中科大學報第 2 卷第 1 期
2015 年 12 月第 23 至 50 頁

The Space of Writing: John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*

Pi-Jung Chang

Associate Professor, Department of Applied English, National Taichung University of Science and Technology

Abstract

John Barth's overtly experimental novel, *Lost in the Funhouse*, is widely regarded as postmodern fiction that indulges in self-reflexive narratives. In fact, his fiction does not lapse into sheer luxury of self-regarding narratives. Acknowledging the problem of exhaustion and used-upness in postmodern writing, Barth chooses alternative by turning exhaustion against itself to make something new and valid. Based on some twentieth-century literary theorists who have influenced both contemporary practice of literature and literary criticism, this essay aims to read *Lost in the Funhouse* by examining Barth's anxiety and breakthrough as an author. The first part, referring to theories about essence of literary language, discusses the paralysis in narcissistic dilemma displayed in the text which ironically lays the ground of possibility for the impossibility of writing. The second part approaches this ground of possibility by focusing on the novel's framed narratives which echo one another and are operating in the milieu of intertextual space where past and present, reality and fiction intersect. In light of theories about authorship, the third part reads the novel as a meditation upon the relationship between authorship and authority. While this novel is written in an age when "the author" is declared dead, the author-character is thematic and structural concerns in this novel, which reveals Barth's attempt to restore the author in twentieth-century fiction. Aiming to read this novel in terms of literary spatiality and conditions of possibility, this essay invites the reader to enter this literary funhouse and discern how Barth recognizes and comes to terms with the exhausted possibilities of novel writing.

Keywords: John Barth , *Lost in the Funhouse,* self-reflexivity, intertextual space, authorship

書寫空間：約翰．巴斯的《歡樂宮迷走記》

張碧蓉
國立臺中科技大學應用英語系副教授

摘要

約翰．巴斯的實驗性小說《歡樂宮迷走記》一書，常被認為是反映後現代那種沉浸於自我反思的代表作。巴斯的確認為後現代寫作面臨窮途末路的困境，但他的小說並非陷於自戀式的喃喃自語，而是力圖在枯竭的後現代語境中尋找創新的泉源。本文以二十世紀一些具影響力的文學理論為基礎，來閱讀此小說如何顯現巴斯身為作者的焦慮及自我突破。第一部分從語言本質探討作品中瀰漫的癱瘓情節，而這種無力的書寫卻反諷式地在不可能性中提供書寫的可能條件。第二部分從小說的循環結構及疊層框架敘述來探討這種書寫的可能。小說中各個看似獨立又合為一體的故事互相呼應，讓意義在過去與未來、現實與虛幻交織的「互文空間」中對話激盪。第三部分以作者身分理論，來探討小說中如何處理作者身分及權威地位的關係。此小說出現於宣稱「作者已死」的年代，但不管在主題上或結構上，卻在在反映巴斯企圖喚回作者的努力。本文試圖以文學網絡空間及書寫的可能條件為觀點，邀請讀者進到這座文學歡樂宮，來審視巴斯對於小說書寫困境的體認與因應。

關鍵詞：約翰．巴斯、《歡樂宮迷走記》、自我反思、互文空間、作者身分

I. Introduction

In her study of postmodern fiction, Linda Hutcheon says, "What we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality" (Hutcheon, 1986: 3). According to many commentators, postmodernism is characterized by, among other things, self-reflexivity, irony, and parody. Defenses of this postmodernist aesthetic are related broadly to metaphysical subversiveness of metafiction and its potential for upsetting the stable division of reality from representation. On the other hand, for others, when these commonly cited stylistic traits—along with fragmentation, hybridization, indeterminacy and contingency—become ends unto itself, literature grows to be nothing more than a purely formalistic and nihilistic reflection of the condition of postmodernity. Writing in the heyday of American postmodern literature, John Barth is commonly regarded as an excellent practitioner and theoretician of postmodernist fiction, a movement in which literary works are often interpreted as studies of how fiction is created and how reader and text interact. His most overtly "experimental" book, *Lost in the Funhouse*, fits comfortably within such a description of esthetic postmodernism. It is a book about the writer and the act of writing, about telling and listening to stories. The reader, bombarded with discomfiting qualities in the novel, is given the sense of the story as unfinished, a rough draft full of uncompleted thoughts and false starts. The author's running commentary forces the reader to remember that a fiction is a made project.

Lost in the Funhouse contains fourteen pieces which, in his "Author's Notes," Barth calls "neither a collection nor a selection, but a series."[1] Self-quotation and self-reference abound in the novel which moves in cyclic repetition. Barth explains his recursive model and sums it up with an analogy in his 1988 "Foreword" to this novel:

> The series would be strung together on a few echoed and developed themes and would circle back on itself: not to close a simple circuit like that of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, emblematic of Victorian eternal return, but to make a circuit with a twist to it, like a Mobius strip, emblematic of—well, read the book. (vii)

The frame narratives in the typically Barthian *mise en abime* enclose and insulate the space of literature free from the infection of representation. The word, freed from its function of representing the world, creates its own world in its internal linkage to other words. Besides, a

[1]John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968; New York: Anchor Books, 1988) vii. All quotations come from this edition. Page numbers alone will be provided for subsequent references.

passage of self-negation and self-defeating is incessantly at work. Saturated with anxiety of self-reflexivity and embedded in recessed intertextuality, this book seems to represent a literature of exhaustion doomed endlessly to repeat the already said.

Lost in the Funhouse is thus often regarded as a demonstration of Barth's belief that the narrative possibilities of the traditional novel have been exhausted. However, while Barth admits that "reality" is "our shared fantasy" (Barth, 1984: 221), his fiction does not lapse into sheer luxury of self-regarding narratives or anti-mimetic playfulness. As revealed in the above quote, rather than a mechanical repetition, the cycling in series is "a circuit with a twist to it," a double movement of affiliation and detachment leading to the intertextual effect which both manifests and problematizes postmodern condition. In view of this, this essay aims to examine this novel in light of some twentieth-century literary theorists who have influenced both the practice of literature and the practice of literary criticism. The first part discusses the narcissistic dilemma displayed in the text which ironically dissolves the narrative mode and consecutive time sequence, hence laying the ground of possibility for the impossibility of writing. The implication is that, while the conventions of writing techniques no longer serve the contemporary writer, the exhaustion of these techniques could be turned into a new source of inspiration. The second part approaches such inspiring force by focusing on the novel's framed narratives which echo one another and are operating in the milieu of intertextual space where multiple meanings intersect. Barth's experimentation with cyclic structure and his "rediscovery" of myth exhibits a rich connection between past and present, origin and originization. However, in an age when it is believed that "language writes, not the author," the creative writing subject is said to disappear into the discursive space of 'anonymous' networks. Hence the third part reads the novel as a meditation upon the processes of authorship, authorizing a voice, and dealing with the authority of texts of the past. The focus is the extent to which authorship and authority are thematic and structural concerns in this novel and Barth's attempt to re-center or reauthorize the author in twentieth-century fiction. Overall, my argument is that Barth's fiction, by productively acknowledging its thematic and formal "used-upness," not only probes in the nature and problems of novel writing, but significantly regenerates and re-originates the tradition of narrative arts. Oscillating between a hope for continuance and a sense of indebtedness to a past, Barth's text expresses an endeavors to innovate literature by replenishing outdated one. Entering the literary funhouse, the reader is invited to discern how the author recognizes and comes to terms with the exhausted possibilities of novel writing.

II. The (Im)Possibility of Beginning and Ending

In his study of the act of creation, Edward Said suggests that the novel as a genre is operating through the dynamic of the dual beginning condition: authority and molestation. Authority is an individual's impulse or power to initiate or produce "an increase over what had been there previously" (Said, 1975: 83). Molestation occurs along with "one's duplicity, one's confinement to a fictive, scriptive realm, whether one is a character or a novelist" (Said 1975: 84). In other words, while the individual authors employ language to create a fictional universe, they nonetheless remind themselves consciously or unconsciously that the 'world' of the novel often seems not to correspond to the real world. Accordingly, novelists are inevitably troubled about the relationship between storytelling and an ineffable reality beyond the compass of words. At certain points of their narrative, something often rises up to challenge the progress of what has already gone before. The traditional theory of mimetic representation is no longer applicable since writers are now becoming conscious that to begin to write is to "work a set of instrument" (Said 1975: 24)—the instrument of verbal strategies. Literature is the art in which the duplicity of the origin is the most evident because its elemental component—the word—is 'two-faced monsters.'

About this, Maurice Blanchot speaks of there being two sides or 'slopes' to literature:

> Literature is divided between these two slopes . . . . The first slope is meaningful prose. Its goal is to express things in a language that designates things according to what they mean . . . . But still on this side of language, there comes a moment when art realizes that everyday speech is dishonest and abandons it. What is art's complaint about everyday speech? It says it lacks meaning: art feels it is madness to think that in each word something is completely present through the absence that determines it, and so art sets off in quest of a language that can recapture this absence itself and represent the endless movement of comprehension. (Blanchot, 1995: 332-3)

Put differently, on the one side, there is the realist content, which one can interpret as belonging to the social world, and, on the other, there is the purity of the language of literature itself, which folds back upon itself. Literary language is marked by a tension between a projection into the future and a return to the moment that precedes it. When thought of as a vehicle for transmitting ideas, language seems to have its gaze focused on the horizon of future progress. However, at the same time, language casts guilty glimpse over its shoulder as it attempts to recover in vain the presence of the object it excludes by naming thanks to its

materialistic qualities. In literature, the word maintains the negativity of language, demanding that we experience this absence as absence. Rather than arguing that literature has no meaning, Blanchot suggests that there is always more to literature than merely reference that it makes to the outside world.

The text that Barth produces in *Lost in the Funhouse* is animated by this kind of literary language that hovers back and forth between two extremes, the authoritative language of power and the passive language of worklessness, without ever stopping once and for all at either one. It oscillates madly between being a condition of possibility and one of impossibility, simultaneously opening and closing the narrative itself. As the writer has gradually become aware of the separateness of the word, the literary signifier, from anything which it might signify, the traditional notion of the artist as demiurge seems to be obsolete: the dynamic creativity seems to be supplanted by a posture of passive indecision. With all the self-reflexive difficulties of its composition blatantly and painstakingly examined, Barth's exposition of self-conscious intent is openly made in his novel. As Martin puts it, the funhouse "metaphorically represents both the confusion and self-consciousness of the adolescent who must deal internally and externally with a maturing body and the self-consciousness of the artist who must create a maze of fictional devices in the struggle to portray reality" (Martin, 1997: 153). The name of the novel is a pun, which can be either a labyrinth in which Ambrose lost his way, or a writer loses his way in literature and can't find a way out.

Upon entering the funhouse, Magda and Peter blindly follow the path laid before them as it winds its way to the exit; they remain unaware of the construct of the funhouse. Ambrose, on the other hand, is immediately aware of its construct and its purpose. Ironically, because of this awareness, Ambrose strays from the regular path and wanders into "some new or old part of the place that's not supposed to be used" (85). He then got lost in the funhouse:

> You think you're yourselves, but there are other persons in you. Ambrose gets hard when Ambrose doesn't want to, and obversely. Ambrose watches them disagree; Ambrose watches him watch. In the funhouse mirror-room you can't see yourself go on forever, because no matter how you stand, your head gets in the way. (85. Emphasis Barth's.)

With its rooms of mirrors that distort reality, the funhouse itself is an illusion. Conscious of its mazelike qualities that take people away from the realities of life, Ambrose is overwhelmed

by "an odd sense of detachment" (84). Even at the height of pleasure, Ambrose must watch himself react and is prevented from full enjoyment: "Strive as he might to be transported, he heard his mind take notes upon the scene: *This is what they call passion. I am experiencing it*" (84. Emphasis Barth's). What Ambrose wants to do in the funhouse is not "act like" the outraged boyfriend but "be" the outraged boyfriend (86). Ambrose wants to be what he is, but "the desire for sincerity is itself a game of mirrors" (Fulmer, 2000: 343). He is always conscious of inhabiting a performance. Everywhere Ambrose turns, he escapes himself; the spontaneity of consciousness makes any meaningful sense of selfhood impossible. After his oblique vision of the hidden mechanisms and operation of the funhouse, Ambrose couldn't be sure whether "he hadn't dreamed part or all of the sight" (87) or there is "really such a person as Ambrose, or is he a figment of the author's imagination" (88)?

Just as Ambrose the adolescent faces many difficulties that result from an oversensitive awareness of oneself and the surrounding world, the narrator, aware of the text as a piece of artistic making, transcribes the story as he tells it. He employs and reviews various devices that might be used in a written version of his story:

> He has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America. A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, which in turn is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases as well as the customary type for titles of complete works, not to mention. (72. Emphasis Barth's.)

Contemplating the purpose of underlining and italics, the narrator also discusses the use of description, metaphor and plot structure, and even questions the realism of his character. Here Barth shows that realism was not just there to be accepted as the natural mode for writers to use; it had to be invented, too. He claims that this mode of literature does not avoid artifice but merely uses another kind of artifice. The narrator thus comments on the art of fiction: "Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality . . . . Interestingly, as with other aspects of realism, it is an illusion that is being enhanced, by purely artificial means" (73). In the middle of the narrative, the narrator even stops short and asks: "Is it likely, does it violate the principles of verisimilitude, that a thirteen-year-old boy could make such a sophisticated observation" (88)? Clearly, the narrative has taken on the attributes of a funhouse—a funhouse in which Ambrose has become trapped and lost, with little hope of getting to the proper end. The narrator knows

what the end should be, but is unable for some reason to bring it about: "The climax of the story must be its protagonist's discovery of a way to get through the funhouse. But he has found none, may have ceased to search" (92). There exists a self-defeating situation throughout the story. Every effort the narrator makes to reach the end only estranges him further from it: "The plot doesn't rise by meaningful steps but winds upon itself, digresses, retreats, hesitates, sighs, collapses, expires" (92). Behind the truth of page lies the superior reality of the writing itself.

Since the writer questions his ability to refer properly to anything in the world outside, the law that governs autobiographical projects that writing can lead to self-presence and self-knowledge is subverted. Instead, writing will lead to nothing else except more writing. Barth understands that he cannot describe his life any more accurately than he can describe the rest of reality. Hence he denies the validity of autobiographical fiction. Self-portraits wish to arrive at the essence of the self, but this question is inevitably displaced by problems concerning language and writing. Instead of attaining a rapport of immediacy with the self, autobiographical writing has the opposite effect of estrangement. "Life-Story" is an attempt to invoke such narcissistic dilemma. Barthes denies the existence of the "real" world by showing that it is composed of layers related to each other in a way that makes them inseparable from imagination. And that is why he uses the intricate system of boxes in "Life Story" and in most of his fiction. The boxes in this story contain imaginary authors, a series of nameless characters, who all try to write a piece of fiction. Barth designates each author by a letter of the alphabet rather than giving them proper names. The initial narrator struggles to write an entertaining and meaningful story at the exact midpoint of his life, which is exactly two-thirds of the way through the twentieth-century— "9:00 A.M., Monday, June 20, 1966" (116). The plot he introduces quickly deteriorates into a discourse on the theory of short stories and the un-written story in particular. The narrator bemoans his birth in the age of modernism rather than in a period that valued heroism and heroic rhetoric, that is, a "conservative, realistic, unself-conscious" style with "arresting circumstance, bold character, trenchant action" (116; 118).[2] It seems to him that the literary vehicle available to him at this time is too "self-conscious, vertiginously arch, fashionably solipsistic, unoriginal—in fact a convention of twentieth-century literature" (116). The problem facing literature in general at this point is that the artist is liable to become trapped within the labyrinth of self-awareness:

[2] In his study on Barth's use of the recent past, Hinden argues that *Lost in the Funhouse* "examines the depletion of certain forms of modernist expression, especially Joyce, and the unbearable self-consciousness of intellectual life" (Hinden 1973: 108).

> Another story about a writer writing a story! Another regressus in infinitum! Who doesn't prefer art that at least overtly imitates something other than its own processes? That doesn't continually proclaim "Don't forget I'm an artifice!"? That takes for granted its mimetic nature instead of asserting it in order (not so slyly after all) to deny it, or vice-versa? (117)

The letters of the alphabet are a metaphor for the creative process; with each additional author, the narrative slips into deeper layers of fiction. In an unexpected development, the more the author writes, the more alienated he becomes from his work and himself. Eventually he suspects that he himself is a character in someone else's fictional text. The more the author writes, and the farther he advances into the literary space, the less clear his original project becomes. The work is a space in which 'nothing' is realized, or the passage of self-negation is at work. Barth's use of autobiography thus leads to a suggestion that at best life is no more real than art, and perhaps it is not real at all.

In the Aristotelian literary scheme, fiction has beginnings, middles, and ends, in correspondence to introduction, rising action, and resolution which takes the shape of a triangle. Here, however, the process of writing disrupts linear models of temporality and changes the linear development into a circular one. There is neither an *arche* nor a *telos* in the space of writing, and repetition comes to take the place of dialectical progress. As Singer has indicated, the stories follow the form of "self-perpetuation": "these self-generations are created by, and they in turn create, an obsessive 'return to origins' that leads the stories back to their own beginnings" (Singer, 2010: 37). Barth's use of "Frame-Tale" seems to suggest the denial of the desire for thematic center or presence. Space encircled by the Mobius strip (Figure 1) is a nonlocus, a hole, a loss and a labyrinth, where the subject or center is consistently fading, so that no unitary meaning is possible. In the space of the text, the center is decentered, origins are denied, and destinations are deferred. This melancholy retreat into breach and eclipse reminds the reader of Roland Barthes' words: "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (Barthes, 1977: 142). The anonymous minstrel in "Anonymiad," abandoned on a lonely island, discovers his ability to write and plans unified pieces that he hopes to send off in his amphorae to readers across the world. But the writing does not happen in the way he wishes: "No use, this isn't working either, we're halfway through, the end's in sight; I'll never get to where I am; Part Three, Part Three, my crux, my core, I'm cutting you out;____; there, at the heart, never to be filled, a mere

lacuna"(183). At the heart of Anonymous's fiction is a lack of center. He has enciphered a script, but it has no totalized meaning or sure audience. His namelessness seems to imply the process of dispossession the writing subject undergoes as he writes. Although the writer may initially feel confident that he has control over his project, he soon feels the work slip away as he himself becomes mesmerized by what was written.

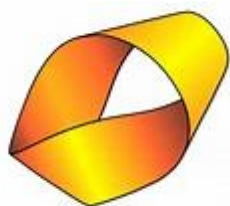

Figure 1: A Mobius Strip.

The difficulties of writing pervading Barth's text also derive from the tension between the authorial impulse for innovation and a given body of literary texts. In "Title," the narrative recognizes its similarity to other stories and feels crippled by its lack of individuality and spontaneity. Words and literary patterns are so common that the idea of going beyond them to new beginnings often seems impossible. Since speakers can only use language generally available and commonly understood, and since previous literary works provide the basis of all further writing, the writer may quite normally feel that everything has been said before. This attitude and feeling can hinder further writing: "What now. Everything's been said already, over and over; I'm as sick of this as you are; there's nothing to say. Say nothing" (105). Notions of growth and progress give way to exhaustion, resignation, and ultimately, despair. This awareness leads to the writer's failure to put anything at all on the page, as the distressed narrator puts it:

> We're more than half-way through, as I remarked at the outset: youthful vigor, innocent exposition, positive rising action—all that is behind us . . . . In this dehuman, exhausted, ultimate adjective hour, . . . every humane value has become untenable, and not only love, decency, and beauty but even compassion and intelligibility are no more than one or two subjective complements to complete the sentence . . . . (107)

He then keeps talking about the impossibility of writing a meaningful story. In the long run, merely debating with himself about writing it, he never writes that story.

Indeed, *Lost in the Funhouse* is preoccupied with the deterioration of language, yet as Barth himself says, in "The Literature of Exhaustion," that the fact that the genre is moribund is "by no means necessarily a cause for despair" (Barth 1984: 70). Instead, this lack of

meaningful story can become the meaningful story, which thereby “turns the artist’s mode or form into a metaphor for his concerns” (Barth, 1984: 78). One of Barth’s major purposes is to write literature that openly displays its artificiality. Sparing no effort to affirm the artificial element in art, Barth himself knows about the dangers of this method. The story “Title” expresses his doubts about nonrealistic writing: “weld iron rods into abstract patterns, say, and you’ve still got real iron, but arrange words into abstract patterns and you’ve got nonsense” (109). While arguing that life is a fiction, the authors in “Life Story” also shows some kind of skepticism about this kind of literature, because it charges that “turning completely away from the everyday world indicates schizophrenia” (115). Therefore, rather than passively lamenting man’s unhappy historical insertion into the labyrinth of language, John Barth chooses alternative by turning exhaustion and paralyzing self-consciousness against itself to make something new and valid. In other words, Barth argues that fiction should both portray and be performative of the postmodern exhaustion he discusses. Accordingly, “it does not follow that self-reflexive fiction is nihilistic or devoid of presence” (Woolley, 1985: 465). The story of Narcissus represents the self-reflexive narrative so in love with itself that it cannot do other than refer to itself but can only “linger forever on the autognostic verge” (100). It serves as a warning that the self-reflexive fiction so popular at the time of its publication can act as an alluring but unproductive trap. While Narcissus “desired himself defunct before his own conception” (103), Echo survived by effacing herself and repeating other’s voice. However, hers is a repetition with variation and alterity, an identity with impurity.

The story “Petition” uses the imagery of twinship and doubleness to demonstrate the impossibility of pure beginning and sheer repetition. The twin brothers are part-and-parcel of each other, but they are also nothing alike: “I am slight, my brother is gross. He’s incoherent but vocal; I’m articulate and mute” (62). One is earthy, sensual, bawdy and realistic; the other is cerebral, solitary, romantic, and unable to speak. Although the narrator is aware of their differences, he seems unable to cope with his dilemma: “I affirm our difference—all the difference in the world!—but have endeavored in vain to work out with him a reasonable cohabitation” (62). The narrator’s problem is that he cannot abide being both identical and different: “To be one: paradise! To be two: bliss! But to be both and neither is unspeakable” (71). Like the twin brothers who are connected by love as well as hostility, the artist encounters difficulty in trying to adhere to tradition and break from it. What it implies is that no beginning or birth can be seen as a wholly unique event, for each duplicates existing patterns and species. Yet, each beginning, however repetitive, is also in some significant way

unique.

The Mobius strip suggested in "Frame-Tale" is also about promising possibility in repetition with difference. The words "ONCE UPON A TIME THERE" appear on one side of the strip and the words "WAS A STORY THAT BEGAN" on the other. If readers follow Barth's directions to connect the opposite corners to each other, he will make a Mobius strip, a continuous loop about stories about stories. Moving in a movement of infinite repetition, the strip folds back on itself without beginning or end. '"Once upon a time there was a story that began 'Once upon a time there was a story that began "Once upon a time there was a story that began [. . .]'(1-2, ad infinitum). The story is always beginning, yet it never advances; it must always return to its origins. On the other hand, because it adds a new level of narrative mediation with each iteration, the repetition is never exactly the same. This device not only suggests that literature depends upon patterns of repetition but, in inviting the reader to cut, twist, and link the ends, emphasizes that no form perfectly reduplicates its predecessor. With the intertextual effect in a dynamic space, this novel well manifests Barth's concern about the exhaustion, and dedication to the renewal, of literary traditions in postmodernism.

III. Tradition and Innovation in Intertextual Space

The theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole, and so does not function as a closed system. Mikhail Bakhtin's study of what he called "the polyphonic novel" is among the best available study of the artistic function of intertextuality. Bakhtin conceives of the 'literary word' as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a fixed point of meaning. Each utterance is always caught up in the crowded space of interdiscursivity: "Every concrete utterance is intersected by both centrifugal and centripetal, unifying and disunifying forces" (Bakhtin, 1981: 272). Novels are enriched by such social heteroglossia, and by the fact that words do not live in dictionaries but in other people's mouths (Bakhtin, 1981: 294). The double-voiced discourse in the novel, for instance irony or parody, is a dialogue of two world views. Bakhtin thus promotes the novel as "the intertextual genre *par excellence*, and hence the prime instigator of indeterminacy in the realm of literature" (Bakhtin, 1981: 7). By reworking the Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia, Julia Kristeva develops the idea of intertextuality, which she defines as follows: "in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (Kristeva, 1980: 36). While the notion of sign (signified/signifier) designates a linear logic, the literary word denotes 'spatialization'—"an

intersection of textual surfaces" (Kristeva, 1980: 65). Derrida also asserts that "there is no such thing as speaking or writing outside other texts" (Derrida, 1976: 49). A text is not an entity complete in itself and encapsulating a meaning that transcends time and history, but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing blend and clash. In *Writing Degree Zero*, Roland Barthes uses the term "intertextuality" thus: "It is impossible to develop my selected mode of writing within duration without gradually becoming a prisoner of someone else's words and even of my own" (Barthes, 1984: 23). Accordingly, a text may appear to be the spontaneous and expression of a writer's intentions, but must necessarily contain elements of other texts. Overall, a general view of "intertextuality" is 'fundamentally an attempt to conceive—or redefine—the concept of the "text" dynamically, as an ongoing operation involving the continual play of referentiality between and within texts' (O'Donnell & Con Davis 1989: ix-x).

Embedding irreducible plurality of texts within and behind itself, *Lost in the Funhouse* is a model of this concept of intertextual dependence upon and transposition of other/previous textual systems. As Barth himself puts it, "Not only is all fiction fiction about fiction, but all fiction about fiction is in fact fiction about life" (Barth, 1984: 236). The implication is that a text is made up by the traces of other texts and we make sense of our lived experience in relation to texts. Barth's writings exemplify intertextual relations both in his structuring of the novel and in his retelling of the Greek myth. The display of intratextual dialogue is especially evident in *Lost in the Funhouse*.[3] For his concern with formal relationships, Barth preserves the tension between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit. The fourteen stories exist individually and as a whole at the same time. Divided into two halves, they illustrate dynamism, sense of play and comic sensibility of intertextuality. Set in tidewater Maryland in 1943 and the years following, four of the initial stories in the first half are in some ways conventional treatments of the growth of Ambrose Mensch, the protagonist, from sperm to a budding author. "Night-Sea Journey," narrated by a sperm, is a story about the purpose of life and the birth of an author. The protagonist then appears in "Ambrose His Mark" in traditional guises as the special child. "Water-Message" is about his boyhood wherein the adolescent undergoes the inner puberty rite. And finally Ambrose grows up to be the committed artificer in "Lost in the Funhouse." The interlaced experimental stories of the first half of the cycle, "Autobiography: A Self-Recorded Fiction" and "Petition", shift toward

[3] The term "intratextuality" is used by some critics "to isolate an intertextual relation between works by a single author" (Morgan 1989: 241). In this view, the writer's former words are made the objects of intertextual appropriation.

issues like nature of memory and identity that have been previously probed with delayed impact inside the text. Interfused with and enveloped by the more "advanced" stories of the first half of the cycle, the final meaning of the Ambrose strand featured by a more traditional core transcends the standard implications of the model of the sentimental education of an individual human being.

The second half of the cycle follows the structural principle exhibited in "Night-Sea Journey"—"the tale-bearer of a generation" endeavors to "transmit the Heritage" (9; 4). The depersonalized analysis of the relationship between consciousness and story-telling comes emphatically to the fore, and it consists mostly of added stories, most of which about retelling of Greek mythic stories. Dispensing with the fiction of the ego or personality called Ambrose, the stories in the second half of the cycle can recapitulate the rhythm and encapsulate the theme once the ontology and biology of the perceiving mind has been fully revealed. The title story "Lost in the Funhouse" ties together the apparently ordinary and recently experienced present of Maryland and seemingly remote but imaginatively re-experienced past of Greece. It successfully links the figure of Ambrose to a universal pattern. By its position and development of themes, this story represents structurally within the whole book the simultaneous 'middle,' beginning' and 'end' investigated previously. Just like the Mobius strip to be cut out and pasted together which reads continuously in cycling, the sequence of the fourteen tales gives the paradoxical impression of recurrence as well as of continuance.

The intra/intertextual relation of the stories cuts two ways. On the one hand, the intertexts specify, narrow, and define this novel. They offer the familiar comforts of traditional autobiographical realism as well as the fantasy of classic story cycles. On the other hand, they expand the limits of this novel to take its place in the wider tradition of history, myth, legend, thus providing the necessary structure inside of which readers are free to play. Barth himself elaborates the structuring of the stories in an interview:

> No doubt it depends on how far you want to stretch the term "novel" or "series" . . . . It's meant to be a series in that there is an exfoliation and a development, one with a double motion. As the apparent narrator in most of the stories in the series goes through his biographical development, the time of the stories tends to move back from the present into the mythic past, and then at the end, of course, there's a cycling back. (Lampkin, 1988: 489)

Again like a Mobius strip, the action of *Lost in the Funhouse* moves on two levels—fiction

and reality—and in two different directions—into the future and into the past. In an organic continuum, each half of the cycle moves through seven stories and each half is paralleled in the way it unfolds from a core story containing the generative cosmic propositions. The discourse in one story plays upon the other stories. Like funhouse mirrors, they reflect and reinforce each other and depend on one another for interpretation. The patterns express the labyrinthine "code" that supposedly underlies both life and art. Together, the stories in this series explore the ways in which fiction and heroes are at once fresh and new as well as traditional and old. They symbolize the ways in which human experience and literary technique are both like and unlike those preceding them. Nothing is ever wholly the same; nothing is completely different. "Life almost repeats life; art almost repeats art; and life and art almost repeat each other" (Fogel & Slethaug, 1990: 111).

In "transmitting the heritage," the problem becomes how to recycle an old story so that it seems new: this begins to take the form of exhaustion and renewal, which have been central concerns to Barth. Indeed, the dilemma for Barth is the problem of how to reconcile his love of the stories of antiquity with modern demands for originality. While he desires to tell a story, he is destined to tell it in an age that is no longer innocent, and therefore he needs to tell it in a way that is no longer innocent. Umberto Eco's reflection on postmodernism makes the contrast between innocence and irony a central feature of postmodernism:"The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently" (Eco, 1984: 67).[4] Never innocent or naïve, but ironically sophisticated, Barth makes it part of what is told to remind his audience that it is no longer innocent. Barth observes in "The Literature of Exhaustion," discussing Jorge Luis Borges,

> For one to attempt to add overtly to the sum of 'original' literature by even so much as a conventional short story, not to mention a novel, would be too presumptuous, too naive; literature has been done long since. . . . His fictions are not only footnotes to imaginary texts, but postscripts to the real corpus of literature. (Barth, 1984: 73)

For the late twentieth-century writers, the myth of origin is at once a source of excitement and a cause of anxiety. The concern is primarily about the relationship between tradition and innovation. Many connections are possible from here to classical stories, including mythology.

[4] Umberto Eco's solution in *The Name of the Rose* is to write a murder mystery set in a medieval monastery and narrated by a medieval monk; that narrative is then filtered through several layers of textuality and intertextuality.

Barth's stories entail the asking of the question of how to recycle an old story so that it becomes new. What does one do when all the stories are told? How can one be original when origin is exhausted?

One possibility, as "Menelaiad" demonstrates, is to turn "exhaustion" of old stories into "replenishment" of new ones, and to acknowledge old stories by "iterating" them in new and creative ways, thereby affirming one's own "re-origination." "Menelaiad" contains an ancient story from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This ancient story has been repeated or retold many times through years. To avoid the risk of repetition, Barth re-contextualizes the mythological story in a postmodern world. The protagonist in the piece is Menelaus, who can't adapt himself in this volatile world. Converted to a postmodern subject, he suffers from many doubts, questions and thinking towards both himself and his wife. What confused him most is why the beautiful Helen chose him instead of other pursuers, to which Proteus replied: "Helen chose you without reason because she loves you without cause" (161). Nestor's and Odysseus's sons came to ask him about the anecdotes of their father. In the story, the narrator, Menelaus, tells the reader how one night he told the sons of Nestor and Odysseus he told Proteus how he told the daughter of Proteus how he rehearsed to Helen how he destroyed their love. "I tried to hold fast to layered sense by listening as it were to Helen hearing Proteus hearing Eidothea hearing me; critic within critic, nestled in my slipping grip . . ." (149).

Here Barth has adopted Chinese-set box as an innovative device of literary replenishment.[5] With the technique of framing, Barth attempts to clear a space for a literature about literature, for a fiction that is about life by being about language. This idea of the frame harbors a longing for literature that is free from the infection of representation. By making his own art repeat and transform works of the past (including his own), Barth hopes to restrict literature to a dialogue with itself about itself. "The use of . . . legendary material, especially in a farcical, even a comic, spirit, has a number of virtues, among which are esthetic distance and the opportunity for counterrealism" (Barth, 1984: 59). As a form of parodic metafiction, frame narrative plays with the tension between the past and the present and indicates a paradoxical trans-relation between originality and repetition. As the story progresses, characters from different layers of the nested narratives begin interacting with one another in chronologically impossible dialogues. Barth's retelling of Greek myth is a postmodern story

[5] Chinese box set has many smaller boxes in it, with smaller one after another. Theoretically, this box set can have numberless boxes in it. This craft has been applied to fiction narration. In narratology, the meaning of "Chinese box set" is that in a fictive circumstance, a protagonist is telling a story to another person who is telling a story to another person, et cetera et cetera.

cycle; he borrows what is needed, adds what is lacking, crosses borders and boundaries when he needs to do so. Against the patronymic fight to establish patriarchal/patrilinear inheritance and to pass on the proper fact, the re-told narrative is deeply concerned with deferred and unstable meaning resulted from "mannered rhetoric" and "shift of narrative viewpoint" (154). In the parodic flurry of quotations, conversations, and plagiarized texts that make up "Menelaid", the myth of originality is exposed for its sentimentalization of individuality and genius: "It was Menelaus disguised as Menelaus, a mask masking less and less" (156). The narrative exhibits itself as intertextual weaving and unweaving: "Menelaus! Proteus! Helen! For all we know, we're but stranded figures in Penelope's web, woven up in light to be unwove in darkness" (150). The myth of origin turns out to be the eloquent blank space at the dead center of his story— a space articulated by seven bracketing sets of quotation marks:

" ' " ' " ' "   " ' " ' " ' " (158)

Turned eventually to a centerless maze, the layers of history indicated by the layers of dialogue and italics cannot be rationally fathomed or understood. Menelaus finds that language may obscure rather than disclose. The ancient mythic figure becomes a modern subject speculating upon the origins of language, awakened to the fact that "we are therefore subject to, and subjects of, language's structuring principles and effects" (Lucy, 1997: 1).

As such, retelling old stories does not mean to follow, but to enter into a dialogue with the past, to see to what contemporary uses they might be put. In his parodying of precursor's texts and retelling of mythic stories, Barth conflates two movements into a dialectical gesture of recapitulation and repudiation, continuity and rupture, to "expose" as well as "escape," and to be "creature" as well as "caricature" (36; 37). This is the force of intertextuality, which may lead to a reflexive textual "self-awareness" but may at the same time engender what Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson characterize for Bakhtin as "novelization."[6] In fact, before Bakhtin, Barth reminded us that the novel as a genre is constituted by parody. The novel perpetuates itself by permuting itself, parodying its forebears into novelty: "With *Don Quixote*, the novel may be said to begin in self-transcendent parody and has often returned to that mode for its refreshment" (Barth, 1984: 205). What "Menelaiad" illustrates is the

[6] In their introduction to their translation of *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson indicate how the novel as a genre permits the recognition of systematic limits and encourages the intertextual dialogue that will dissolve and reconfigure those limits: "'Novel' is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system. Literary systems are comprised of canons and 'novelization' is fundamentally anticanoncal" (Bakhtin 1981: xxxi).

possibility that a storyteller can, instead of keeping silent in the age of exhaustion, turn originality into a paradox and employ it to recreate new stories. By quoting and re-originating the "iterable" contents and forms of myth, Barth's postmodern-ancient story suggests what Derrida calls the "paradoxical historicity in the experience of writing" (Derrida, 1982: 54).[7] So re-origination is to re-contextualize ironically the echoing of the past since for Barth writing is always an intertextual dialogue that involves the consciousness of literary history.

Barth's fictive practice shows that his originality arises from his virtuoso revoicings of older narrative scores. Hence intertextuality is not simply a reference to earlier/other texts, but is a manipulation of those texts as well. While the concept of intertextuality challenges those systems of signification which allows us to mark off the formal terrains of "author," "subject," and "text," the potentiality of a creative individual should never be denied even if the founding subject as the original source of fixed meaning in the text is no longer acceptable. Though the writer himself sometimes doubts the validity of the success of the experience and reform, it is precisely the creative individual who modifies received forms and makes expression become possible. Like what drives the sperm in "Night-Sea Journey," love towards literary writing prompts the writer full of responsibility to carry on some good heritages from generation to generation.

IV. Authorship, Authority, and Re-authorization

In 1968, Roland Barthes declares "the death of the Author" and "the birth of the Reader" (Barthes, 1977: 1). In the traditional concept, the author is to his text as God is to his world. The author is the 'transcendental signified' and attains the supernal privilege of being at once the beginning and end of his/her text. However, the structuralist's and post-structuralist's critique on agency has thrown into question the humanistic certainties of authorship and literary authority. Intellectual developments in literary theory shift stress toward the slipperiness of language and meaning. The author is revealed to be a necessary fiction, a reading effect. Free from the author, the text becomes a *jouissant* affirmation of indeterminacy. The signs play within the text against each other in a chain of signification and difference. 'Writing,' or *ecriture,* is seen as evasive of any one stable meaning which could be attributed to any one author. Barthes' description of writing as an oblique space where all

[7] Refusing J. L. Austin's exclusion of "quotation" as an inferior possibility of language use, Derrida asserts that a precondition for communication is "iterability"—the possibility of being repeated, as well as connoting otherness (Derrida 1982: 323). In others words, rather than regarding quotation as a parasitic and unusual activity, Derrida holds that any text is inevitably quoting and quotable.

identity is lost replaces "the authored text" with "an authorless textuality." Derrida also claims that "the horizon of the author's intention is insufficient to control the free play of the signifiers" because the sign is subject to "iterability" and "citationality" (Derrida, 1977: 180). Since the very same text can function detached from any authorial intention, the author cannot control the meaning of his utterance.

Yet the author has not gone away. While Roland Barthes reduces the author to a space in which linguistic and literary conventions converge, it is nevertheless the case that there is room for the exercise of individual deliberation and imagination. Similarly, Derrida's approach to the politics of authorship unsettles liberal humanist ideas of the author, but does not do away with the author altogether. After all, "to articulate a critique of authority is always itself an authoritative gesture" (Biriotti, 1993: 10). The cult of the author, particularly the cult of the poststructuralist author, persists. The denial of an absolute authorial control implies not the necessary absence of the author, but the redistribution of authorial subjectivity within a textual *mise en scene* which it does not command totally. The author is no longer innocent, but plural and open. New approaches to authorship must also change the subject: that is to say, they should take into account fragmentation, ambiguity, and complexity. The return of the author is not in the mode of identification and possession. The *retour* is accomplished as what Derrida designates as a *detour* (Derrida, 1982: 29), a sort of dislocation or removal from what is an intended trajectory. A *detour* of authorship is a critique of metaphysical foundations from the inside. It represents a certain movement away from this tradition, but always within it, or with the aim of returning to it, while the orbit does not remain identical to itself after a decentering or a deconstruction of its concepts.

One of the serious and urgent challenges Barth's novel manifests is the challenge of dealing with authorship in the postmodern world. *Lost in the Funhouse* rejects a belief in the author as a genius who can fully control his writing. The pattern of the relationship between author, text, and reader or what Barth calls "teller, tale, and told" (122) presented in the novel deconstructs the idea of the author as master of the meaning of the work. At the opening of the novel, the reader is requested to cut the three-dimensional Mobius strip which symbolizes the circular and inexhaustible movement of the sign. If the reader wants to read the novel, he or she has to learn to make up what is missing to complete the story. No longer sitting quietly to read the story passively, the reader has to involve him/herself in constructing the story as a creator. While every writer is a commentator, an analyst, a reader, every reader also writes or analyses in some measure. The reader is charged with the responsibility for making meaning

and interpreting the text because, as the deconstructionist insists, the text no longer provides a singular, authoritative meaning. The narrator of "Autobiography" admits the initiating power of the reader: "You who listen give me life in a manner of speaking" (35). Likewise, the narrator of "Life Story" emphasizes the immense responsibility of the reader: "Because your own author bless and damn you his life is in your hands! He writes and reads himself; don't you think he knows who gives his creatures their lives and deaths? Do they exist except as he or others read their words" (127)? A story cannot even commit suicide without the reader's decision to close the book: "he can't kill himself without your help" (128). The unpredictability of writing is further complicated by the role of the stubborn reader, who the narrator of "Life-Story" calls "you, dogged, uninsultable, print-oriented bastard" (127). It seems that it is the reader, not the author, who holds the ultimate power over a narrative.

The contestations of authorship and authority is also enacted by articulating authority of voice within the narrative's play of voices, which are most patently expressed and manipulated in "Menelaiad." In Menelaus' narrative, past conversations are placed in separate quotation marks, each set moving the reader ever further from the verifiable present. As Menelaus directly quotes the previous interlocutors, the framing of his narrative places the claim of authoritative message in inverted commas. Here the inverted commas of citation threaten the security and control of language's signifying practice. As he describes past events and conversations, Menelaus fears that he is only a narrating voice without any substantial identity: "One thing's certain: somewhere Menelaus lost course and steersman, went off track, never got back on, lost hold of himself, became a record merely, the record of his loosening grasp" (131). The model of the speaker as the authoritative producer of images and narratives for a culture is problematized by its framing of the claims of authority. "The opinions echoed in these speeches aren't necessarily the speaker's" (154). The text produces some dizzying effects for the idea of the speaker's voice and voice of authority. "No matter; this isn't the voice of Menelaus; this voice is Menelaus, all there is of him" (130). An authoritative position is thus formulated in and against a display of the contests of voices.

In this way, Barth is recommending a little *detour* off the orbit/circle of transcendental author, but with the intent of never losing sight of it. He cares to stress that we cannot achieve this play without establishing a "metaphysical complicity" to engage in a (de)constructive critique. Hence the unsettling of the authorial center should be rendered not as erasure but as displacement and relocation. Though this novel proclaims the supremacy of the reader and reduces the author from the status of godlike creator to a striving fictional character or a

dissenting voice, the author-character is nevertheless made the thematic and structural crux of many of the stories it contains. Despite the reciprocity of the reader-writer process, readers—however free and in final control of the act of reading—are also always constrained by what the author composes. In Barth's novel, a consciously constructed authorial figure can easily be discerned in most of these stories. The implication here is that a text that thematizes a self-conscious awareness of the processes of its own construction unavoidably thematizes the importance of its constructor. By asserting his failure, the author simultaneously asserts his power, illustrating that the self-reflexivity of metafiction is at the same time a recognition of authorial presence. It is precisely the irony and self-reflexive twisting and turning of the author's voice that the humanist conception of authorship finds hard to incorporate and to make sense of. What Barth shows is that a multiplicity of difference and dissenting voices is a condition we cannot hope to escape, neither does it stop an author's inevitable implication in the structures of authority. In other words, he is enacting ironically in his novel call of authority he claims to find problematic and problematized.

The initial four stories are significantly about the birth, aspiration, and responsibility of a writer. Barth suggests a funhouse in which writers get lost in order to realize that they are always already lost. What writers can no longer pretend is that words represent reality, that stories reflect the truth about life instead of a version of it. Ambrose envies his normal brother Peter and he would rather live in the funhouse of life and love without being aware that he is living in a construct. However, since he is aware of the constructedness of the funhouse, it is impossible for him ever to look back. Finally, he takes another alternative:

> He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator—though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed. (97)

For Ambrose, it is the awareness of the gap prevalent in language, fiction, and life that finally allows him a certain measure of freedom. At the end of the story "Water Message," Ambrose finds a message in a bottle which has been washed ashore.

> Ambrose uncreased it. On a top line was penned in deep red ink:
>
> TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
>
> On the next-to-bottom:
>
> YOURS TRULY

> The lines between were blank, as was the space beneath the complimentary close. In a number of places, owing to the coarseness of the paper, the ink spread from the lines in fibrous blots. (56)

Receiving a message and an order from a distant source, Ambrose is being asked, as an artist, to "fill the blank" between the salutation and the close. "Ambrose's spirit bore new and subtle burdens" (56). These "new and subtle burdens" are perhaps the knowledge the artist bears about the artificial and arbitrary nature of what others call reality. Nonetheless, this knowledge is both his burden and his freedom. Ambrose has gone through a rite of passage at the end of the experience: "the things he'd learn would not surprise now or distress him, for though he was still innocent of that knowledge, he had the feel of it in his heart, and of other truth" (56). That knowledge is what he'll discover in "Lost in the Funhouse"—artistic and philosophical truths. "Water Message" ends with the statement that "some corner of his mind remarked that those shiny bits in the paper's texture were splinters of wood pulp. Often as he's seen them in leaves of cheap tablets, he had not thitherto embraced that fact" (57). Ambrose remembers that pulp is physically transformed into paper; symbolically this indicates that reality can become language and literature. Ambrose recognizes the provenance of the tools of his art, and he is thus ready to be initiated into the origin of things—sexual, artistic, and philosophical. Despite the curse of exhaustion, "We must make something out of nothing . . . . Not only turn contradiction into paradox, but employ it, to go on living and working" (111).

The story "Echo" illustrates the limitations and possibilities of the author's originality. Like Echo, who can speak only in the words and voices of others, all writers are doomed as well to struggle with the problem that all storytellers are faced with: i.e. how to say what has already been said and yet say it in an effective, fresh, and new way. "The worst is to come. Everything leads to nothing" (106). However, Echo didn't repeat other's discourse like a parrot; rather, she deliberately edited and revised other's words in order to reach her own purpose: "Echo never, as popularly held, repeats all like gossip or mirror. She edits, heightens, mutes, turns others' words to her end" (100). Although her words are not her own, Echo still manages to be a storyteller through the manner in which she repeats what she is told. Her voice is not original, but it can transform. Falling in love with Narcissus, she repeats, alters, and shapes his words into a love narrative of her own:

> I can't go on.
> Go on.

Is there anyone to hear here?
Who are you?
You.
I?
Aye.
Then let me see me!
See?
A lass! Alas. (101)

As a writer echoing previously written works, Echo always chooses words offered by her culture to create new fiction. Her echo is both a tribute to and a distortion of the originals. Her response prolongs her life and storytelling, whereas Narcissus dies in his attempts to embrace his own reflection.

The last story "Anonymiad" illustrates recognition of vocation as a writer. The anonymous minstrel, at the end of his life, has forgotten his own name during the seven years of his isolation. He intends to compose the autobiographical "Anonymiad," a tale of *the* artist: "Seven parts plus head- and tail-piece: the years of my maroonment framed by its causes and prognosis" (172). In "Night-Sea Journey," the sperm that is to generate the future artist is carried towards the shores of love. Then in "Water-Message," the future artist receives a message in a bottle revealing to him his calling. Here in "Anonymiad" the Mobius strip which frames *Lost in the Funhouse* has come full circle with the image of the artist filling the bellies of his beloved muses with fictions and sending them off into the Aegean. The sperm that may be "the tale-bearer of a generation" (9) becomes the drifting amphorae bearing art. However, the anonymous minstrel feels discouraged for he cannot fulfill his intentions and the manuscript has not gone as he hoped. Even so, with his feelings of defeat and exhaustion and his view that no one will probably ever read his manuscripts, he does accomplish something. In fact, his writing saves him from suicide. Had he not been able to "tell" (though to no certain audience), he would have been bereft of hope in solitude. By a remote chance, his works may communicate something to someone. He finds a jar washed up on his own beach. Whether his own or another's he does not know, but he does not care: "Now I began to imagine that the world contained another like myself" (196). He then adds, "I never ceased to allow the likelihood that the indecipherable ciphers were my own; that the sea had fertilized me as it were with my own seed. No matter, the principle was the same: that I could be thus messaged, even by that stranger my former self" (196). An artist can be "messaged" by

his/her own or others' work; communication between past and present or between persons becomes possible. Though the message may be somewhat misunderstood, literature does have a function, and the communication act does not have to be aborted. Without giving heroic endings, this concluding story affirms the possibility of new beginnings and new cycles.

Hence it's not difficult to discern Barth's endeavor to reinstate the author as the center of textual importance. It could even be said that the whole novel is about the creation of an author. Ambrose fails to find a way out from the labyrinth, which paradoxically calls for the emergence of a writer. While trapped in the funhouse, he decides to become an author. In this sense, this narrative does not fail but ends productively. To navigate through the exhausted forms of modern literature toward newer and truer possibilities requires a creative author. The creative power is manifest in the would-be authors in the stories of the novel. Instead of relinquishing their ability to challenge and even change within the boundaries of language and literary convention, they explore the creative potential of narration, using the old forms to let them mirror their own reflections. With the power of the artistic imagination to generate literary fabrications and constructs, the artist can create wonderful pictures and joyful entertainment.

V. Conclusion

In this essay, I've examined John Barth's writing in *Lost in the Funhouse* by approaching it in terms of literary language, intertexutal space, and the position of the author. The writer's indecision in writing stems from the medium in which s/he works. The paralysis of the author's work comes from self-consciousness and a too-radical questioning of the act of creation. As proposed by Barth, sometimes it is best not to look back: "the only way to get out of a mirror-maze is to close your eyes and hold out your hands. And be carried away by a valiant metaphor, I suppose, like a simile" (111). Barth's response to the arguments about the precarious nature of literature and of language is to continue writing in spite of them, and to use the negative arguments as raw materials for a positive achievement. While perceiving the gap between words and things, Barth doesn't surrender to the impasse, let alone grants the impossibility of writing anything significant. On the contrary, he incorporates the narrator's doubts and questions into a significant literary text. The impossibility of writing is successfully written about and addressed to. Self-reflexivity gives him instead a measure of distance between himself and conventional significations. Standing alone and feeling "an odd detachment" (84), Barth (or Ambrose) finds a way to use this apparent dead-end of

self-consciousness without being overwhelmed by it.

By doing so, the author's limitations cease to be negations marking what s/he cannot do and become instead the conditions in which, and from which, s/he must work. Accordingly, Barth's text is a positive aspiration for, as well as a negative assessment of, the condition for writing. *Lost in the Funhouse* presents the exhausted possibilities of novel writing seeking for brand-new techniques. Barth's retelling of mythic stories generates textual echo in intertextuality, which is the simultaneous repression and remembering of the past. The desire for originality involves a necessary recognition of how much any writing is "language answering language." The intertextuality exhibited in his novel presents itself not as a closed system of binary sign relations, but as an opening space of networks for a seemingly endless alterity, like the Mobius strip form which is both repetitious and endlessly filled with possibility. An intertextual citation is never innocent or direct, but always transformed, distorted, displaced, condensed, or edited in some way in order to suit the speaking subject's value system. Through the image of the strip, Barth tells readers that although literature has faced challenges and is trapped in the dead-end, there's still way for literature to pass through.

In exploring the origin of writing, Barth may seek to challenge the unquestioned concept of authorial intention, but his text displays the inevitable stresses and fissures of authorship. The renunciation of authorial dominance is only apparent, and it is, on the contrary, implicitly re-asserted by Barth's effective control of the whole novel as we read it. In revising and re-originating the work of precursors, the author vacillates between determining and determined, creating and created, instead of disappearing into a sea of intertextuality. After all, the notion of author as an original creator with a unique voice cannot be totally discarded. Yet no longer a monumental authority, authorship is articulated in the gap between the author's voice and the voice of authority, which opens a space where writing as an author takes place. Barth's text mobilizes the reader's creativity performance by alerting her/him to the fact that originality may not be the best way of regarding a work. In various ways writers are inscribing themselves in tradition and making public a loving gratitude to ancestors—but their works are equally witnesses to an agonistic impulse to proclaim their own creative space. Undeniably, the writer's inventive freedom is never absolute, and that's why "novelists have construed authority and molestation together as beginning conditions, not as conditions for limitlessly expansive fictional invention" (Said, 1975: 83). Even so, writing will continue to be taken because creative instincts and a strong desire to continue filling in the blank are irrepressible. The novel refuses to end.

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquisr. Ed. Michael Holquist. Texas: U of Texas P.

Barth, John. (1984). *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*. New York: Putnam's.

Barth, John. (1988). *Lost in the Funhouse.* 1968. New York: Anchor Books.

Barthes, Roland. (1977). *Image-Music-Text.* Trans. Stephen Heath. London: Collins.

Barthes, Roland. (1984). *Writing Degree Zero*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. London: Routledge.

Biriotti, Maurice. (1993). Introduction: Authorship, Authority, Authorisation. In Maurice Biriotti & Nicola Miller (Ed.), *What Is an Author?* (pp. 1-18). Manchester: Manchester UP.

Blanchot, Maurice. (1995). *The Work of Fire*. Trans. C. Mandell. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Derrida, Jacques. (1976). *Of Grammatology*. 1967. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP.

Derrida, Jacques. (1977). Signature Event Context. *Glyph, 1*, 172-208.

Derrida, Jacques. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.

Eco, Umberto. (1984). *Postscript to The Name of the Rose.* Trans W. Weaver. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Fogel, Stan & Gordon Slethaug. (1990). *Understanding John Barth*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P.

Fulmer, James Burton. (2000). First Person Anonymous: Sartrean Ideas of Consciousness in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*. *Critique, 41*(4), 335-348.

Goldhill, Simon. (1993). The Sirens' Song: Authorship, Authority and Citation. In Maurice Biriotti & Nicola Miller (Ed.), *What Is an Author?* (pp. 137-154). Manchester: Manchester UP.

Hinden, Michael. (1973). *Lost in the Funhouse*: Barth's Use of the Recent Past. *Twentieth Century Literature, 19*, 100-122.

Hutcheon, Linda. (1986). Historiographic Metafiction. In Patrick O'Donnell (Ed.), *Passionate Doubts: Designs of Interpretation in Contemporary American Fiction* (pp. 3-32). Iowa City: U of Iowa P.

Kristeva, Julia. (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP.

Lampkin, Loretta M. (1988). An Interview with John Barth. *Contemporary Literature, 29*,

485-97.

Lucy, Niall. (1997). *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Martin, W. Todd. (1997). Self-Knowledge and Self-Conception: The Therapy of Autobiography in John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse. Studies in Short Fiction, 34* (2), 151-157.

Morgan, Thais. (1989). The Space of Intertextuality. In *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction.* In Patrick O'Donnell & Robert Con Davis (Ed.), *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction* (pp. 239-279). Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP.

O'Donnell, Patrick & Robert Con Davis. (1989). Introduction: Intertext and Contemporary American Fiction. In Patrick O'Donnell & Robert Con Davis (Ed.), *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction* (pp. xi-xxii). Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP.

Said, Edward. (1975). *Beginnings: Intentions and Method.* New York: Columbia UP.

Singer, Marc. (2010). Recursion, Supplementarity, and the Limits of Subjectivity in John Barth's *Menelaiad*. *KronoScope, 10* (1-2), 35-48.

Woolley, Deborah A. (1985). Empty Text, Fecund Voice: Self-Reflexivity in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*. *Contemporary Literature, 26*, 460-81.