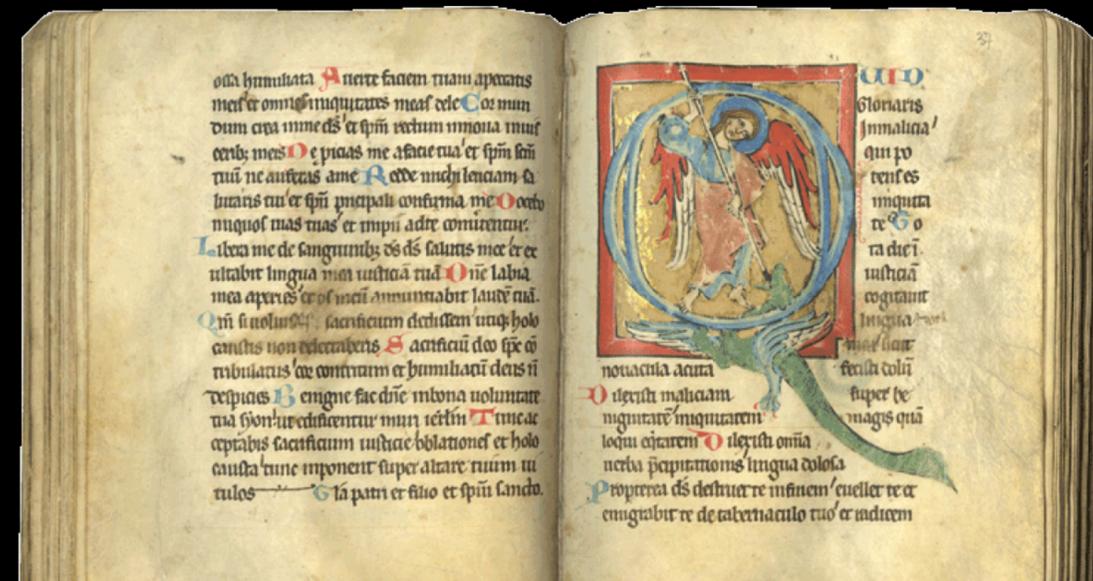
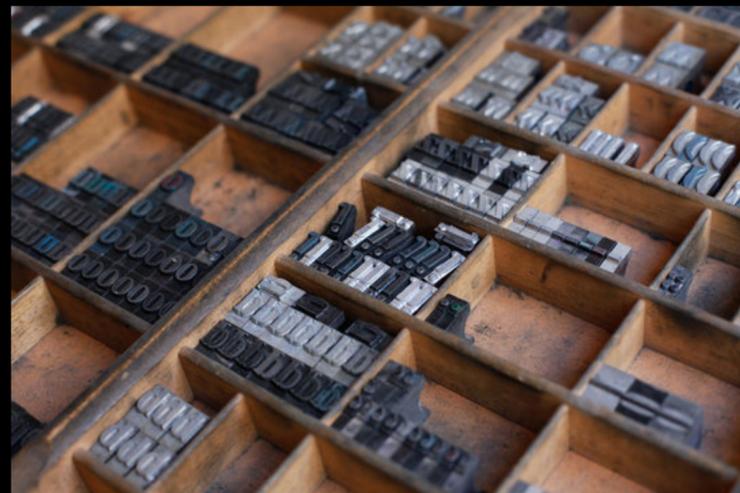


BOOKS!!

ECL 596: Professor Jessica Pressman
Fall 2025

Day 3: Jorge Luis Borges, "Library of Babel" (1941)



ADMIN

- Wordpress — all good? Password added soon.
- I will be posting class slides to the Wordpress site
- Blog posts suggestion: focus on a quote and develop an idea/interpretation/question.

each of us carries a subjective view of disorder. This means that the search for truth is always individual. It does not necessarily have to be found in written texts. Sometimes it takes the form of ideologies, or, in today's world, even algorithms that claim to impose order on the overwhelming complexity of information.

Applying this idea to our digital age, I think people today are still searching for truth through religions, science, AI and algorithms. But as described in Borges' Library, there is too much information and contradictions at the same time. Maybe that's why it's not about finding the perfect book, but about accepting that truth remains fragmentary. Therefore, humans should question the meaning of life.

This entry was posted in [Uncategorized](#) by [Oz Yilmaz](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

ONE THOUGHT ON "HOPEFULLY THIS BOOK FINALLY EXPLAINS MY EXISTENCE"



Raine Porath on [August 31, 2025 at 6:01 pm](#) said:

Edit

Hi, Oz! You make deep points about the search for meaning. I like how you connect philosophical searches for truth to "algorithms that claim to impose order on the overwhelming complexity of information." It makes me think about how Google and AI like ChatGPT generate answers that the human user might interpret as objective truth, but which are based off of subjective data. The way that the user actually interfaces with these technologies shapes their expectations of how knowledge and truth are sought and obtained. Thanks for this great post, it's making me think a lot harder about philosophy and technology!

Reply ↓

Questions from Canvas

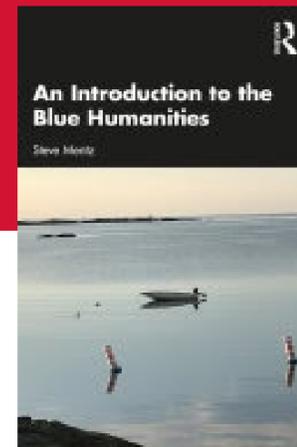
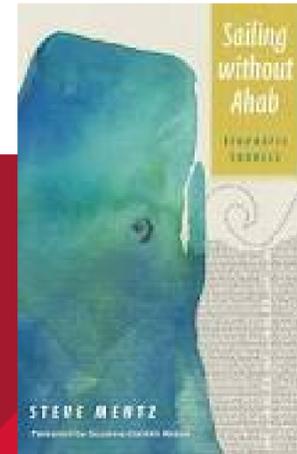
- Regarding the extra credit 1%, does that mean there is an available total of 1% for the whole semester or each extra credit opportunity gives up to 1%?
- Considering we are not really using Canvas for the daily assignments, will our grade still be visible on Canvas?
- For the **weekly blogs**, should we focus more on our own original ideas or just close reading of the text?
- Are books in special collections able to be removed from the area, or will we have to work in the area?
- What happens if I miss a Special Collections lab day?
- Can we choose any book for the midterm "Biography of a Book" project, or only from the ones in Special Collections?
 - Do we get feedback on each weekly blog post, or just one grade?
- DEADLINES: on READING SCHEDULE

Steve Mentz

Pioneer in Blue Humanities, Shakespeare scholar, poet, and ocean swimmer.



Dr. Mentz will be in conversation with Professors Jessica Pressman and Diana Leong (ECL) about Ecocriticism, the Blue Humanities, *Moby-Dick*, and more. He will answer your questions about interdisciplinary creative-critical research from all in attendance.



Location:
Digital Humanities
Center (Love Library,
lower level)

Date:
Tuesday,
Sept. 16

Time:
3:30 - 4:45 p.m.

SPONSORED BY:

SDSU

College of Arts and Letters
English and
Comparative Literature



Extra Credit

New Digital Humanities Center Installation!



The Digital Humanities Center will be featuring an installation from School of Art and Design Professor, Matthew Herbert, also known as his studio name, **eleet warez!** ([Artist site](#))

The installation will run from August 25th to November 21st, so make sure you head down to the DHC (LA 61) and check it out before it's gone!

Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986)



Argentine writer and librarian

His “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1944) inspired creators of digital tech/the Web

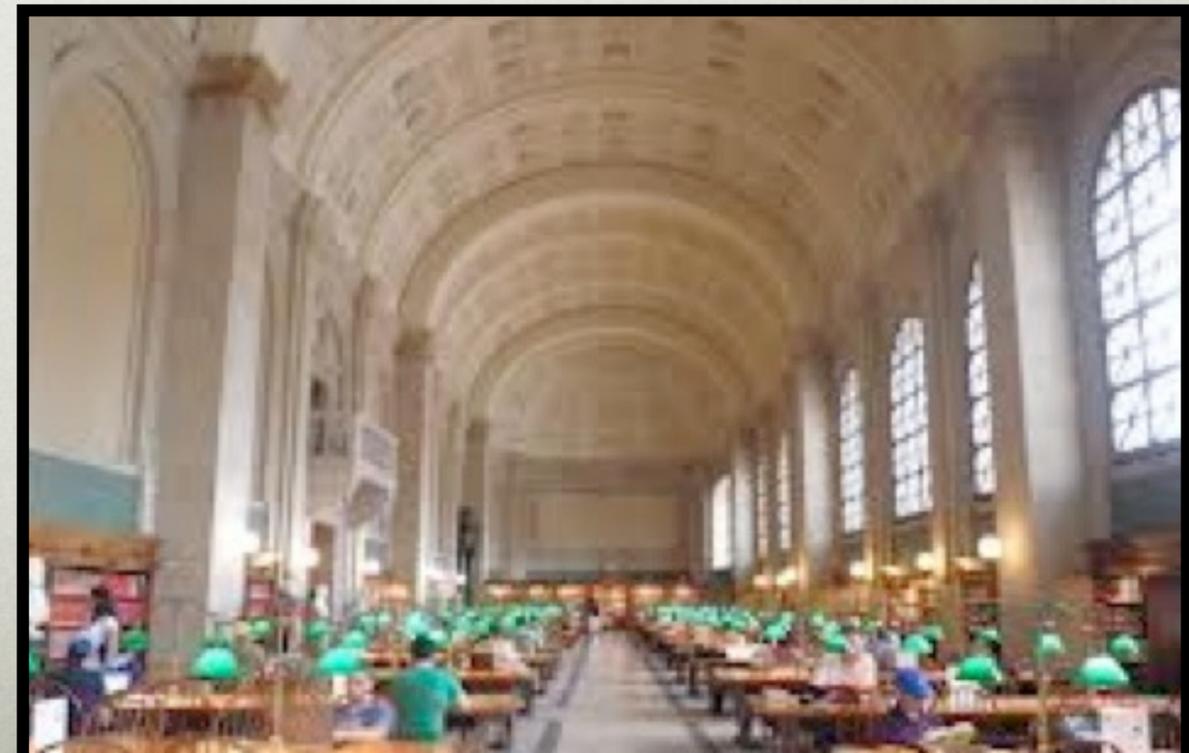


- British Museum Reading Room (1857)

Philadelphia



NYC



Boston

National Library, Buenos
Aires / Biblioteca Nacional
de la República Argentina
(circa 1960-70s)



Discussion

“The Library of Babel” (1941)

- First impressions, ideas?

From your blogs= importance of questioning

- OZ: ut this shows the character of human beings, because we want order, even if it cannot exist. Human beings cannot endure chaos...Applying this idea to our digital age, I think people today are still searching for truth through religions, science, AI and algorithms...Maybe that's why it's not about finding the perfect book, but about accepting that truth remains fragmentary. Therefore, humans should question the meaning of life.
- ALLEA: Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Library of Babel" is a fantastical thought exercise that essentially reflects various human reactions to abstract questions in a thoughtful and sometimes humorous way.

From your blogs= infinity vs constraint

- NINA: The Library, or the Universe, is as Borges describes, “indefinite and perhaps infinite,” it stretches into vast galleries and hexagons, yet, all the books in the library reach a total number, somewhere on the library shelves the rows of books end although there is space for them to reach and take up space forever. It feels disappointing that there could not be an endless amount of books. **I view this as a representation of humanity reflecting on its own limits...**
- have heard before that it is nearly impossible to know if you have a truly original thought that no one has ever had before, even if right now in your head you try to form the most random idea, how would you know you were the first person to ever think that out of the billions of people who have ever existed? ...how do we create new thoughts, how do we know they are new?

THESIS-driven analysis: From your blogs= knowledge as embodied

- RAINE: Borges situates archival, reading, and knowledge production as material, time-bound labors that interface with violence and mortality. Before the Internet exists, Borges reminds us that this network is a material construction through which human labor produces means of interpreting information.
- ...
- Borges understands that reading is a constructed and historic custom shaped by bodily labor, limits, and innovation; the same understanding shapes Marino's work and my reading of it through multiple modes of reading. Thinking about books as objects networked through labor and time will help to guide me as we begin examining materials in Special Collections

[View full results for 'epistemology'](#)

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epistemology, *n.*

Text size:

View as: [Outline](#) | [Full entry](#)

Quotations: [Show all](#) | [Hide all](#) Keywords: [On](#) | [Off](#)

Pronunciation: Brit. [▶](#) /ɪˈpɪstəˈmɒlədʒi/, U.S. [▶](#) /əˈpɪstəˈmɑlədʒi/, [▶](#) /ɛˈpɪstəˈmɑlədʒi/,

[▶](#) /iˈpɪstəˈmɑlədʒi/

Frequency (in current use): ●●●●●●●●

Origin: A borrowing from Greek, combined with an English element; modelled on a German lexical item. **Etymons:** Greek *ἐπιστήμη*, *-OLOGY comb. form.*

Etymology: < ancient Greek *ἐπιστήμη* knowledge (see [EPISTEME n.](#)) + *-OLOGY comb. form...* ([Show More](#))

Philosophy.

The theory of knowledge and understanding, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion; (as a count noun) a particular theory of knowledge and understanding.

[Thesaurus »](#)
[Categories »](#)

1847 *Eclectic Mag.* Nov. 306 The title of one of the principal works of Fichte is 'Wissenschaftslehre,' which, after the analogy of *technology*, we render *epistemology*.

1854 J. F. FERRIER *Inst. Metaphysic* 46 This section of the science is properly termed the *Epistemology*... It answers the general question, 'What is Knowing and the Known?'—or more shortly, 'What is Knowledge?'

1882 *Athenæum* 20 Oct. 402/2 He divides his work into four sections, dealing with epistemology, ontology, anthropology, and ethics.

ONTOLOGY VERSUS EPISTEMOLOGY

Ontology is concerned with what is true or real, and the nature of reality

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and different methods of gaining knowledge

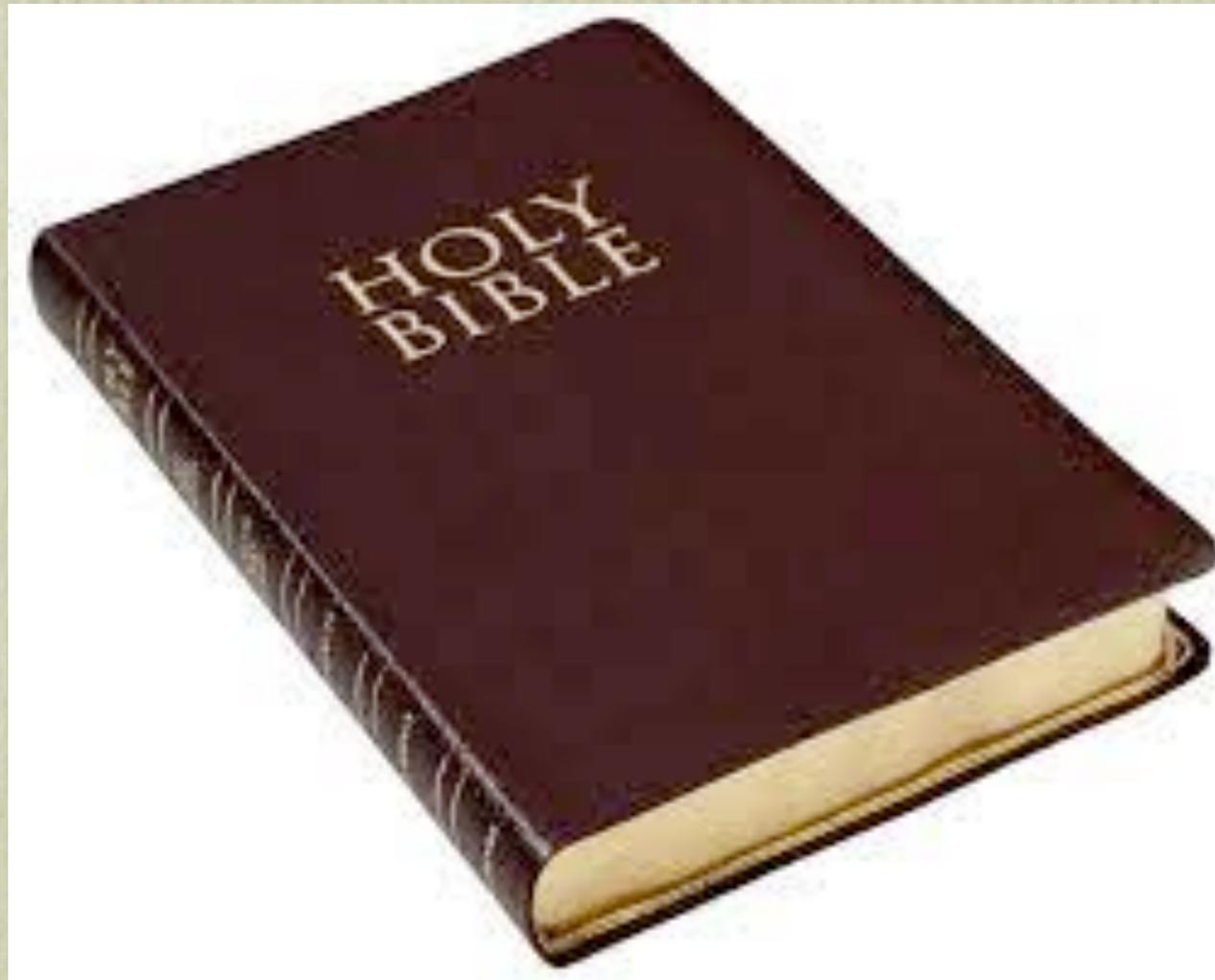
Asks questions like *“What is existence?”* and *“What is the nature of existence?”*

Asks questions like *“What do you know?”* and *“How do you know it?”*

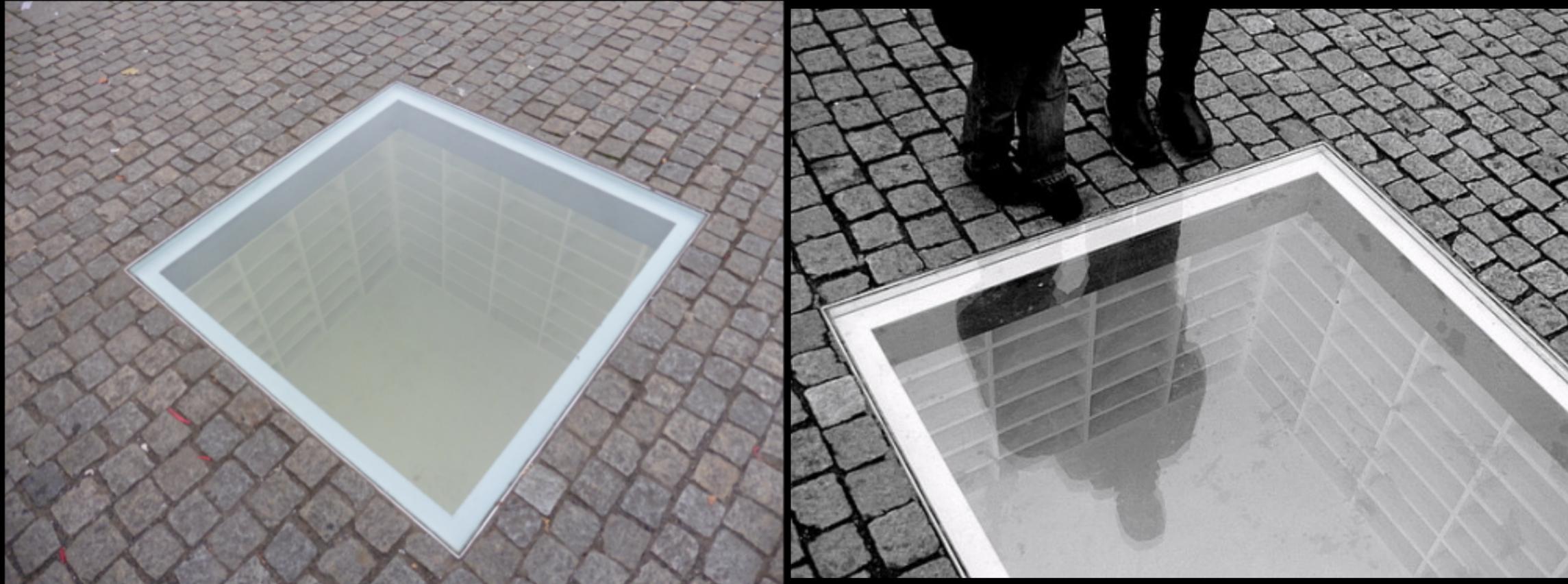
The Idea of the Total Library

- Where have we seen visions of totalizing knowledge before?
- What books are identified as contains this universal knowledge?

Totalizing Knowledge



- THE WORLD WIDE WEB



Micha Ullman's "Library" (1995), a memorial to books burned in the Holocaust, located in Berlin's Bebelplatz, the site of public burning of tens of thousands of books on May 10, 1933.

Discussion

- What is the relevance of the title?

Babel



The Tower of Babel by Bruegel the Elder (1563)

"Tower of Babel" (Genesis 11:1-9)

Babel & Translation

Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel”(1985)

“The ‘tower of Babel’ does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues: it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating...” (165)

“Translation then becomes necessary and impossible, like the effect of a struggle for the appropriation of the name, necessary and forbidden in the interval between two absolutely proper names” (170)

-“Nothing is more serious than translation” (184)



Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel* (1563)

Universal Language quests

1641: John Wilkins

1678: Leibniz composed lingua generalis

1827: Soudre invented Solresol

1854 George Boole

1887: Esperanto

-Computer languages: “None the less, they are universal systems; they are comprehensible to speakers of differing natural languages and are perfect in the sense that they are permit neither error nor ambiguity” (Eco 311)

The Search for the Perfect Language

Umberto Eco

Trans. James Fentress

Blackwell

1995

Derrida on Babel

“The ‘tower of Babel’ does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues: it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating...” (165)

- =no totalizing= no totalitarianism

Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel”. Trans. By Joseph F. Graham
In Difference in Translation, Ed. by Joseph F. Graham
Cornell University Press, 1985
(165-207)

World Wide Web

```
1  <!DOCTYPE html>
2  <html>
3    <head>
4      <meta charset="UTF-8">
5      <title>Title goes here</title>
6    </head>
7    <body>
8
9    </body>
10 </html>
```

Questions/Take Aways?