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FOLDING AND UNFOLDING THE INFINITE

Space-time relations in Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés

Introduction

From the point of view of its form, *Un coup de dés* has been analyzed from many different perspectives. Kristeva¹ analyzes its syntactic procedures; Scherer² presents a grammatical description of Mallarmé's language; Meischonnic³ focuses on orality; Murat⁴ on verse; the study undertaken by Greer Cohn⁵ deals with the poem as a unity, its rhythm and its place in Mallarmé's *œuvre*, while, at the same time performing an analysis of the syntax, the vocabulary, the form, and the themes, including the meaning of each letter. The most recent analysis comes from Quentin Meillassoux,⁶ who finds in the poem a code that would explain the manner by which Mallarmé inserted chance into his creation.⁷ But there remains a point still unexplored by commentators: how does Mallarmé think or formalize, inside his poem, the relationship between chance and the infinite?

In the drafts of *Igitur* we discover that chance always performs its own idea, indicating that the throw of dice is defined precisely as that which allows the infinite to be: "This was to take place in the combinations of the Infinite face to face with the Absolute".⁸ In this work, we will analyze and describe how the infinite was formalized in *Un coup de dés*. We will begin with the formal innovations that the poet himself highlighted in the preface of his work, such as the double page and the division of motifs.

The evolution of the formal and spatial resources employed by Mallarmé — the blanks inserted on the page are concrete spaces that provide the narrative with its space but which also move, process or present the spacing of *Un coup de dés* as mobile — illustrate a path whereby the unique space of poetry, the space of the page, is used more and more to become a fundamental element of its formal constitution. If poetry takes place, it is because it is capable of making space a condition of its eventual possibility; that is, space is not a simple given, but an element that pro-

duces stories, a condition that allows poetry to take place, that produces qualitative transformations, that make it possible for something to happen. In short, it makes History as it makes a story.

The same can be asserted about time. *Un coup de dés* takes place in “eternal circumstances” since if a specific time had been appointed, the poem would lose its general, universal, and cosmological ambition. To be the poetic explication of the Earth the poem must be capable of seizing “the relation, between *times*, rare or multiple” and thus “expanding, simplifying the world”.⁹ In eternal circumstances, time is always multiple and composed of divergent series. It is thus capable of providing the conditions of all possible experience or making the possibilities of experience infinite. It is also rare since each story, each small event in each person’s life, takes place in a singular combination of multiple times. The rare time, however, is not the time of particular experience: what is rare is that time presents itself not as one, but as multiple — as infinite. Rare is the time of an event that contains inexhaustible possibilities in a unique instant.

For a poem to take place inside “the combinations of the Infinite face to face with the Absolute” it must be able to identify the eternal and minimal conditions of all possible experience, of any possible event; and thus from these minimal conditions discover the “unholy” formula that makes the production of the infinite in the Book possible. In other words, the infinite can be disclosed in a form because this form is constructed through an elaboration of multiple spatio-temporal relations intended to contain (potentially) endless experiential possibilities.

Where does time start? Where does space end?

Before unearthing this letter, I had wondered how a book could be infinite. The only way I could surmise was that it be a cyclical, or a circular volume. A volume whose last page would be identical to the first, so that one might go on indefinitely.¹⁰

This eminently Mallarméan question guides the adventure of Borges’ story ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’. But upon discovering the manuscript of Ts’ui Pen, the Narrator sees himself confronted with another way of making an infinite book.

In the manuscript of the novel the Narrator reads: “I leave to several futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths”. Faced with this affirmation we could think of Mallarmé’s assertion in the preface of *Un coup de dés*: “today or at least without presuming upon the future that will emerge from this — nothing or perhaps what merely verges on art”.¹¹ The Narrator continues these speculations by telling us that the phrase “several futures (not all)” suggests an image of a forking in time, rather than in space. A complete rereading of the story confirms this theory. In all fictions, each time a man meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the virtually-impossible-to-disentangle work of Ts’ui Pen, the char-

acter chooses — simultaneously — all of them. He thereby creates several futures, several times, which themselves proliferate and fork.¹² It is thus as if all the possible futures of his art were somehow prefigured or present in the work at the time of its completion.

The Garden of Forking Paths is a huge riddle, or parable, whose subject is time; that secret purpose forbids Ts'ui Pen the merest mention of its name. To always omit one word, to employ awkward metaphors and obvious circumlocutions, is perhaps the most emphatic way of calling attention to that word. It is at any rate, the tortuous path chosen by the devious Ts'ui Pen at each and every one of the turnings of his inexhaustible novel. I have compared hundreds of manuscripts, I have corrected the errors introduced through the negligence of copyists, I have reached a hypothesis for the plan of that chaos, I have reestablished, or believe I've reestablished, its fundamental order — I have translated the entire work; and I know that not once does the word 'time' appear. The explanation is obvious: The Garden of Forking Paths is an incomplete, but not false, image of the universe as conceived by Ts'ui Pen. Unlike Newton and Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not believe in a uniform and absolute time; he believed in an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. That fabric of times that approach one another, fork, are snipped off, or are simply unknown for centuries, contains all possibilities. In most of those times, we do not exist; in some, you exist but I do not; in others, I do and you do not; in others still, we both do. In this one, which the favoring hand of chance has dealt me, you have come to my home; in another, when you come through my garden you find me dead; in another, I say these same words, but I am an error, a ghost.¹³

It is first with irony that the Narrator seeks to explain what might yet be difficult, strange and distant to the reader. He quotes Schopenhauer and Newton as if the reader were familiar with these authors and could recognize the obvious nature of the explanation. But after explaining that time is composed of multiple sets that intersect or remain unaware of each other, Borges, in bringing science and philosophy to life in their concrete dimension, mentions familiar examples which any reader could identify with; placing the player in a time series, he challenges them by introducing a relation of complicity: "you came to my house". These divergent time series can cross or lose each other; when a character meets another, these encounters or misfortunes are what make stories take place. Actually, the multiple temporal series — convergent or divergent, parallel or intersecting at a point in space — are responsible for all the possibilities of events, meetings and misfortunes. Chance places us in the same space-time, while another is where the narrator dies, and yet another rattles space and time themselves, and turns the narrator into a ghost. Thus, every story requires a minimal condition to start, a chance that causes a spatio-temporal meeting.

If a time composed of convergent or divergent infinite series is a condition that makes literature infinite and inexhaustible, what can we say about space? Where does it start? Can it be also infinite? If a book can cause multiple time series to meet, it must be able to contract space — and thus contain all points of the universe. This is what Borges described in another story ‘The Aleph’:

Under the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brightness. At first, I thought it was spinning; then I realized that the movement was an illusion produced by the dizzying spectacles inside it. The Aleph was probably two or three centimeters in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution in size. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos.¹⁴

The Aleph is a small circumference of two to three centimeters from where the character observes all the points of cosmic space. And as in ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’, Borges’ examples are both imaginary and real, or very familiar:

I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spider-web at the center of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, all very close, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror, saw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me), saw in a rear courtyard on Calle Soler the same tiles I’d seen twenty years before in the entry way of a house in Fray Bentos, saw clusters of grapes, snow, tobacco, veins of metal, water vapor, saw convex equatorial deserts and their every grain of sand.¹⁵

The Aleph is viewed from all points and from the Aleph one sees the entire Earth, and from the Earth the Aleph, and in the Aleph again the Earth. The character of the text, before starting its description, announces that what he has seen was produced simultaneously, but its description will be successive because language itself is successive.

What if the form of a poem could contract space and time such that an infinity of possibilities could, as in the Aleph, fit in a restricted and limited space? If ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’ provides us with a description of a temporal infinity, here Borges manipulates a spatial infinity. An infinite space is not a boundless space (for this reason the first text is not about space but time) but a space restricted and yet capable of containing all points in the universe, capable of expanding itself, successively, just like language.

The first conception of the infinite, which is Aristotle’s, or that of common sense, is that what is infinite takes an infinite time to be travelled. But there are other ways of designing the infinite inside a book. And this manner is not exclusively the cyclic book that never ends. Here Borges describes two: two infinities constituted out of space and time. Borges shows us that if space and time are the minimal conditions of all possible experience, a multiple and infinite space-time assures us

the certainty of the infinity of experience; that is, of an infinite number of possible stories to be told.

Literature, just like any possible experience, has its source in a temporal series and in a particular space; that is, it is sufficient that two people occupy determined spaces or determined temporal series for a story to take place. The question is how poetry can present its own infinitude through a *mise en forme* of space and time. So, the question of elaborating a presentation of the infinite concerns what configuration of space-time is capable of presenting its own infinitude. What would the configuration of a poem be, such that it could demonstrate the infinite nature of space-time and the endless possibilities of literature? From Borges, we can conclude that to demonstrate the inexhaustible infinity of literature, the poem must provide the following: the presentation of a potentially infinite series of convergent, divergent, or parallel times that intersect or are unaware of one another; and the presentation, in a restricted space, of a multiplicity of infinite spaces, as if we could observe the infinite space of the Cosmos from all points of the Universe.

A Form in the Image of a Starlit Sky

In the preface to his poem, Mallarmé lists its innovations: the spatialization of reading, the “prismatic subdivisions of the Idea”, the double page, and the designs created by its typography. These are the elements that will radically transform the format of the Book: “without presuming upon the future that will emerge from this — nothing or perhaps what merely verges on art — let us openly acknowledge the attempt participates, in a way that could not be foreseen, in a number of pursuits that are dear to our time: free verse and the prose poem”.¹⁶ The phrase “in a way that could not be foreseen” sufficiently indicates that the poem is as innovative as the prose poem and free verse but that it cannot be confused with either of them.¹⁷

It begins with a transformation of the space of the page, causing the breakup of verse. This highly visual design of the poem is referred to as the “prismatic subdivisions of the Idea”; it replaces verse with the configuration of this new form.

The paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, excepting the succession of others; and, as it is not a question, as it usually is, of regular sound patterns or verses but rather of prismatic subdivisions of the Idea.¹⁸

The “prismatic subdivisions of the Idea” are organized into several motifs according to the print; the images slide into and out of the scene (the sheet of paper); they emerge from the main sentence and revolve around it as a constellation.

The motifs are divided into:

Primary motif: “A THROW OF DICE/WILL NEVER/ABOLISH/CHANCE”;

First secondary motif : EVEN WHEN LAUNCHED IN ETERNAL/CIRCUMSTANCES/FROM THE DEPTHS OF A SHIPWRECK (P. 3) / “THOUGH IT BE” (P. 4)/ “THE MASTER” (P. 5)/ “WERE IT TO EXIST/WERE IT TO BEGIN AND WERE IT TO CEASE/WERE IT TO BE NUMBERED/WERE TO ILLUMINE” (P. 10)/ “NOTHING/WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE/BUT THE PLACE” (P. 11) “EXCEPT/PERHAPS/A CONSTELLATION” (P. 12).

Second secondary motif : “AS IF” (P. 7) “IT WAS THE NUMBER/IT WOULD (P. 10)

Adjacent motif (P. 7) : “AS IF/AS IF”, which has several ramifications.

The two secondary motifs have in turn their own adjacent motifs. The fourth and fifth double page develop a hypothesis introduced by the term “SOIT” [*THOUGH IT BE*], “that/the Abyss [...]”. The 6th, 7th and 8th pages develop a prismatic subdivision of the first secondary motif, describing the hesitancy of the master. The 11th page develops another prismatic subdivision of the first motif, NOTHING/WILL HAVE TAKEN PLACE/BUT THE PLACE: “of the memorable crisis [...]”. The 12th page develops a final prismatic subdivision of the first secondary motif “A CONSTELLATION”: “on high/PERHAPS [...]”.

The second secondary motif has its adjacent motif, or its development, on the 10th page: “Born of the stars [...] / worse / no / more nor less / but as much indifferently”.

The secondary motifs bend the main motif. Then they divide and unfold in turn. Adjacent motifs develop and bend the secondary motifs. Thus Mallarmé creates several temporal and spatial layers. The typography of the letters perfectly illustrates this division; the poem develops from larger letters towards smaller ones. The smaller letters occupy the middle of the poem, and thus are the deepest layer of the text, the fold or centre around which the poem-constellation revolves.

Each letter, with its special typography, is the distinct twinkle of words-stars. Each letter marks a distinct spatio-temporal series. The poem is then crossed by several layers, textures and intensities. Each typeface marks both a temporal and a spatial series (Mallarmé distinguishes between different phrases that occupy spaces determined within the development of the poem); one texture, as it folds and unfolds or divides the motifs; an intensity (a tone, marked by the size of the letters); and a “brightness” (a “flicker” marked by normal letters in bold or italic characters), indicating the distinct importance of motifs.

These divisions provide a depth, both *temporal* and *spatial*. They realize a temporal and spatial distension and contraction. First, the division of the motifs distend time, as the double page enlarges the space of the page. Then, in one single page, several times that were spread across the pages are then mixed, juxtaposed, and cross themselves. The main motif forms a sentence, its reading has a time, but this sentence is cut and crossed by many other motifs throughout the poem. And this operation is repeated with regards to the secondary and adjacent motifs. It is as if each motif corresponds to a spatio-temporal series, like a verse, placed on a straight

line. But from the moment the motifs spatialize and mix, the “prismatic subdivisions of the Idea” contract to fit into a smaller space, presenting them in a swoop on a single page. Thus each page (with the exception of the episode of the “solitary distraught feather” where letters are smaller, indicating the “depth” or deepest layer of the poem) is crossed by multiple time series.

There is therefore a first movement of development of motifs through division. Motifs are unfolded and elongated in several phases. There are multiple temporal series that nevertheless do not converge but diverge since secondary and adjacent motifs contradict the assertion of the title phrase, which affirms that a throw of dice will never abolish chance, while the motifs speculate on this possibility. Thus at the very moment these multiple sets, these temporal series, mix on the same page they converge producing distinct effects; this convergence contracts space-time, presenting it as divided and multiplied on the same page in a confined space. By dividing the poem into motifs, Mallarmé created multiple configurations of space-time. Time and space are divided before being prolonged or distended along the pages. On the one hand, the divisions of the motifs develop or distend time, like a camera whose frame-rate has been slowed. On the other hand, these motifs are mixed, as if the time which had been dilated had contracted again. Each turned page reproduces and resumes the same movement, as if each were the performance of the whole poem, of a poem that had turned itself around itself like a whirlpool. Through the divisions of the motifs juxtaposed on the same page, on several occasions, Mallarmé makes the poem the act of extending and simplifying the world through these multiple or rare space-time configurations.

In ‘The Book as Spiritual Instrument’, Mallarmé suggests that the role of the poet is precisely to transform literature in its objective form, the book: “The folds will perpetuate a mark, intact, inviting one to open or close the page, according to the master”.¹⁹ Knowing that the poem tells the story of the sinking master who wants to vanquish chance, the question would be whether on the formal or visual level, the motifs are also ordered so as to vanquish chance. If in narrative terms chance arises from its own negation, or from the impossibility of its being denied, the poem visually performs the condition that makes possible the appearance of chance, from the unique number, which in fact is not *a* number because it is infinite. On the narrative level, this condition is fulfilled when the siren, this fictional being, dissolves the bounds of the infinite and opens the space of the poem to the appearance of the number. In formal visual terms, chance arises when literature develops and creates a space without frontiers. These operations are accomplished through the spacing of the page and the double page. In the passage from one side to another of the double page, the “siren episode” illustrates this movement of expansion of poetic space and the multiplication of time:

<i>in its Siren twist</i>	<i>long enough</i>
	<i>to slap</i>
<i>with impatient terminal scales</i>	<i>forked</i>

Chance is conquered by the master who orders the folding and unfolding of the motifs for each page, but chance is present here too insofar as it establishes the relationship between the series and allows the combination and the meeting of the motifs. To the extent that the presentation of the poem is that of its infinite power, chance does nothing but multiply this power, since any act — any event in literature — takes place thanks to a basic condition: the qualitative power of space-time. In this passage, time forks, just as it does in Borges' text, in a movement that can be compared to the twist of a siren or a page being turned. And time bifurcates *through* the double page. It is for this reason that in literature “nothing / will have taken place / but the place”. Literature is the place where no chance is vain and all chance is chance defeated because it necessarily leaves open a space for the other possibilities of literature — and thereby expands the real. All chance is a hypothesis that, similarly to those in the poem, makes a story.

In these circumstances, chance is no longer the other of reason, nor is it what prevents and blocks the poetic faculty. Chance is therefore the engine of another logic — a poetic, creative logic — that transforms the poem into a constellation, an image of the Universe. The division of the motifs will create the conditions for chance to be the engine of a concept that is “in formation” and presented in its limitless power. The count or the thought moves in such a manner that it is “keeping vigil / doubting / rolling / shining and meditating”. Its form is that of the poem, oscillating, rotating or even doubting, and achieving a “count”, a constellation that is the infinite series of its own possibilities, its multiple subsequent envelopings: the folding and unfolding of chance.

The Ballet of Words-Stars: To fold and to unfold

In Mallarmé's reflections on The Book in *Divagations*, as well as in the manuscript for The Book, we find several clues that will guide us in the analysis of the fold. The fold allows the book to establish relations and it is from these relations that the book can compose an Idea, which completely escapes the universal story. Folding — which is more than a contribution to the creation of the poem's rhythm and more than what distinguishes the book from the newspaper (where each column presents a distinct fact), but instead a “religious index” — contains a secret: “Folding is, in relation to the large printed sheet, a sign, quasi-religious: that does not strike so much as its compression, in thickness, offering the miniscule tomb, surely, of the soul”.²⁰

We can then identify “religious index” or the sacred with what makes the book unique, namely the ability to lock up, unfold and develop an Idea. The fold joins a recurrent metaphor in the poetry of Mallarmé, that of the “hymen”, the betrothal mentioned in *Un coup de dés*, the union between the words and the present concept in *Épouser la notion*. In the book, the fold is the “religious” index of a union between

the world and the Book; a union that sees the very possibility of the transposition of the world *to* the Book.

The fold works like a veil, each turned page breaks with inviolability, with the virginity of the book, as black ink breaks with the whiteness of the page. Each turned page is an unveiling, a revelation, a discovery, an event. It is by reflecting on the fold that Mallarmé describes how literature could renew itself by transforming the format of the book:

“Can there be any end to this; and in a moment I am going to satisfy the curiosity in every detail, for the work, preferably on its own, should provide an example. Why — a burst of grandeur, of thought or of emotion, eminent, a sentence pursued in large letters, one line per page, in a graduated arrangement — wouldn’t this keep the reader in suspense throughout the whole book, appealing to this power of enthusiasm — all around, minor clusters, of secondary importance, explicatory or derivative — an array of flourishes”.²¹

This description, so close to how the motifs of *Un coup de dés* function, indicates that Mallarmé thought the poem to be like a book. This therefore justifies our hypothesis that the reflections on the book, as well as the manuscripts of *The Book*, can also be reflections on the *mise en page* and format of the poem.

The manuscripts of *The Book* suggest that the assembly and disassembly of the pages, the planning or the constitution of a book, correspond to an operation that can be identified as a dramatization of the poem: the passage from the idea into its realization and practical presentation, a theatre; or, as in *Igitur*, the passage from the Idea to the act — existence. Writing is therefore turning an Idea into a book, operating concretely on the format of the book or from the format of the book itself — transforming it and thus changing literature. Mallarmé speculates on the formal opportunities offered to literature by the height, thickness, and width of the book, but also on its “position” — standing or lying down — on a table or other support:

the ratio is in the thickness
 the height indicates the number of lines 18
 width — their fragmented length 12
 the thickness of the jet of their addition — be from 1 to 2/3
 or if the height is reduced to 12, everything happens between the width
 and the thickness and the deduction of the number of lines indicates the
 number of volumes in which one is resolved
 top edge gilt
 where 5 (or 6?) superposed lying volumes = the height of one standing —
 and the ensemble of all volumes standing = the block produced by the same
 number of vol. lying. the block.²²

Mallarmé multiplies possibilities or assumptions of motifs and unfolds them in their development. This development is not historical but rather intellectual or hypothetical; therefore it relates to possibilities as such. That is, the format of the book

allows the expansion of formal possibilities, of future possibilities, possibilities of transformation and the renewal of literature.

Thus the title phrase or the predominant motif and the secondary motif develop; in turn, the leading motif and adjacent motifs develop the secondary motifs. A spiral is created, folding and unfolding itself throughout the reading. The size of the letters and typography contribute to determining the operative movement of expanding space-time. Each motif is superimposed on another, thereby creating various temporal series and diverse spaces that generate several temporal and spatial layers. It multiplies the space-time because the motifs are folded and unfolded according to the format of the book. Multiple layers are developed and unfolded throughout the reading; the movement that turns the pages is therefore the act of unfolding the motifs, which extends and distends time and space. From another place a turned page folds or refolds motifs one on each other, creating a block, the book, which is the folding of these motifs, or a temporal and spatial contraction. The book would thus contain multiple temporal and spatial series. Its own format is the “quasi religious” index of this possibility: the ability of multiplying, encrypting and making space-time series infinite at once, and at the same time contains them all, folded or virtual, in a limited space, in the space of a single book.

The book, like a fan, folds and unfolds. Thus two space-time axes are created simply by the format of the book, in its width and depth, its verticality and horizontality. The motifs are therefore the reflection of a book’s format and its disposition. If a book by itself already offers two different configurations of space-time, then the motif’s division multiplies these possibilities. It allows the division of the motifs to expand space-time as it contracts: the presentation on the page of a variety of motifs belong to distinct time series. The double page is, then, the distention of space-time:

and the book is to this reader pure block — transparent — he reads in,
guesses it — knows in advance — showing where it is — what should be —
or end
connection — relations.²³

And again,

the back of one — that becomes front
— The front of the other — that becomes back.²⁴

In the same way that the poem is like a spiral that unfolds, Mallarmé conceived that the pages should “turn” in a manner that results in recto becoming verso and verso, recto. The vision of the whole poem would permit the vision of multiple temporal and spatial layers, replicating once again the operation of the motifs, which in turn reproduce the folding operation. Reading, by activating this mechanism, breaks with the inviolability of the book, which for Mallarmé means taking possession of this sacred object in order to transform literature. But this transformation is

still based on that of the book. Literature is therefore literally based on the concrete elements that constitute a book, its object, product or support. And the book, since it condenses all the power of combinations of space-time, englobes the world. Thus if any book were to enclose multitudes of “combinations of the Infinite with respect to the Absolute”, there would no limits capable of determining precisely what literature is capable of.

Conclusion

Un coup de dés is a constellation, “a total count in formation”. It is created from multiple temporal series that the poem crosses with other series in a space unfolded to allow precisely the most possible encounters between times. Expanding the space of encounters between multiple temporal series, the poem increases the possibilities of literature itself (this does not mean, however, that it multiplies the possibilities of reading or meanings because everything happens at a formal level). Chance will no longer be what prevents poetry from being; rather, it will be the single source of its renewal. Transforming chance into a new logic – a creation of opportunities and a source of novelty – is possible only because literature creates the conditions under which chance can make a story. These eternal conditions concern space and time, the minimal conditions of all experience, sensible givens that make all stories possible – in a book as well as in reality. Space and time are no longer units of measure. They no longer quantify movement (which is no longer a simple spatial displacement). They are the source and condition of any event. The poem may, as an aleph, contract and present in a limited space an infinite number of possible worlds because it plays on the conditions of these worlds. In these circumstances, each meeting is an event, an event triggered by chance. It is always chance that makes a temporal series cross another temporal series. It is always chance that performs its own Idea and that turns this Idea into a story by allowing it to unfold.

By altering the *mise en page* of the poem, with various temporal series, expanded and contracted across a double page, Mallarmé touched on a fundamental point that concerns the conditions of all possible experience: namely, space and time. All story and all narrative, each event or different fact, requires a determined space-time configuration as its minimal condition. If a specific time and a precise space provide the conditions for any fact, a potentially infinite space-time provides the conditions for the eternal return of movement or of change. It contains, in a limited space, that is, the pages of the poem, *all* the possibilities of stories, *all* possible forms of life, *all* the points of Universe. The poem is the reflection of the starlit sky: the “Orphic explanation of Earth”. Space-time is presented in its pure state, in its state of pure power. Any book is, in this way, a block of space-time, a summary of the endless possibilities of literature. Everything exists to produce a book, because the Book, while limited, can contain multiple worlds. Under these circumstances, where space-time relations are multiple, chance is an infinite source of novelty – and thus of stories. The Mallarméan siren neither deceives, nor seduces, nor causes

perdition. For some its act is absurd, pure madness, and yet, despite the sobriety and the seriousness of the realists, the siren, this fictional being is capable of making evaporate into mist any rock “which imposed / a limit on infinity”.

Notes

1. Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXème siècle. Mallarmé et Lautréamont* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974).
2. Jacques Scherer, *Grammaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Broché, 1977).
3. Henri Meschonnic, *Ecrits sur le livre, 'Mallarmé au-delà du 'silence', Introduction à Mallarmé* (Paris: Editions de l'éclat, 1986).
4. Michel Murat, *Le Coup de dés de Mallarmé. Un recommencement de la poésie* (Paris: Belin, 2005).
5. Robert Greer Cohn, *L'Œuvre de Mallarmé. Un coup de dés* (Paris: Les Lettres, 1951).
6. Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren. A Decipherment of Mallarmé's Un Coup de dés* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014).
7. For an exposition of the critical fortunes of the poem see, Thierry Roger, *L'Archive du Coup de dés* (Paris: Garnier, 2010).
8. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Igitur* in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, Mary-Ann Crows (ed.) (New York: New Directions, 1982), p. 92.
9. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Music and Letters' in *Divagations*, Translated by Barbara Johnston (Cambridge/Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 187 (*modified trans.*).
10. Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 67.
11. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, translated by Henry Weinfield (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 122.
12. Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions, op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.
17. This hypothesis of reading can be reinforced by the affirmation to be found in the unpublished draft of the preface. In this excerpt the poet affirms that the *poem* is “a poem conceived and then executed according to habits in fact completely different from others which defy our tradition” [*conçu puis exécuté selon des habitudes en vérité tout à fait différentes d'autres qui défraient notre tradition*].
18. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
19. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations, op. cit.*, p. 227.

20. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

22. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes, I*, Bertrand Marchal (ed.) (Paris: Gallimard 1998), p. 559.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 576.