Science fiction, especially since the 1950s, has typically presented a dystopian vision of the mass media as a narcotizing force of control and containment. It has underscored the passivity of the audience in the age of the spectacle and demonstrated the potential for authoritarian abuses of mass televisual practices. Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) would seem to epitomize this anxiety. Bradbury depicts a society in which books have been outlawed in favor of television, more suited to the shorter attention spans and the intellectual and political lethargy of a consumer society in thrall to the image. Scott Bukatman claims that in the book burnings of *Fahrenheit 451*, “the overthrow of the Word is presented as tantamount to the overthrow of Reason itself, leaving an infantilized—if not barbaric—citizenry poised passively before the pseudo-satisfactions of the spectacle, bereft of the ability to think, judge, and know.”

Bukatman reads this strain of science fiction as an attempt to protect the power of the civilizing Word against the barbarizing forces of image culture. Ultimately, he claims, it expresses a fear concerning the erosion of representational truth, in the context of the increasing manipulation of digital images and electronic data. However, I would suggest that Bradbury’s treatment of book culture in *Fahrenheit 451* is rather more complex: it is not presented nostalgically as the apogee of civilization, or opposed in its essence to image culture. As Faber tells Montag, books are simply receptacles for a kind of consciousness that can easily be deposited in other forms, including cinema, radio, or television:
It’s not books you need, it’s some of the things that once were in books. . . . The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisors, but are not. No, no, it’s not books at all you’re looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.⁴

Bradbury thus finds nothing unique about the form of the printed book that should mark it out as a privileged vehicle for this kind of cognitive mapping or for the preservation and transmission of culture. Literature is merely one tool developed by human society for these ends, and other forms of media could perform a similar role.

This chapter explores the treatment of cinematic, televisual, and other visual regimes within a selection of literary texts in Argentina, published in the 1920s, in 1940, and in 2000. It finds, surprisingly perhaps, that the relationships constructed between literature and new (or imagined) technologies of the image are not always ones of contrast or rupture, but often of similarity and continuity. Where we might expect to see a desire to shore up the status of the literary text in the face of the increasing threat of the rise of image culture, we often find instead a recognition that books are, as Bradbury suggests, “only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget,” or an acknowledgment that we invest both literary texts and images with similar desires, most often to immortalize our transient lives, or to reflect back to us a coherence of self or world that can only be illusory. These texts reveal an abiding interest in the apparatuses of photography, cinema, and virtual reality both as material artifacts and as technologies of materialization. Far from being understood merely as regimes of representation of a greater or lesser realism, they are presented here as intervening directly in sensual experience. Through the relationships they establish between these technologies and those of the literary text, the writers explored in this chapter emphasize their shared nature as prostheses for human thought and memory, and their determining influence on modes of human engagement with the material environment.

In Horacio Quiroga’s short stories of the 1920s and Bioy Casares’s well-known novel La invención de Morel (1940), new or invented technologies of
photographic recording and the projection of moving images may arouse hitherto unimaginable desires and fears, but in many ways they simply bring into sharper focus the kind of imaginary and subjective investments that have always characterized representations of ourselves and our societies. At the same time, these texts begin to explore the changing forms of perception and subjectivity that arise from our interaction with new forms of visual technology. This is also a central aim in César Aira’s *El juego de los mundos* (2000), a novel that explicitly compares and contrasts traditional literary culture with a futuristic vision of a culture based entirely around images and virtual reality. This comparison does not give cause, however, for any simple lament at the passing of the age of literature, at risk of being superseded by a more powerful and image-based mass culture. In Aira’s novel, literature’s operations have not been rendered obsolete so much as displaced onto other forms of media and virtual reality. This enables us to grasp their shared characteristics as technologies of prosthesis. Aira’s key interest is in imagining the effect this shift might have on our modes of perception and understanding.

My discussion will develop the Stieglerian perspective developed in the last chapter, according to which written texts become just one form (albeit a very effective one) of technics, or tools designed to carry cultural memory from one generation to the next. However, the literary narratives I discuss here do not ultimately, or solely, present image culture or the mass media as damaging to human processes of individuation in the way that Stiegler often does, whose work on mass culture may in some ways be read as a continuation of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s analysis of the detrimental effects of the culture industry. Instead, the primary concern of these texts is to demonstrate the plasticity of human perception, in ways that echo some of the insights of Catherine Malabou’s work, written at the intersection of philosophy and neuroscience. My reading of these texts will prepare the ground for a consideration, at the close of this chapter, of Malabou’s claim that plasticity is now replacing writing as an organizing paradigm in contemporary thought.

**Life beyond Death in the Cold Chemistry of Quiroga’s Celluloid Screens**

Cinema arrived early in Argentina: the first of the Lumière’s films was shown in July 1896 in Buenos Aires, a mere six months after the inaugural public screening in Paris; the first short films depicting the Argentine capital were
screened there later that same year. Cinema’s rapidly growing popularity during the early decades of the twentieth century, principally in the form of imported Hollywood films, met with a mixed response from the country’s lettered elite. Fascinated by the fictional and aesthetic potential of the “seventh art,” intellectuals in this period were also deeply troubled by the unchecked flow of U.S. cultural products into the country, and critical of the low quality of many of these films. Cinema was widely perceived as a serious threat to intellectual culture; Jason Borge suggests that, for many of its critics, it represented “una especie de erosión de su propio espacio mediático” (a kind of erosion of their own space within the media) and a loss of their monopoly over the public sphere.

Debates over the relative qualities of cinema and theater, in particular, filled the pages of newspapers and magazines. Many acknowledged, with admiration and mistrust in varying degrees, the considerable power of cinema’s direct appeal to the masses. For the novelist and cronista Roberto Arlt, critical of many imported films but more open than most to the subversive potential of cinema, it may be true that cinema “idealiza la vulgaridad” (glamorizes vulgarity), but a film is far more effective than any book in arousing discontent with the social status quo. He finds that “el cine ha suplantado al teatro en su función de Escuela Práctica de Vida” (cinema has supplanted theater in its role as the Practical School for Life); in an article written in 1933, he speculates about the particular power of cinema over the imagination in the sleepy, impoverished towns of Argentina’s provinces, where it is performing “una tarea revolucionaria” (a revolutionary role). Here, where a bookseller would die of hunger, Hollywood’s intoxicating images provide a glimpse of a life out of reach for members of the audience, trapped in poverty and the conservative customs of provincial life. What consequences might such discontent lead to? Arlt is not sure, but he ventures the view that “de lo que no me queda ninguna duda es que el cine está creando las modalidades de una nueva psicología en el interior” (what I have no doubt about is that cinema is creating the forms of a new psychology in the provinces).

Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan-born writer who spent his adult life in Argentina, was a key figure in the development of film criticism, publishing extensively in journals such as Caras y caretas, Atlántida, and El Hogar from 1918 to the end of the 1920s. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Quiroga did not find cinema to be inferior to literature in its aesthetic qualities. Mediocre books are as plentiful as films, he pointed out, and he considered film to benefit from a narrative economy that is often lost in overwordy plays and novels. His writings on cinema consistently praise its realism over the
exaggerated gestures, verbosity, and embellishments of theater.\textsuperscript{14} If his fellow intellectuals regarded cinema with animosity, he claimed, this was rooted in a class snobbishness that led them to dismiss it as “un simple espectáculo populachero” (a mere vulgar spectacle) rather than to appreciate its qualities as a form of dramatic art with poetic potential and psychological depth.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite the impassioned defense of cinema Quiroga mounts in his critical and journalistic writings, however, it is generally the sinister side of new visual and imaging technologies that is explored in the short stories he wrote on the theme. “El espectro” (1921), “El puritano” (1926), and “El vampiro” (1927) make incursions into the genres of science fiction and fantasy, dramatizing the capacity of visual technologies to blur the boundaries between life and death, presence and absence, and subject and object. In these narratives, the power of x-rays, photography, and the cinema stretches beyond that of recording life: these new techniques completely reorganize perception. If Arlt understood the potential of cinema to produce new forms of consumer desire, and perhaps even to provoke thoughts of social revolution, Quiroga finds in cinema a much more fundamental challenge to the categories that underpin our understanding and experience of subjectivity.

Edgar Morin notes, with respect to cinema: “Is it not astounding that the ‘legendary,’ ‘surrealizing,’ ‘supernatural’ quality should spring directly from the most objective image that can possibly be conceived of?”\textsuperscript{16} Paradoxically, it is the intense realism of cinema that inspires Quiroga to write some of his most fantastical stories. Penning a critical note on D. W. Griffith’s \textit{True Heart Susie} (1919), he finds that the protagonists “corren por la eléctrica pantalla, tan vivas, tan del momento, que por poco que extendieran los labios o las manos, alcanzarían a tocarnos” (move across the electric screen, so alive, so in the present, that if they were just to extend their lips or hands, they would touch us).\textsuperscript{17} This notion is the stimulus for many of Quiroga’s stories on cinema, in which actors and actresses leave the confines of the screen, invested with an agency that outstrips the simple mechanical capture and projection of their image. Quiroga plays with the fictional potential suggested by cinema’s apparent granting of life beyond the grave to its actors, who continue to dazzle and dance across the screen even when their natural lives have come to an end. If the impression this causes in viewers who do not know the actors personally is already strong, Quiroga suspects that it must become a kind of “alucinación torturante” (tormenting hallucination) for those who know them well.\textsuperscript{18} This provides the nucleus of the plots of “El espectro,” “El puritano,” and “El vampiro,” which weave a series of highly emotional entanglements between their pro-
tagonists and the spectral images of lost loved ones on-screen, transgressing the boundaries between life and death.

The screen, therefore, is not a mere canvas onto which recorded images are projected. It becomes a threshold between life and death, past and present, fantasy and reality. The actors of “El puritano,” now deceased, continue in a kind of somnambulant half-life in a cloakroom, disappearing for a short period when their films are screened again in Hollywood. They are caught in a contradiction, representing an “instant” but one that is also, at the same time, “imperecedero” (everlasting). The screen in “El espectro” is described as a “curtain” or a “corridor” through which the narrator and his lover, now dead, hope eventually to escape back to life. In “El vampiro,” Rosales is encouraged by the devotion of cinema audiences to believe that “debe de haber allí más vida que la que simulan un haz de luces y una cortina metalizada” (there must be more life there than the kind simulated by a beam of light and a galvanized curtain). His experiments with N1 rays succeed in animating the image of an actress, whose ghostly presence remains with him in his apartment even while her films are shown in Hollywood and whose soul seems to be transferred to her image upon her death.

It is this emphasis on cinema’s power to conquer death that leads Beatriz Sarlo to identify Quiroga’s stories as a cross between “mitología tardorrromántica y tecnología sofisticada” (late-Romantic mythology and sophisticated technology). As Sarlo observes,

El invento por excelencia de la modernidad se convierte en condición de posibilidad de una imaginación narrativa exaltadamente romántica cuyo eje es el tópico de “un amor más allá de la muerte.”

The invention par excellence of modernity becomes the condition of possibility of an exaggeratedly Romantic narrative imagination, revolving around the topic of “love beyond death.”

Quiroga delights in the incongruity that results from the conjunction of the Romantic with modern technology, repeatedly describing the apparatus of cinematography as cold or chemical, in contrast with the heat and turbulence of the emotions it arouses. Crucially, too, he insists that the cinematographic image may be animated, may cross into life, only through the emotions invested in it by both spectator and actor, whether of desire, fear, anger, or vengeance. If, as we are told in “El espectro,” there are “leyes naturales, principios físicos que nos enseñan cuán fría magia es ésa de los
espectros fotográficos danzando en la pantalla” (laws of nature, principles of physics that explain how cold the magic is that sets photographic ghosts dancing across the screen), these are insufficient to account for the forces of desire and destruction that transgress such laws.

In Sarlo’s account of Quiroga’s fiction, the ghosts and vampires of nineteenth-century literature breathe again by means of new technologies of the moving image. While she credits him with bringing a new interest in the material and the technological to lettered culture in the region, she finds that his is “una literatura que recicla tópicos del pasado” (a literature that recycles themes from the past). The question of what kind of innovation, if any, is effected or evoked by Quiroga’s cinematographic fantasies is a significant one in the tracing of an imagined relationship between literature and new technologies of the image, the central theme of this chapter. On the one hand, then, there is a considerable continuity suggested with the themes and narrative modes of nineteenth-century literature, both in Quiroga’s own stories and in the films that form a key element of their plots. Indeed, Pablo Rocca points out that Quiroga’s discovery of cinema did not lead to the kind of radical experimentation with literary form that it did in the case of his Brazilian counterpart, João do Rio. On the other hand, I would argue, it did usher in a clear departure from realism. In particular, it inspired a reorientation of perception and perspective that begins to challenge the division between subject and object, a reorganization of the sensible that defines cinema for Quiroga and marks it as qualitatively new.

The cinematic apparatus in Quiroga’s fiction allows for constant reversals in perspective. The screen does not erect a barrier between the viewing subject and the object of that viewing. It is a transparent membrane through which both actors and spectators may view the other, each the objects of the other’s gaze; it is also a frontier across which desire and revenge are transacted, in both directions. The actors that characters watch on-screen (or create through their own projections) become invested with the power to act, often vengefully, on the watching subject. The resurrected Hollywood actress of “El vampiro” leaves her animator drained of his lifeblood, surrounded by fragments of burned film, while in “El espectro,” the spectator, pointing his gun at the projection of his rival on the screen, somehow becomes the recipient of the gunshot himself.

Quiroga’s stories attest to the power of cinema to reorganize perception and subjective experience, far beyond the simple recording or projection of images. That power is life changing; it is also ultimately devastating, even for those characters for whom it does not bring death. Cinema gives life,
and it takes it away. The intensity and vibrancy of its images and stories cast everyday life into shadow, robbing reality of its vitality. “El vampiro” delivers a hyperbolic example of this operation: as soon as the film starts to roll, energized by light, electricity, and experimental N1 rays, “Toda ella se transforma en un vibrante trazo de vida, más vivo que la realidad fugitiva y que los más vivos recuerdos que guían hasta la muerte misma nuestra carrera terrenal” (It all transforms into a vibrating sketch of life, more alive than fleeting reality and the sharpest memories that guide our earthly journey to its death). As a technology for recording the transient, cinema delivers images that insert themselves into our sensory experience, becoming fully part of the material environment that presents itself to our senses. Indeed, they may seem even more lifelike, gaining a degree of vigor and consistency that outstrips that of our comparatively fleeting and vague impressions and memories. In the company of the reanimated actress, the narrator of “El vampiro” feels his real existence beginning to slip away. His daily life is nothing but “una alucinación” (a hallucination), and he is nothing but a ghost created to act a role: in the presence of cinema’s heightened sensory and dramatic appeal, reality takes on the ephemerality of the spectral.

For Quiroga, then, cinema and photography provide new dramatic possibilities for literature’s exploration of subjectivity. As the narrator comments in “El puritano,”

Never before now has literature taken full advantage of the terrible situation that arises when a husband, a son, a mother, turn to see on-screen, throbbing with life, the loved one they have lost.

Quiroga’s fascination with the apparatus of cinematography also brings something new, as Sarlo suggests, to lettered culture of the region: “la cercanía efectiva con la materia y la herramienta” (an effective proximity to materials and tools). An emphasis on the material, the sensual, and the corporeal is omnipresent in these stories. In “El espectro,” for example, the narrator reflects that he and Enid can still feel the brush of Duncan’s hair as he emerges from the screen and moves toward them; mental impressions and emotions take on tangible form, just as anger and vengeance become
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alive in Duncan’s “rastro químico” (chemical face).\textsuperscript{32} In myriad transmutations between human emotion, imaginary projection, and material inscription, Quiroga demonstrates the extent to which, as Morin suggests, “The cinema allows us to see the process of the penetration of man in the world and the inseparable process of the penetration of the world in man.”\textsuperscript{33} The screen in Quiroga’s stories is not a barrier separating representation from the represented world: it leads us to a greater understanding of the role of cinema and other visual technologies, in transporting us to a realm of the imaginary but also in immersing us in the material world.

The Magic of Machines: Anthropomorphic and Cosmomorphic Desire in La invención de Morel

As some critics have already noted, Bioy Casares’s novel La invención de Morel (1940) revisits some of the principal themes of Quiroga’s narratives on cinema, in its exploration of the ambiguous frontier between life and death, and the fatal attraction of the image. The novel has frequently been read as an exposition of the postmodern simulacrum, which erodes any distinction between reality and its simulation.\textsuperscript{34} Here, however, I will emphasize its contribution to the materialist current in Argentine science fiction. I read the novel in the light of Morin’s theory of anthropomorphic projection and cosmomorphic identification, in order to tease out the relationship between the imaginary and the material in cinematic spectatorship. In La invención de Morel we also begin to see a more explicit alignment of literature with other technological regimes of representation, as the expression of a desire for transcendence and permanence beyond a human life-span, and to appreciate how such technologies shape our perception of time.

Watching scenes repeatedly played out before his eyes on the island on which he is stranded, Bioy Casares’s narrator makes the startling discovery that it is peopled by hologram-like figures, captured and projected by a giant machine of Morel’s invention. These extraordinary holograms are not simply three-dimensional projections in space; they also respond to the five senses, including touch and smell. Morel’s machine was intended to improve on the work of a cinematographer, capturing its subjects through a complex system of radio waves and mirrors. The abhorrent design of the machine becomes apparent when the narrator realizes that, once captured on film, the original bodies die within days; their consciousnesses are transferred to their projected images, destined to repeat the events of a single
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week. For both Quiroga and Bioy Casares, it is desire that puts in motion the sinister mechanism that will lead to death: both a desire for immortality, and the voyeuristic desire for a woman. Morel admits that he invented the machine in order to perpetuate the dream of being with Faustine, with whom he is in love; for precisely the same reason, the narrator eventually takes the unconscionable decision to record himself and thereby enter Faustine’s simulated world.

The central paradox here relates closely to Quiroga’s: that while granting immortality, the recording and projection of the moving image simultaneously brings about death. Something of human life enters the image. In *La invención de Morel*, the narrator recalls the superstitious beliefs held by certain cultures about cameras, according to which capturing the image of a person causes the soul to pass into that image, and the person dies. Jean Baudrillard reflects in a similar manner on the “disquieting” nature of image reproduction, which involves “a kind of black magic”:

Reproduction is diabolical in its very essence; it makes something fundamental vacillate. This has hardly changed for us: simulation . . . is still and always the place of a gigantic enterprise of manipulation, of control and of death, just like the imitative object (primitive statuette, image of photo) always had as objective an operation of black magic.  

While the science of Morel’s machine in Bioy Casares’s novel is speculative—we know of no form of holographic projection that may respond to all five senses—it is, however, clearly presented as science, and not as black magic. Indeed, *La invención de Morel* is a crucial text in the genealogy of Argentine science fiction because it marks a clear affiliation with a materialist understanding of textual illusion, moving away from the idealist philosophical underpinnings of the greater part of fantastic narratives in Argentina and prefiguring the much greater dominance of materialist thought in more recent science fiction.

The difference may easily be grasped if we compare the novel with another text by Bioy Casares, the short story “En memoria de Paulina” (1948), in which the figure of Paulina reappears to the narrator in a fully embodied form after her death. He discovers that she is nothing but the projection of his rival’s jealous fantasy, much in the same way as Borges’s wizard dreams up every detail of a son in “Las ruinas circulares” and sends him out into the world. Both “En memoria de Paulina” and “Las ruinas circulares” playfully
take to an extreme the tenets of philosophical idealism, according to which what we imagine takes form in the world around us, manifesting itself in the material realm, and the world is therefore an illusion. In *La invención de Morel*, however, Bioy Casares insists on the materiality of the machinery that generates the illusion of life or, more accurately, generates the form of existence that has come to replace what we understand as life. At the end of the novel, we are not left wondering—as we are with “Las ruinas circulares”—whether our lives are merely dreamed up by another, but whether there is some infernal machine at work that manipulates our every movement, and whether our apparently free actions “dependen de botones que seres desconocidos pueden apretar” (depend on buttons pressed by unknown beings).36 The effect of both, of course, is to introduce a radical determinism. But while in the first, illusion is sustained by the life of the mind, in the second, the mind, the soul, and selfhood have all become an effect of the operation of mirrors, motors, and the energy generated by an island’s tides.

For Quiroga, new technologies of image projection provide a source of new perceptions and dramatic scenarios for literature; for Bioy Casares, similarly, they add another dimension to the human drama of transience and the desire for immortality. However, Bioy Casares goes further to imagine a crucial continuity between literature and Morel’s villainous invention. Rather than being repulsed by Morel’s monstrous act, or moved to pity by his subjects’ eternal imprisonment, the narrator ultimately feels envy for the kind of transcendence and permanence such repetitions seem to suggest, and which he finds lacking in his own life:

> Acostumbrado a ver una vida que se repite, encuentro la mía irreparablemente casual. Los propósitos de enmienda son vanos: yo no tengo próxima vez, cada momento es único, distinto, y muchos se pierden en los descuidos.37

> Accustomed to seeing a life that repeats itself, I find my own to be the irreparable product of chance. The idea of mending my ways is futile: I do not have a next time; each moment is unique, distinct, and many are lost from being overlooked.

The difference between the predetermined repetitions of the weeklong lives of the island’s inhabitants, captured forever by Morel’s machine, and the comparatively arbitrary and meaningless nature of the narrator’s existence is heightened by Bioy Casares’s recourse to the diary form in *La invención de Morel*.
The diary conjures up the vagaries of daily experience: the contingent nature of events; misunderstandings that are later corrected; inconsistencies in behavior or motives; moods and desires that are at the mercy of changes in the weather. The narrator is thus immersed in the present, struggling to understand the wider meaning of a thousand daily mundanities and unable to construct the kind of broader, more coherent picture that hindsight might permit.

Wolfram Nitsch’s perceptive analysis of the representation of writing in *La invención de Morel* finds that the old technology of the text is repeatedly set at a disadvantage in relation to the newer technology of Morel’s machine. The power of literature appears to pale in the light of Morel’s invention, and the narrator admits that “un hombre solitario no puede hacer máquinas ni fijar visiones, salvo en la forma trunca de escribirlas o dibujarlas” (a solitary man cannot construct machines or bind visions, except in an incomplete way to write them or draw them). As Nitsch observes, writing also fails in its task of seduction: the words of love laboriously formed out of flowers do not (cannot) attract Faustine’s attention. When he reflects on his obsession with Faustine, the narrator notes “lo escribo para fijarle límites” (I write about it to set limits on it), but this endeavor also clearly fails, and Nitsch reads his eventual abandonment of the diary and his surrender to the machine as a recognition of its superior power. On the other hand, what restores writing to a position of partial transcendence for Nitsch is the fact that it provides Morel with the keys—set out in Morel’s manuscript—to modify the machine, that in the form of the narrator’s diary it is able to stage a reflexive return to reinterpret earlier observations with the greater accuracy of hindsight, and also, of course, that it survives as a testimony of what has taken place, communicating the truth of the island’s machine to future readers.

While Nitsch’s discussion thus explores a conflict staged between “el viejo medio de la escritura” (the old medium of writing) and the fantastical new possibilities for reproduction and simulation evoked by Morel’s machine, in what follows I emphasize instead the repeated parallels drawn in the novel between Morel’s machine and the narrator’s diary. These relate in greater part to the desire for transcendence and immortality encoded within them. When Morel is overheard saying to someone that all his actions and words have been recorded, for example, referring to the machine, the narrator mistakenly jumps to the conclusion that they have discovered his diary. Once he discovers that the machine’s images may be subject to destruction, he declares that “mi propósito es salvarlas, con este informe” (my purpose is...
to save them, with this report), articulating a desire to rescue them from oblivion and render their memory immortal in much the same way as Morel’s machine does.\^41 That his account does survive him and is somehow rescued from the island is made clear by the insertion of a fictional editor’s footnotes. As the narrator hopes, “Estas líneas permanecerán invariables, a pesar de la flojedad de mis convicciones” (these lines will remain unchanging, in spite of the weakness of my convictions).\^45 It is suggested that the same desire for immortality that drives the construction of the machine also lies behind literature, in its attempts to bestow meaning upon life by lending it permanence and transcendence, eradicating the fleeting quality, the missed chances, and the senselessness of everyday existence. We look to the literary text, as to the cinematographic projections of Morel’s machine, to rescue us from the vacillations and accidents of human time.

It can do no such thing, of course, and indeed the simulations of Morel’s machine ultimately allow Bioy Casares to persuade us that the human is thoroughly embedded in a natural, material world, in relation to which it enjoys no position of transcendence. La invención de Morel invokes the power of cinematic projection to highlight the imaginary and material transactions that immerse humans within their environment. Humans, animals, and inanimate objects are caught up in exactly the same machinery of reproduction: Morel’s machine captures and projects landscapes, plants, insects, books, walls, and humans, with indifference, and when the narrator records his own hand, he reflects that “ahora es como otro objeto o casi animal que hay en el museo” (now it is like another object or almost-animal in the museum).\^46 For Morin, cinema stages “the interchangeability of men and things, faces and objects,”\^47 as film appears to energize and mobilize the material world alongside human actors. Morel’s machine animates the world of things in a similar manner, as objects in the museum disappear and reappear in such a way that they seem to acquire a life of their own.

Bioy Casares’s narrator clearly demonstrates the dual movements of “projection” and “identification” through which Morin finds the spectator to be caught up within the film, and which mirror the way we imagine our relationship with the world beyond ourselves. As Morin suggests, “Our needs, our aspirations, our desires, our obsessions, our fears, project themselves not only into the void as dreams and imaginings, but onto all things and all beings.”\^48 Much of the novel’s irony derives from the fear of persecution consistently projected by the narrator onto an entirely unconnected series of events: in every action he witnesses he finds allusions to his situation and the threat of conspiracy, suffering the delusion that everything he sees is
“una máquina para capturarme” (a machine to capture me). In the process of identification, which operates alongside projection, Morin claims that “the subject, instead of projecting himself into the world, absorbs the world into himself. Identification incorporates the environment into the self and integrates it affectively.” This process can also clearly be seen at work in La invención de Morel, not least in the narrator’s fateful affective identification with Faustine. For Morin, the dual processes of projection and identification correspond to forces of “anthropomorphism and cosmomorphism” that, respectively, “inject humanity into the external world and the external world into the inner man.” The desire of Bioy Casares’s narrator to enter the recording and realize his fantasy to gaze eternally upon Faustine, playing his part alongside her, is effectively a cosmomorphic desire to become integrated into a world of which he is merely a spectator.

For Morin, the cinematic apparatus binds the imaginary and the material in human experience. In films, he argues, “The fantastic transformation and the material transformation of nature and man intersect and replace one another. Dream and tool meet and fertilize one another.” And again, “The imaginary and the technical rely on one another, help one another. They always meet not only as negatives of each other but as mutual fermenting agents.” La invención de Morel stages this “dialectical unity,” demonstrating not only the mutual penetration of human subject and world but also the simultaneously imaginary and material qualities of the cinematic image. Crucially, though, it also finds the literary text to be an expression of the same anthropomorphic and cosmomorphic desires, the same projections and affective identifications, through which we seek to incorporate and integrate ourselves within the material environment and thereby, paradoxically perhaps, to secure for ourselves a coherence and a transcendence we are otherwise denied.

*El juego de los mundos: From Prosthesis to Plasticity*

If literature in La invención de Morel becomes an expression of our (often fatal) desire for immortality, in Aira’s *El juego de los mundos* (2000) the immortality now enjoyed by the citizens of an imagined futuristic society has rendered literature a useless and anachronistic artifact. The disappearance of books as we know them, eclipsed by forms of visual and virtual media, brings radical changes to modes of perception, thought, and social relations. However, this does not provide a cause for simple lament. In Aira’s often
ironic fable, literary culture is rarely held up as the fount and pinnacle of human civilization: indeed, we find, it was the narcissism and vanity of writers that ultimately brought about the demise of literature. Neither does Aira uniformly denounce the new visual regimes that have supplanted literature as narcotizing agents of consumerism. He holds no truck with more reactionary assertions that pit literature against the passive consumption of images, and explores the idea that—from a philosophical point of view—literature has, logically, few roles to play in a Leibnizian best of all possible worlds in which man has now discovered the long-elusive secret of immortality. Aira’s searching enquiry into what might be lost, gained, or sustained in the replacement of words with images, and the wider transition from literary culture to virtual systems of intelligence, reveals an interest in the shared prosthetic nature of books and images, as well as in the plasticity of human intelligence. It thereby advances a materialist understanding of the operations of mind and language, which are extensively shaped by technical supports and specific environmental conditions.

Set in the far future, Aira’s novel describes an era in which the “worlds game” has become the most popular way of passing time. The game is played using the Total Reality system and consists of traveling to another world inhabited by an intelligent species, declaring war, and annihilating them. Lest we assume that this is some new advance in virtual reality, it is clearly explained to us that these worlds are as real as our own. Success in the “game” is guaranteed, however, given the superiority of this world’s weapons and tactics. El juego de los mundos is narrated from the viewpoint of a member of the older generation, who views with suspicion the “game” his son plays with such gusto. He finds it deplorable that his “civilized” world should treat other worlds as disposable in this manner, placing them at the mercy of the entertainment industry. His son, an active player of the “game,” argues in response that it is only players such as he who take other worlds seriously, studying their features carefully, while those who do not play the game have no interest in other worlds whatsoever. It is the conflict between the perspectives of father and son that allows Aira to develop a sustained and intriguing comparison of the differing roles of literary and visual culture within society and the evolution of human thought.

Literature as we know it no longer exists in the world of El juego de los mundos. In the distant past, all texts were transcribed by an automated system into images: word by word, or often even syllable by syllable. The result is a flow of rebus-like images that strips words of their original meaning. Thus the beginning of the phrase “un día, de madrugada” (one day, in the
early morning) might be rendered with an image of a vertical index finger, followed by an astronomical figure to express “day”; alternatively, the system might combine “día” with “de ma-” (diadem) and insert a crown of dazzling diamonds. The arbitrary way in which syllables are divided up, together with the use of images to transcribe literal meaning, results in a string of images from which the original meaning of the text cannot possibly be deciphered. We are told that the transition from the era of print culture to that of the image was effected in a single step, with the instant destruction of the original books, leaving only these enormous and enigmatic image-strings. This act of transcribing literature has eradicated differences between works and authors: the transcriptions flatten out style and all variation in language, dialect, or register. “Reading” has been reduced to watching these images as they pass before one’s eyes, at a rate of at least ten images per second. Not surprisingly, it has become almost entirely obsolete as a practice. The narrator is unusual in choosing to dedicate at least an hour or two every day to what has become, in the eyes of the majority, an antiquated exercise.

Does this translation of literature into images represent an impoverishment of the act of “reading”? Aira is characteristically ambivalent on this score. The narrator reflects that literature has been reduced to “cadenas incoherentes de imágenes” (incoherent chains of images) and “un vértigo de rebus insensatos” (a dizzying string of senseless rebuses). On the other hand, he is told that he has misunderstood the very essence of the literary, which consists in the invention of new stories from a given sequence of images, which would then in turn be translated into images and give rise to ever more stories, and so on, in an endless deferral of meaning. Aira certainly avoids descending into a diatribe against the passivity of mass culture consumption of the kind that one would find in Adorno or Baudrillard. If the translated strings of images are a mere shadow of print culture, he presents the “worlds game” as a more worthy successor. Indeed, the narrator’s son considers “reading” to be “pasivo, sin compromiso, sin vida . . . sin emoción” (passive, without commitment, lifeless . . . emotionless) in comparison with the “worlds game,” which requires an active curiosity on the part of the player, an engagement with the real world, and (theoretically, at least) a willingness to take risks. If literature was, in times past, a route into knowledge of worlds beyond our own, rescuing us from insularity or ignorance, it is clear that this function has been taken on by the “worlds game.” Such knowledge is hardly innocent, of course: it clearly goes hand in hand with the destruction and domination of other worlds.

In Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, discussed above, Montag fears that the
burning of books will wipe out messages they might contain that would help to save society from repeating its mistakes and destroying itself. In Aira's best of all possible worlds, there are no longer any problems to solve. It is not the ascendancy of mass society, consumerism, the image or virtual reality that has put paid to the traditional form of literature, but the discovery of immortality. This, the narrator considers, completely devalues literature. The story once took its place as the account of a survivor of an adventure, but if everyone always survives, wherein lies the value of a survivor's tale? As a result, “Ya no sucedían aventuras, no se improvisaba, no había espontaneidad” (There were no adventures any more, no one improvised, there was no spontaneity), and as the adventure and its story are two sides of the same coin, both have been eclipsed.

In suggesting that literature has no viable role to play in an infinite world of immortals, Aira draws on some recognizably Borgesian conceits. In Borges’s “El inmortal,” man's knowledge of his immortality dissolves all individuality, ethics, and creativity: the city of immortals is inhabited by troglodytes who can barely rouse themselves to stammer a few words. The Leibnizian best of all possible worlds, Aira decides, could not possibly contain literature. Literature arises out of man’s loneliness and his struggle with forces beyond his grasp. As the narrator states, “En el ser humano, la soledad nació con la captación de lo universal” (In human beings, loneliness is born with the apprehension of the universal).

The narrator of El juego de los mundos sets out in search of the unique and—in one of Aira’s most ludic passages—manages to discover God, hidden somewhere in the system. Surprised to find that the deity is about forty centimeters tall and made of cardboard, with a spider’s legs and a blond wig, the narrator becomes embroiled in an unholy scuffle with Him, grabbing His wig to play football with it, and running across the galaxies with the Supreme Being in hot pursuit. While recognizing that the turn of events has necessarily become somewhat “extravagant” and even “ridiculous,” the narrator succeeds in disrupting the wearisome predictability of his world with a unique event, and now has a story to tell. The passage can be read as a metafictional, tongue-in-cheek defense of Aira’s own predilection for exploiting the utterly fantastical as a means of throwing conventional modes of realism into disarray. It is, nevertheless, wholly in keeping with one of the novel’s overarching themes, the relationship of literature with newness.
In other respects, however, Aira prefers to focus on the continuities between traditional literature and the visual and virtual systems of information and communication that he presents as having superseded it, in a way that demonstrates their common status as prostheses in human thought and social relations. In *El juego de los mundos*, meeting face-to-face, without the means of telepresence, has become unusual and rather old-fashioned; instead, most encounters between people and worlds take place within the “Realidad Total” (Total Reality) system. This system, somewhat akin to the matrix of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), allows for the storage and retrieval of all known facts about the universe. Most people use a “Rectificador de discurso” (Speech Corrector) to help them communicate with others: this is a technology that improves the flow and efficiency of speech, editing it in real time. The narrator observes that these devices automatically adapt to the personality of the speaker. By creating a sense of authorial style in this way, “Coincidían, por casualidad, con la vieja práctica de la literatura” (They just so happened to coincide with the old practice of literature).

Other vestiges of literary modes of representation are also detectable in the RD system. At one point, a friend regales the narrator with an anecdote, telling him about an occasion on which he demonstrated unusual perceptive-ness. The narrator is thrown to discover that the character and the event of the anecdote have been invented by his friend: it is not a real story, but an “example.” The narrator struggles to understand the meaning of “example,” a new word for him. He is told that it is a particular case that has the characteristics of all the different cases of its kind, but he still doesn’t understand the concept: “¿Cómo puede ser un caso particular no real?” (How can a particular case not be real?). He is particularly bemused by the detail with which the friend had related his story, even going as far as to mention the way his invented character puts his hands in his pockets when he is puzzled. It is explained to him that this is “una verosimilización” (a technique to enhance verisimilitude).

The RD system, which contains an “ejemplificador” (exemplifier), acts in many ways as an analogy for the workings of (realist) literature, which narrates a particular case that is representative of its type but is not real, and which embellishes its story with details with the aim of increasing verisimilitude.

The analogies drawn throughout *El juego de los mundos* encourage us to see the relationship between traditional literature and the novel’s futuristic systems of information and communication as essentially one of continuity rather than rupture. Literature’s operations have not been superseded so much as displaced onto other forms of media and virtual reality. This allows
us to perceive the properties they share as technologies of prosthesis. All prosthetic technologies organize perception and subjectivity in particular ways, and the difference between these becomes Aira’s principal interest in the novel.

*El juego de los mundos* makes continual references to certain categories according to which rational thought is organized, such as the particular and the general, the partial and the total, the relative and the absolute. Just as the narrator cannot understand the concept of an invented example—a case that is not a true case but has all the characteristics of one—so other characters have difficulty thinking in abstract or universal terms beyond the concrete nature of particularities, or in linking theory with practice. The narrator, miserably out of sync with this new, textless society, complains that his son’s generation has grown accustomed to thinking in “concrete terms,” and that only his son is still able to translate these occasionally into “la universalidad en que se movía mi mente” (the universality that my mind moved in). It is clear that this difficulty in translating between the universal and the particular, and the abstract and the concrete, has come as a result of the decline of textuality. The narrator reflects that the reduction of texts to meaningless strings of images has limited generalizing thought, as “Las singularidades lo habían invadido todo” (Singularities had invaded everything).

Rather than deploring the decline of literature and textuality, however, Aira shows much greater interest in using the shift from reading to playing the “worlds game” to explore the plasticity of human intelligence, which is continually shaped in different ways by the particular tools and prostheses it uses to extend its perceptions and abilities and interact with a changing environment. In this way, *El juego de los mundos* echoes the insights of a number of theorists of cyborg identities, including Andy Clark, for whom the essence of human intelligence is precisely its ability “to enter into deep and complex relationships with nonbiological constructs, props, and aids.” Clark argues that different kinds of “human-machine symbiosis” expand and alter psychological processes at a fundamental level, whether these are new experiments with virtual reality or “old technologies of pen and paper.” In consonance with other philosophers of the science of human evolution, including Sterelny and Stiegler, Clark emphasizes crucial aspects of brain development that are not genetically determined but shaped by individual experience. As Sterelny suggests,

> If our minds are (mostly) ensembles of (largely) prewired modules, then human nature is largely the same everywhere and when. But
we are pervasively and profoundly phenotypically plastic: our minds develop differently in different environments.\textsuperscript{68}

*El juego de los mundos* clearly shows us how the human mind responds to changing environments and different kinds of technological prosthesis, which enable certain modes of thought while disabling others. This understanding traverses many of Aira’s novels, including *La guerra de los gimnasios* (1992), *La villa* (2001), and *Embalse* (1992), in which televised images merge almost imperceptibly with characters’ perceptions of real landscapes, projected continually even in the absence of a television set.

In *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, a work that mediates between philosophy and contemporary neuroscience, Catherine Malabou discovers an uncanny similarity between new models of how the brain works developed in neuroscience and the dominant model of capitalism as a dynamic, decentered, and highly adaptable system, in which flexibility and participation in multiple networks is demanded of the worker who wishes to succeed. If a previous understanding of how the brain works typically traced a series of hierarchical relationships, in which the brain was pictured as the central or controlling organ, the new neuronal paradigm emphasizes “a plurality of mobile and atomistic centers, deployed according to a connectionist model.”\textsuperscript{69} As Malabou argues:

In the same way that neuronal connections are supple and do not obey a centralized or even truly hierarchized system, political and economic power displays an organizational suppleness in which the center also appears to have disappeared. The biological and the social mirror in each other this new figure of command.\textsuperscript{70}

Aira’s *El juego de los mundos* depicts a similar mirroring between the processes of human thought and the broader operations of power, raising exactly this question of how a particular “figure of command” might come to govern a whole society. If Malabou fears that the new understanding of the brain acts to naturalize the dominant socioeconomic system of our time, neoliberal capitalism, the danger Aira dramatizes in his novel is that the changes in human thought processes that result from the “worlds game” may reintroduce a much more hierarchical structure of authority in a world that currently benefits from the moral and philosophical freedom of liberalism.

What the narrator is able to grasp—and the younger generation cannot—is that the popularity of the “worlds game” is effectively preparing the
minds of the younger generation for the reintroduction of the idea of God. In the novel, it is explained that God had (unwittingly) been destroyed by the narcissism of writers such as Aira, whose desperation to discover what place their work might have in the new order produced an overload of the system, which subsequently short-circuited. The narrator, anxious to protect the liberalism of the new era, is horrified by the prospect of the return of God and fears that the idea of God is implicit in the worlds game. He reasons that

los mundos, por ser reales, son particularidades que ocupan cada vez el campo entero de la realidad, y no dejan espacio más para un ser ultraparticular, una generalidad singular, que sería justamente la vieja y archipodrida idea de Dios.\(^71\)

the worlds, because they are real, are particularities, each of which occupies the entire field of reality, and only allows space for an ultraparticular being, a singular generality, which would be precisely the old and totally noxious idea of God.

If the fates of the worlds, representing “partial totalities” within the system of the universe, are subject to a throw of the dice, this opens up a path that might lead back to theology, allowing for the possibility of a supreme being, a “singular generality,” who might decide those fates. The narrator is forced to acknowledge that the idea of God is embedded within his antecedent Aira’s work. “Al parecer mi antepasado escritor había puesto las bases para una superación del saber a partir de las singularidades de la literatura” (It appears that my writer-predecessor had laid the ground for an improvement in knowledge on the basis of literature’s singularities),\(^72\) he realizes, in a probable self-reference to Aira’s construction of his novels as singularities that are gathered together to form a kind of encyclopedia.\(^73\) The existence of plural worlds (or texts), and the contact between them, points back to God, or a higher system of knowledge that embraces these worlds and the relationship between them (the Creator-Writer). The narrator fears that his world is about to be led, unknowingly, back to the subjugation of life under a divine authority.

In the context of the parallels she observes between recent neuroscientific paradigms and the dominance of certain structures of command in society, Malabou reasserts the resistance that may be offered by the brain’s plasticity. Crucially, the brain is not merely flexible and impressionable, but “plastic”
in the full sense she describes. She reminds us that the word “plasticity”—which comes from the Greek _plassein_, to mold—has two senses: first, “the capacity to _receive_ form,” like clay, and second, “the capacity to _give_ form,” as in the plastic arts, or plastic surgery. If the brain is “plastic,” it is because it both receives form _and_ is formative.\(^7\) In many ways, Aira’s _El juego de los mundos_ reflects on an ethical question that becomes central to Malabou’s work: how should we then use our brain? By becoming more conscious of the plasticity of those mechanisms that form our sense of self, Malabou suggests, we may acquire the ability to give form to the world around us rather than simply submit to the influences of our environment:

To ask “What should we do with our brain?” is above all to visualize the possibility of saying no to an afflicting economic, political and mediatic culture that celebrates only the triumph of flexibility, blessing obedient individuals who have no greater merit than that of knowing how to bow their heads with a smile.\(^7\)

Becoming aware of the kind of transformations our brains undergo potentially enables us to create resistance to certain systems rather than simply adapting flexibly to them. This is also the premise of _El juego de los mundos_, whose narrator gains an insight into the relationship between thought patterns and the broader mechanisms of societal control and is therefore able to act to challenge the threat of a resurgent God.

With characteristic irony, Aira presents literature as both the source of the problem and its potential overcoming. _El juego de los mundos_ presents Aira’s own narcissism as the possible cause of the destruction of literature and, it is feared, the return of an oppressive supreme being. And he has certainly not learned his lesson: the novel is full of precisely the same reflexive and intertextual references that lead us straight back to himself and his work. The narrator adopts the “sonrisa seria” (serious smile), a repeated reference in Aira’s novels, as facial gesture of his own.\(^7\) As José Mariano García points out, the example the narrator chooses to demonstrate how literary texts were translated into images is not, as he claims, “una frase cualquiera” (a random phrase)\(^7\) but the first phrase of _Moreira_ (1975), the first of Aira’s novels to be published.\(^7\) For such reasons, García suggests that we read _El juego de los mundos_ as “una especie de metáfora de su escritura” (a kind of metaphor for his writing).\(^7\) Importantly, however, it is the narrator’s familiarity with the phenomenon of literature in its traditional printed form, now extinct, that makes him the only one able to grasp the impending disaster awaiting a
society that complacently assumes it has done away with its divine dictator. Literary culture, like new technologies of the image or new forms of virtual experience, produces unique transformations of processes of human thought and perception. Aira’s novel never laments the passing of literature as we know it, but points to the importance, both epistemological and ethical, of gaining insight into those transformations as a means of shaping our own destiny.

Conclusion: Plasticity and the “Dusk of Writing”

The screens, projections, and enhanced cinematographic technologies that are ubiquitous in science fiction novels, from the multisensory “feelies” of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) to the bidirectional telescreens of George Orwell’s *1984* (1949), have presented insidious new forms of social control as well as a threat to traditional cultural values. Science fiction has typically fallen into step with many of the twentieth century’s most prominent theorists in their ardent indictments of the increasing incursions of a mass culture organized around images. In Adorno’s critique of the culture industry, a formulaic cinema prescribes behaviors and attitudes for the passive consumer; the primary role of the “dream industry” is to indoctrinate the spectator, perpetuating the socioeconomic hierarchies of society. Baudrillard constructs a similarly negative scenario, assigning cinema to the domain of the hyperreal, in a world of simulations and simulacra in which the image has lost any connection with reality.

The texts discussed in this chapter tell a different story. While they often narrate the partial or total eclipse of literature in the face of powerful new visual modes of drama, they do not find in this a simple cause for regret. Rather than depicting new modes of (audio)visual communication and entertainment as forms of pacification and vehicles for bourgeois capitalist ideology, as both the Frankfurt School and more recent theorists of the postmodern have tended to do, Quiroga, Bioy Casares, and Aira have imagined the relationship between literature and new technologies of the image in different, and rather more creative, ways. All three writers certainly attest to the sinister potential of such technologies to entrap individuals in fantasies and obsessions to the extent that they often become blind, or indifferent, to their own self-destruction. Quiroga’s cinephiles, driven to meddle with the forces of life and death by the intensity and vibrancy of cinema’s illusions, become the victims of vampirism or other forces beyond the grave. The narrator of
Bioy Casares’s *La invención de Morel* is so deeply entranced by the projected image of a woman that he willingly gives up his life to enter a world of fantasy. The young players of Airá’s *El juego de los mundos* become so absorbed in the pursuit of other worlds that they are oblivious to the philosophical and social consequences of the game for their own.

However, these writers primarily seek to incorporate the visual or virtual technologies they imagine within the literary tradition, or to understand in a broader sense the profound shifts in subjectivity and even socioeconomic systems that may result from the dominance of different media technologies. A rhetorical appropriation of the image belongs to a rich tradition within Argentine and Latin American literature, and one that is deftly traced by Valeria de los Ríos in *Espectros de luz: Tecnologías visuales en la literatura latinoamericana*. In the work of writers as diverse as Lugones, Quiroga, Arlt, Cabrera Infante, Cortázar, and Bolaño, De los Ríos finds that “la escritura se convierte en un espacio que integra la influencia de los nuevos medios” (writing is transformed into a space that incorporates the influence of new forms of media) presenting itself as “un lugar privilegiado para analizar la impronta de la visualidad en la cultura” (a privileged site for analyzing how visuality has made a mark on culture).

In a similar way, the texts I have discussed here ironically resort to literature to narrate the eclipse of that particular textual technology: not as a motive for protest or nostalgia, but as a way to approach broader questions concerning the interplay between subjectivity and different regimes of communication or expression, or how human thought is shaped by the technologies it has brought into being. In this manner, their fiction can be brought into dialogue with Malabou’s argument concerning the elevation of “plasticity” as the most productive paradigm for our time, marking the decline of writing, which has hitherto held that position of dominance.

Malabou draws on Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* in her account of how writing came to constitute itself as the prevailing “motor scheme,” in a movement that begins with structuralism and is grounded in linguistics, genetics, and cybernetics. Derrida finds the notion of writing to embrace concepts of trace, inscription, code, and program, all of which became organizing principles in accounts of cell biology and the theory of cybernetics. Malabou contends, however, that “we must acknowledge that the power of the linguistic-graphic scheme is diminishing and that it has entered a twilight for some time already.” In its place, “Plasticity is slowly but surely establishing itself as the paradigmatic figure of organization in general.” This gradual revolution accompanies a growing understanding of the limits...
of genetic determination and the importance of neuronal plasticity, or in other words the ability of the brain to modify itself as a result of experience. Neuronal traces do not proceed as writing traces do, argues Malabou: they do not leave a trace, but take place as a change in form, such that “we can therefore make the claim that plasticity forms where DNA no longer writes.”

Aira’s novel, in particular, is concerned with such shifts in conceptual understanding that might attend the decline of writing, not just in the form of literary culture, but as a paradigm with much broader power in the organization of philosophical beliefs and social relations. It is in his novel that the notion of plasticity is most thoroughly explored, in a way that casts into shadow the rise or fall of any one cultural form of expression. But the fictions of Quiroga and Bioy Casares discussed here also provide important intimations of the emergence of plasticity as a paradigm, highly attentive as they are to ways in which imagined technologies may open up new forms of being, and to how subjectivity may be profoundly shaped by a complex and shifting relationship with new representational regimes. If, as Ian James observes, Malabou’s claim relating to the coincidence of neuronal function and sociopolitical organization is “perhaps rather speculative, but certainly provocative,” for that reason it provides highly fertile ground for literary exploration. Paradoxically, literature emerges as a privileged locus for discussions of its own decline, drawing on its others—photography, cinematography, mass culture, even new paradigms of plasticity—in order to extend and diversify its own praxis.