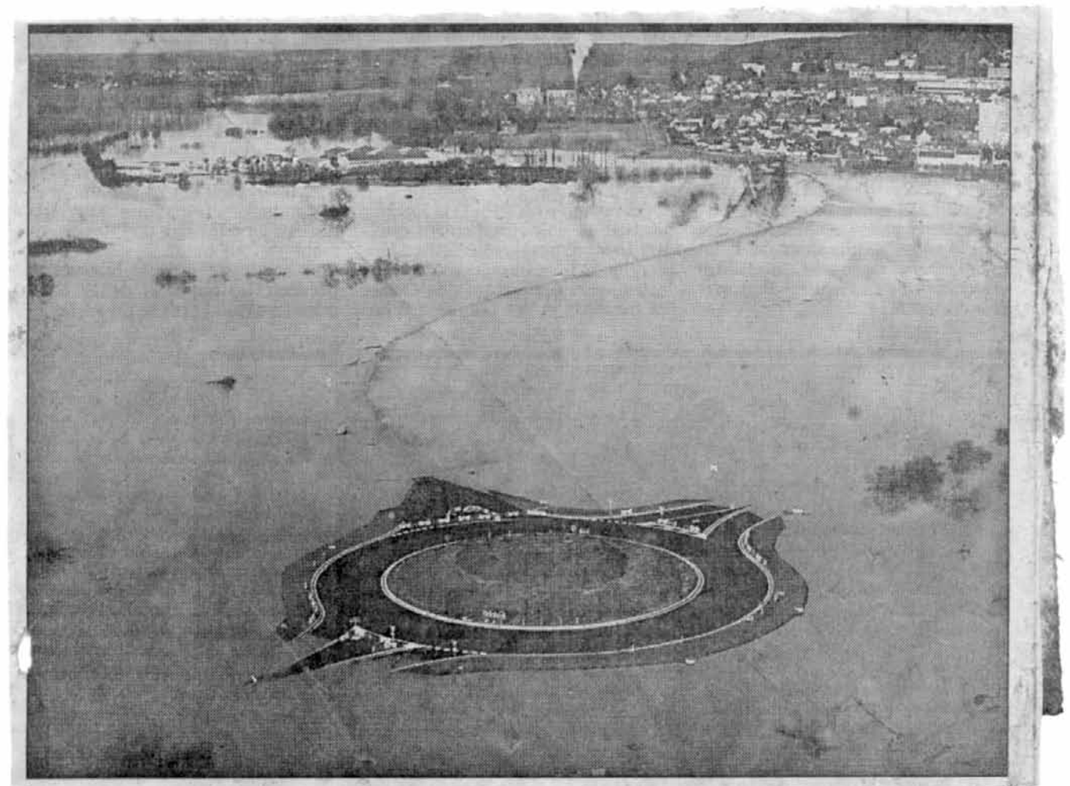
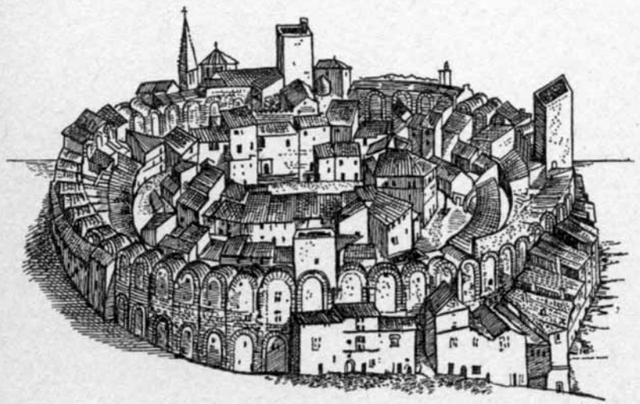


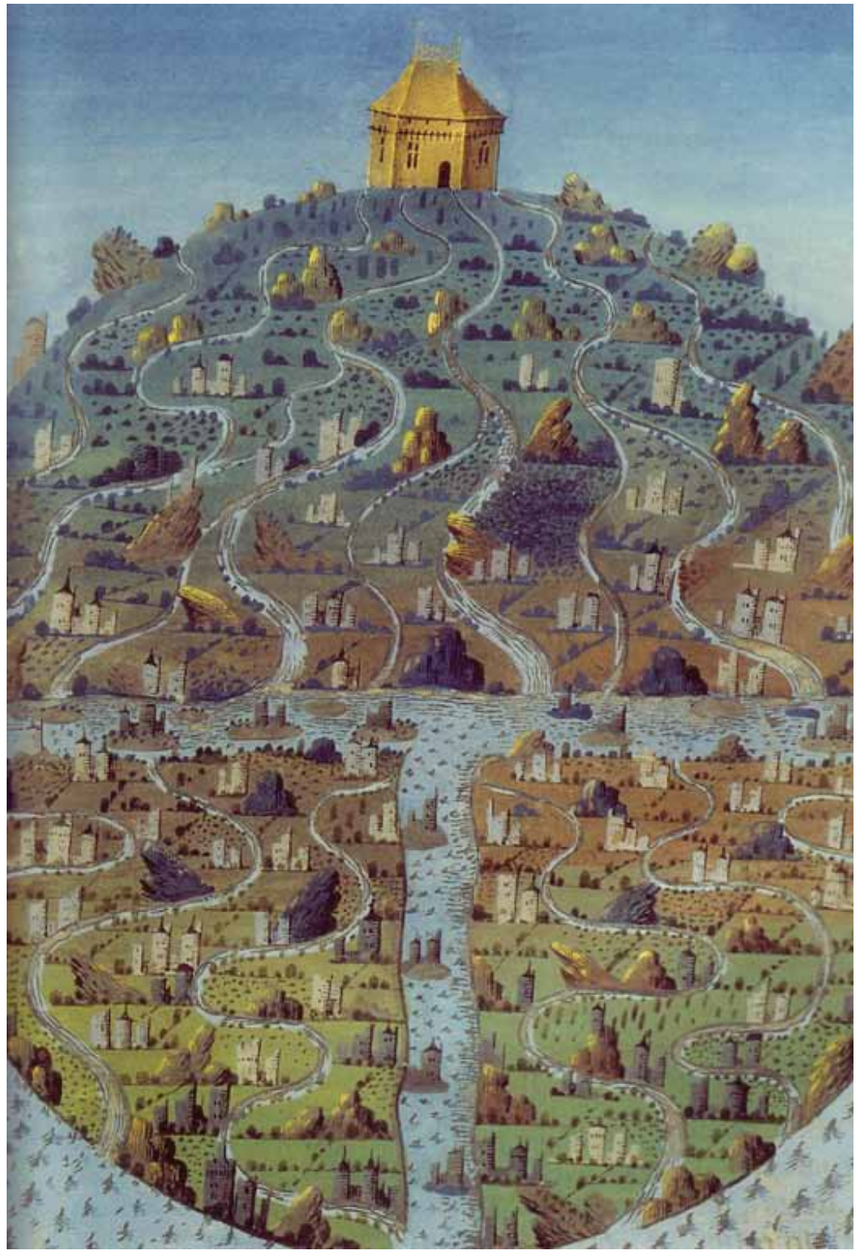
PHOTO AFP

L'eau recule en France

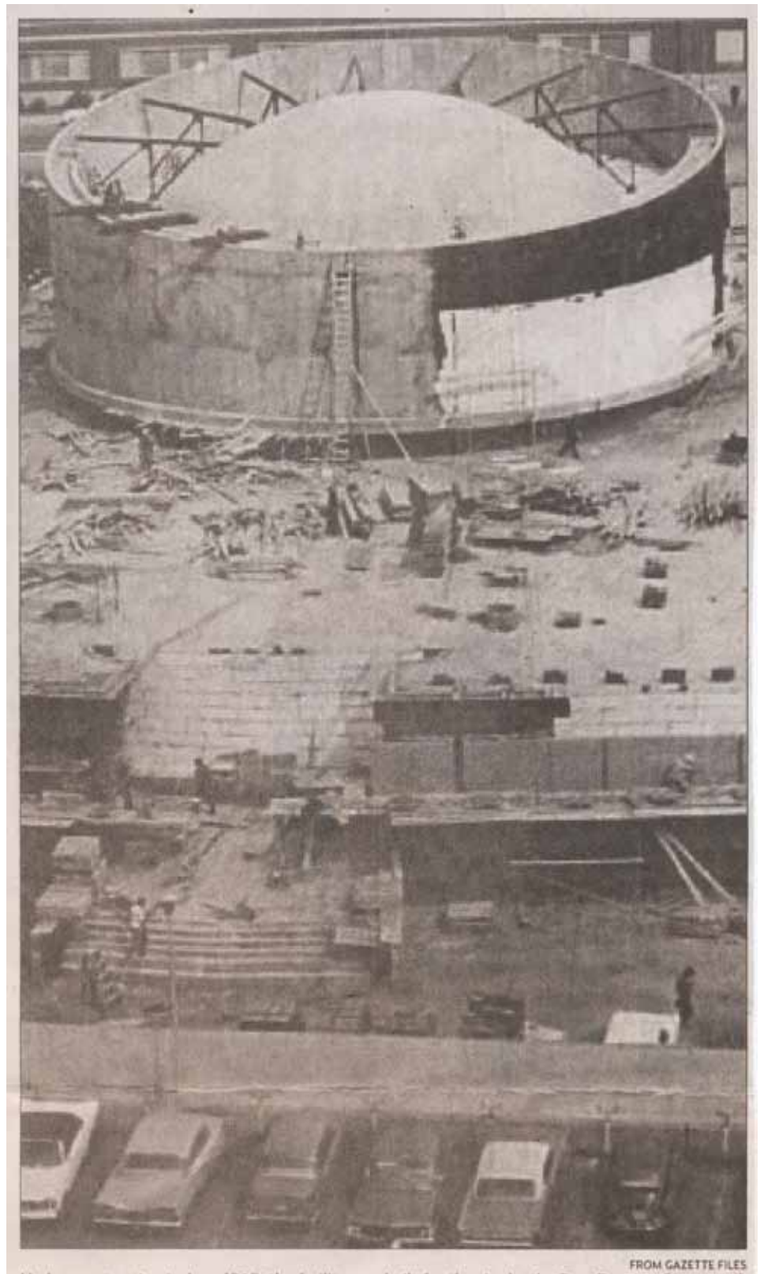
Malgré une décrue générale en Bretagne, les inondations restaient préoccupantes dans la région de Redon (Ille-et-Vilaine), en France, où la Vilaine a atteint hier le niveau de la dernière grande crue de 1995. En Normandie, un recul des eaux s'est amorcé dans les régions touchées, principalement dans le Calvados. À Redon, l'eau de la Vilaine est montée d'un centimètre par heure dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche, si bien que la cote de 5,35 mètres, constatée en 1995, a été atteinte hier matin et même légèrement dépassée en milieu de journée, selon la sous-préfecture de la ville. Le niveau du fleuve s'est ensuite stabilisé. Par ailleurs, vraisemblableent en raison des inondations, un homme d'une vingtaine d'années est porté disparu depuis samedi à Hennebont, près de Lorient, dans le Morbihan.



Roman buildings were adapted to a variety of uses during the Middle Ages. Circuses became public squares (e. g. at Lucca or the Piazza Navona in Rome); theatres a warren of houses (as the theatre of Marcellus still partially is); and mausolea citadels (the Castle Sant'Angelo). At Nîmes and Arles the amphitheatres assumed the appearance of small towns. That of Arles (above) was fortified in the Middle Ages, and the three towers of this engraving are the remains of this work. The houses built into the great masonry arcades gradually declined in status. By 1825 they were slums and were cleared away, the Roman arrangements being restored. (8)



Le monde, Livre des propriétés des choses, Barthélemy l'Anglais, Pootiers, vers 1480

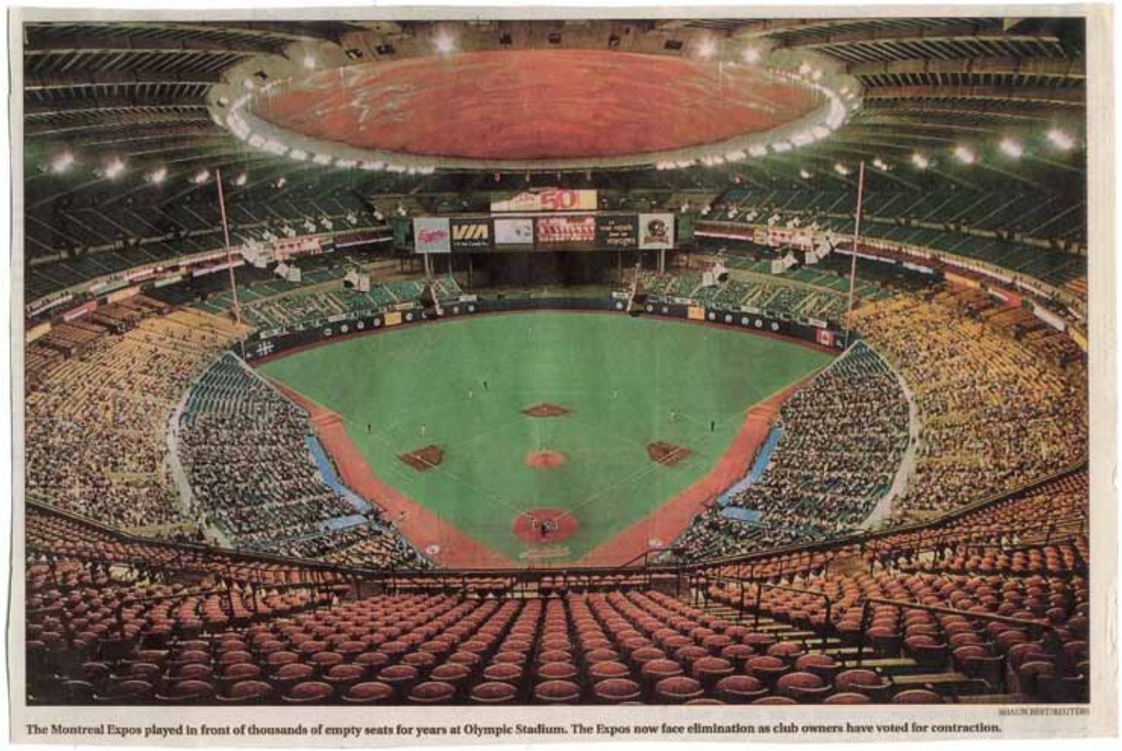


FROM GAZETTE FILES

Under construction in June 1965: the facility was built for the city by the Dow Brewing Co. to mark Canada's centennial, and was the country's first planetarium when it opened in 1966.

The Colosseum in Rome

Baseball Diamond

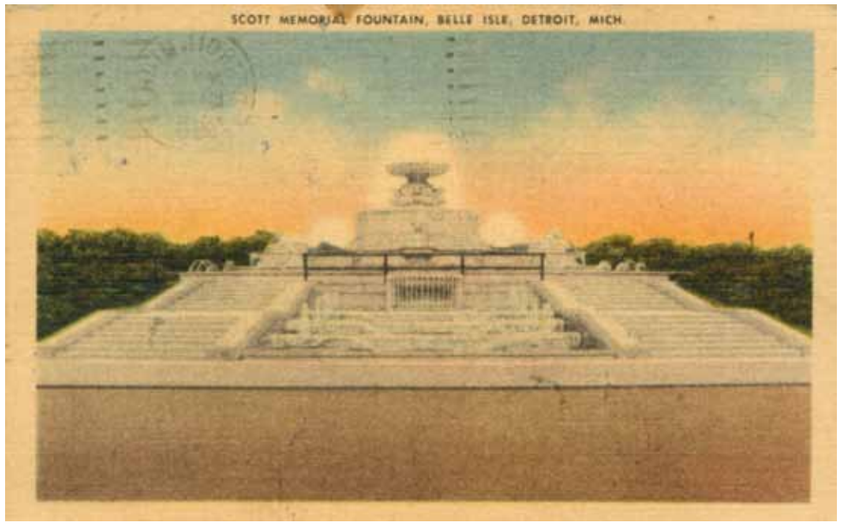


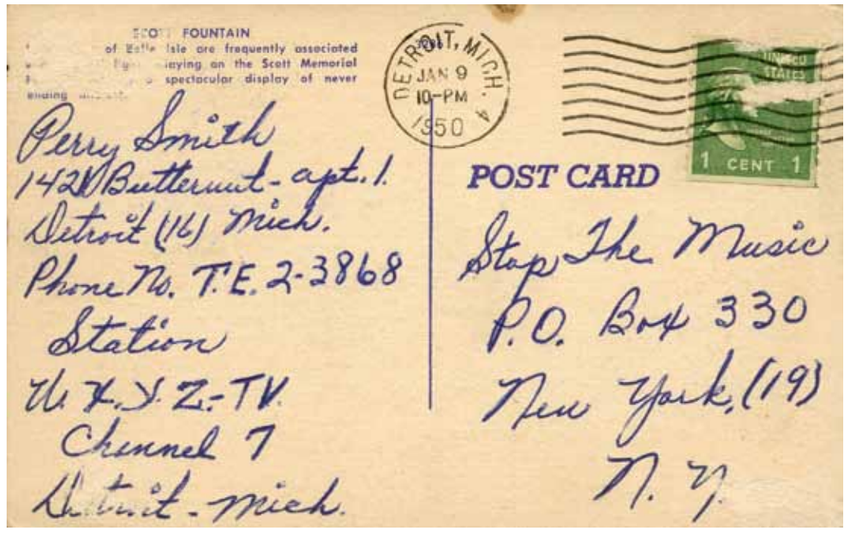
The Montreal Expos played in front of thousands of empty seats for years at Olympic Stadium. The Expos now face elimination as club owners have voted for contraction.

Reservoir

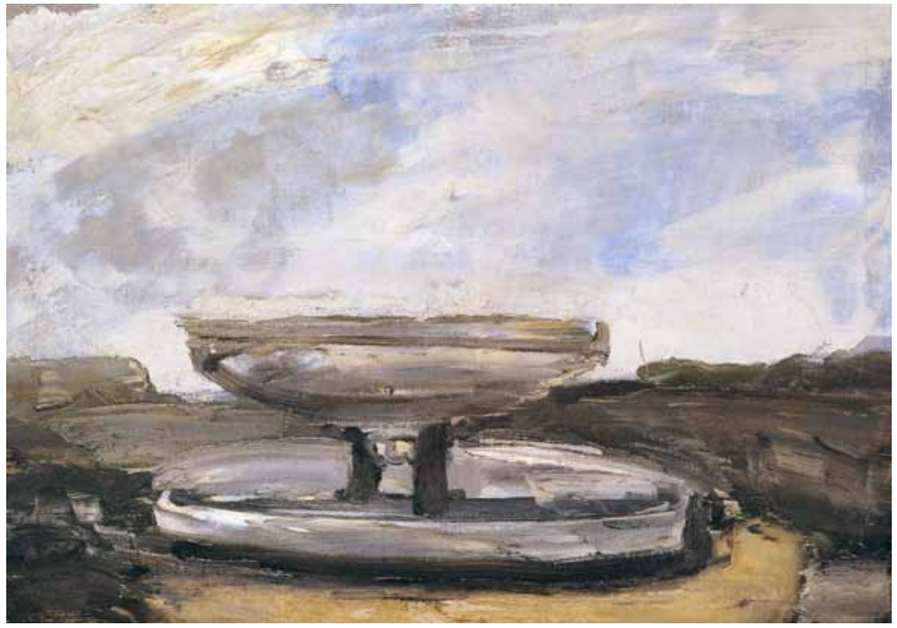
Fountains

Fountains

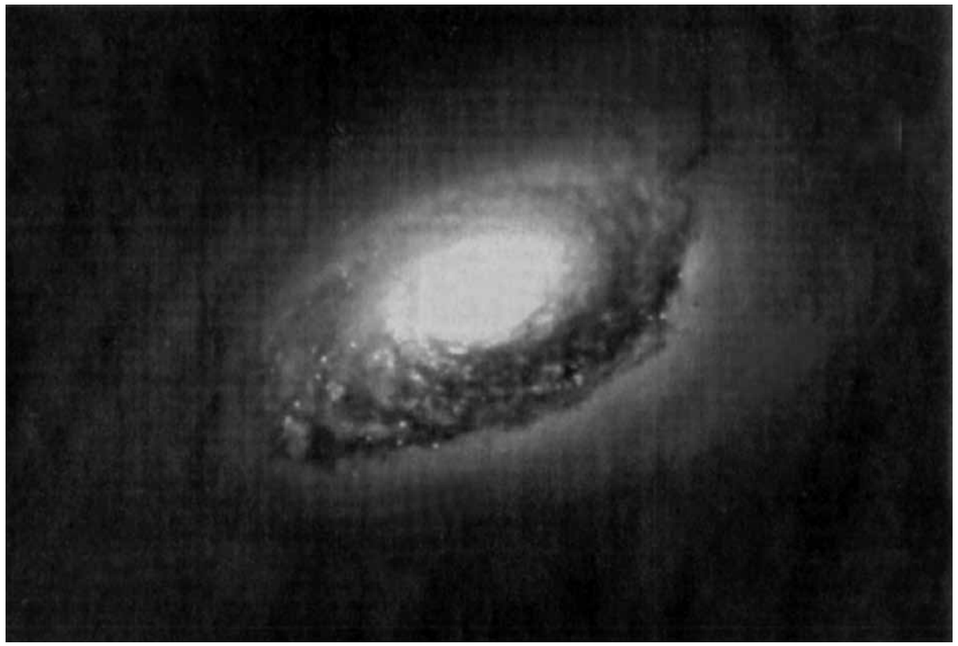



FOUNTAIN
of Eolie Isle are frequently associated
playing on the Scott Memorial
spectacular display of never
DETROIT, MICH.
JAN 9
10-PM
1950
1 CENT 1
POST CARD
Perry Smith
1421 Buttermut - apt. 1.
Detroit (16) Mich.
Phone No. T.E. 2-3868
Station
W.X.Y.Z.-TV.
Channel 7
Detroit - Mich.
Stop The Music
P.O. Box 330
New York (19)
N. Y.

Fountains



Kotaro Migishi, **Landscape with Fountain**, 1932



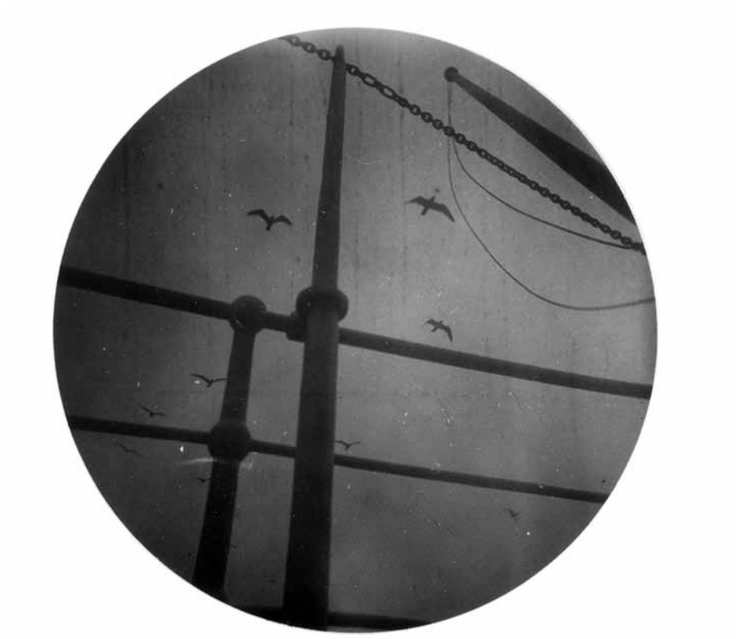
DANILO KRSTANOVIC/REUTERS

'The Roses of Sarajevo': red rubber is used to fill holes left by four years of intense bombing.

Ce jour-là. Le dernier. Paul Célan chez moi. Assis à cette place que mes yeux, en cet instant, fixent longuement.

Paroles, dans la proximité, échangées. Sa voix? Douce, la plupart du temps. Et, cependant, ce n’est pas elle, aujourd’hui, que j’entends mais le silence. Ce n’est pas lui que je vois mais le vide, peut-être parce que, ce jour-là, nous avions l’un et l’autre, sans le savoir, fait le tour cruel de nous-mêmes.

Edmond Jabès, **Dans la double dépendance du dit** (Le livre des marges, II), Fata Morgana, 1984



Et si, après avoir tant lu, parlé, écrit, après avoir lutté sur tous les fronts, couru en tous sens et à tous vents, il se révélait, au bout du compte, l'écrivain d'un seul livre?

Il y a des écrivains d'un seul livre. Il y a des écrivains qui, dès le commencement, quelles que soient la pression ou la tentation, ont su qu'ils n'écriraient que ce livre et qu'il serait tout leur apport à l'histoire de la pensée ou de la beauté. La Rochefoucauld. Madame de Lafayette. Montaigne et ses *Essais*. L'admirable La Bruyère. Saint-Simon. Senancour. Joubert, ce pur héros, qui poussa la rareté jusqu'à ne pas écrire du tout le livre dont il était porteur. Et lui-même, par principe autant que par inclination, a toujours préféré ce pari sur la rareté, ce dandysme extrême, ce goût de la concentration poussée aux limites de la stérilité, à l'obscène fécondité de ces écrivains prodigieux, pléthoriques, qui, à l'instar de Hugo ou de Balzac, aiment faire étalage de leur tempérament, de leur santé. Seulement voilà : étalage ou pas, il se trouve qu'il avait, lui, d'autres livres à écrire. Il le sait. Il l'a toujours su. De tout temps lui aussi, depuis le tout premier temps de son tout premier silence, il a su qu'aussi dandy fût-il, aussi féru de densité, d'intensité et de perfection, il n'était pas l'un de ces monographes austères concentrant en une bible l'intégralité de leur message. En sorte qu'ici, sur ce lit, en ce jour sans recours qui semble suspendu à la perspective d'une mort soudain possible, il ne peut pas ne pas songer à l'énorme part de son oeuvre qui ne verra jamais le jour.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, **Les derniers jours de Charles Baudelaire**, Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1988

Suis-je vraiment tenu de me justifier si je m'empêtre moi-même et s'il y a, dans mes discours, de la vanité et des erreurs que je ne perçoive pas ou que je ne sois pas capable de percevoir même en tentant de les imaginer ? Car souvent des fautes échappent à nos propres yeux, mais la maladie du jugement consiste à ne pouvoir les apercevoir lorsqu'un autre nous les indique. La connaissance et la vérité peuvent loger en nous sans le jugement et le jugement peut y être aussi sans elles. (...)

Je ne cherche dans les livres qu'à me donner du plaisir par un honnête divertissement; ou, si j'étudie, je ne cherche que la science qui traite de la connaissance de moi-même et qui m'instruise à bien mourir et à bien vivre.

Montaigne, **Des livres** / **Fragment des *Essais***, Actes Sud, Arles, 1998