

All the Borges Books (Conversation Between Jorge Luis Borges and Jorge Méndez Blake)

2012 - 2018

Two channel video 3'55"

The following is a conversation between Jorge Méndez Blake and Jorge Luis Borges on "All the Borges Books", an intervention to the Public Library System in New York.

On May 7th, 2012, for a period of ten days, all the Jorge Luis Borges' books were checked out from the 39 public libraries in Manhattan, New York. The books were put in a closed box and transported to an art fair, where they were inaccessible to the public.

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Jorge Méndez Blake

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JMB: What would you think if it became impossible to access your books in a given city for a period of time?

JLB: That the number of authors is limited, but the readings of their works are infinite. Given enough time, my ideas would reach the readers through the readings of other authors.

JMB: I am planning to remove all your books available in all the public libraries in Manhattan, to sequester them for some time, to keep people from reading them.

JLB: Reading is seeing. It would be a sort of temporary blindness, a public intervention that would run counter to the free divulgation of knowledge and traditional cultural policy, which advocates broad and free access to culture for everyone.

JMB: The art project would ideally be a glaze, although it might go unnoticed by readers, I'm not sure. In our relationship with culture, glazes overlay each other and it is difficult to appreciate their modulations.

JLB: The repercussions of a public action, however discrete it may be, are unpredictable. We may never know if your art project has an effect on collective knowledge (if such a concept exists), and if it has, to what extent.

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JMB: Public access to culture does not guarantee that it will be a living organism.

JLB: The idea of culture as a citizen's right is arguable. We have mistaken democracy for apathy. How far we are from Athens and its public agora, in which ideas about the city and the culture were freely discussed!

JMB: Nonetheless, only a few had access to knowledge...

JLB: The city we live in is evidently different. However, I doubt that public culture can effectively reach the average citizen. Cultural policy is not sincerely democratic, and the public has no interest in bringing back the agora.

JMB: Is a public library a living organism? If it was, it is clear to me that it has ceased to be so, at least not to the same extent. Knowledge is now distributed and stored in different ways. But libraries have not lost their status as cultural symbols. That is why my interest in literary activism has taken the public library as a target.

JLB: Causing partial blindness among the population is not activism. It sounds more like proselytism... I am still in doubt whether anyone will really miss those texts, not now perhaps, but in the long night of history.

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