Signposts

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> I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars.
>
> —narrator, Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths"

In his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein (1953) presented an image of how language grows through new modes of disciplinary writing, such as when

> the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it; for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses. (§ 18)

As differences in writing emerge, they vary the rest of language from which they are inseparable, a changing yet unified space, and it is within this labyrinthine architecture—or archi*text*ure—that we dwell. Whether one is writing in chemistry or mathematics or another discipline, one may make a point, and through the passages one constructs make it to the next point, but at times one may feel lost or stuck, and in a maze these are the same experience.

Wittgenstein's image implies the peril of trying to solve this maze by exiting it. His overview of the city, one that lays out its entire architexture, assumes a vantage point beyond language, an Archimedean perspective from outside the maze. But any theoretical clarification of language, such as this one, is itself a part of language, and so its completeness is always undone by a newer use of language, "a labyrinth of labyrinths" in which an endlessly expanding architexture reduces each subsequent theory of language to a partial view of it.

A later image from Wittgenstein (1980) suggests that this maze may instead be solved when one no longer tries to exit it. This reversal of perspective makes each partial view of the architexture a complete view of part of it, signs continuously posted within a shifting maze in order to prevent writers from becoming lost or stuck:

> Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings. . . . What I have to do then is erect signposts at all the junctions where there are wrong turnings so as to help people past the danger points. (p. 18e)

This reversal presents a solution to the maze that is pedagogical. The way out of an exitless maze is by learning how to avoid its "traps" and "wrong turnings" because a maze without confusion is simply an architexture one may feel at home in.

The pedagogical turn enacted by Wittgenstein is one way to define the work of *Double Helix*. This volume is a complex of signs for negotiating the architexture of the university, guiding readers though its labyrinth of steps, thresholds, centers and projects, scaffolding, capstones, platforms and pillars. As readers follow these signs, they may also notice this volume's essential incompleteness, a relational architecture that admits a variety of possibilities for connecting one part to another. One reader may see steps leading to a center, and another these same steps leading away from it. Others may see scaffolded projects, or pillars with capstones. And still other readers may see how this architexture extends to other volumes and journals, an infrastructure shared across otherwise diverse histories of disciplinary thinking and writing, a pedagogical commons both permanent and provisional.

References

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