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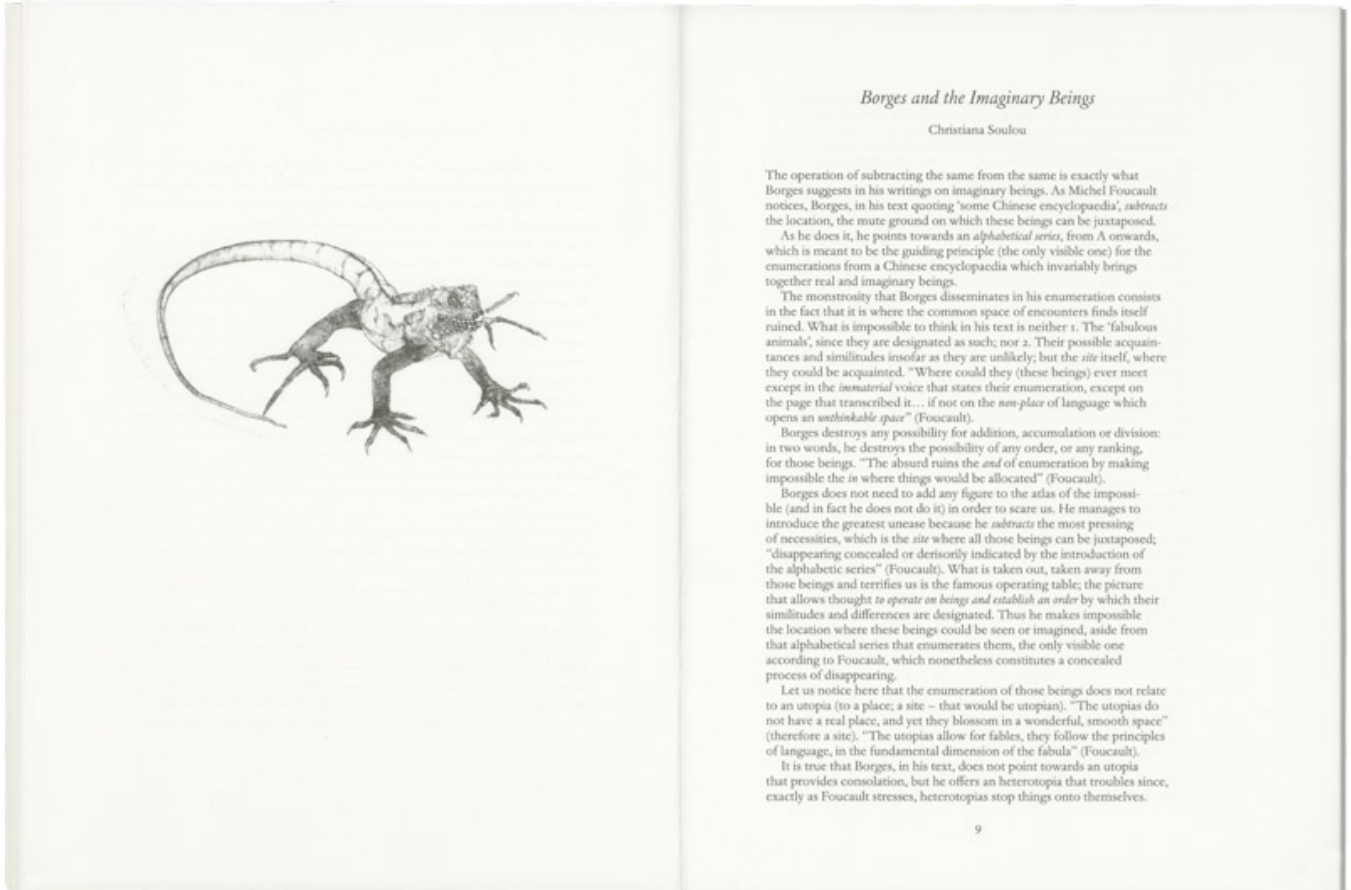


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[The Book Of Imaginary Beings](#)



### Borges and the Imaginary Beings

Christiana Soulou

The operation of subtracting the same from the same is exactly what Borges suggests in his writings on imaginary beings. As Michel Foucault notices, Borges, in his text quoting 'some Chinese encyclopaedia', *subtracts* the location, the mute ground on which these beings can be juxtaposed.

As he does it, he points towards an *alphabetical series*, from A onwards, which is meant to be the guiding principle (the only visible one) for the enumerations from a Chinese encyclopaedia which invariably brings together real and imaginary beings.

The monstrosity that Borges disseminates in his enumeration consists in the fact that it is where the common space of encounters finds itself ruined. What is impossible to think in his text is neither 1. The 'fabulous animals', since they are designated as such; nor 2. Their possible acquaintances and similitudes insofar as they are unlikely; but the *site* itself, where they could be acquainted. "Where could they (these beings) ever meet except in the *immaterial* voice that states their enumeration, except on the page that transcribed it... if not on the *non-place* of language which opens an *unthinkable space*" (Foucault).

Borges destroys any possibility for addition, accumulation or division: in two words, he destroys the possibility of any order, or any ranking, for those beings. "The absurd ruins the *end* of enumeration by making impossible the *in* where things would be allocated" (Foucault).

Borges does not need to add any figure to the atlas of the impossible (and in fact he does not do it) in order to scare us. He manages to introduce the greatest unease because he *subtracts* the most pressing of necessities, which is the *site* where all those beings can be juxtaposed; "disappearing concealed or derisively indicated by the introduction of the alphabetic series" (Foucault). What is taken out, taken away from those beings and terrifies us is the famous operating table; the picture that allows thought to *operate on beings and establish an order* by which their similitudes and differences are designated. Thus he makes impossible the location where these beings could be seen or imagined, aside from that alphabetical series that enumerates them, the only visible one according to Foucault, which nonetheless constitutes a concealed process of disappearing.

Let us notice here that the enumeration of those beings does not relate to an utopia (to a place; a site - that would be utopian). "The utopias do not have a real place, and yet they blossom in a wonderful, smooth space" (therefore a site). "The utopias allow for fables, they follow the principles of language, in the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*" (Foucault).

It is true that Borges, in his text, does not point towards an utopia that provides consolation, but he offers a heterotopia that troubles since, exactly as Foucault stresses, heterotopias stop things onto themselves.

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