'A Fluke? [N]ever!': Reading Chris Edwards[1]

KATE FAGAN

University of Western Sydney

> yet
> something in my vicinity
> tells me
> an awful lot of reading
> goes unnoticed
>
> does it matter

– Chris Edwards, ḥm *(2011)*[2]

> When I was a small child there was a box in the attic containing neatly trimmed scraps of material that had once belonged to dresses, aprons, blouses, dish towels, and which were apparently intended for a quilt that never got made. I was fascinated by them and used to pore over them with the zeal of an Egyptologist. There was a language there.
>
> *– John Ashbery (1970)*[3]

For Australian poetry the twentieth century arguably began in September 1897 when Christopher Brennan asked his close friend and sparring partner Dowell O'Reilly to visit him at the Public Library of New South Wales. Brennan had been ensconced there for two years working on a catalogue of the Mitchell collection. He invited O'Reilly to collect and peruse 'a big MS' that he described as 'an exposition in English of the new Mallarméan poetical-musical form' (Brennan 5), and that he had composed in part-retaliation to criticisms of his poetry by O'Reilly and others as 'obscure' (Brennan 27) and lacking regard for its reading public. Eighty four years would pass before Brennan's 'Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope' found publication, during which time—most of the twentieth century—it lay sequestered in the Chaplin Collection of the National Library of Australia.

While it may seem a facile link, it delights me to think of *Musicopoematographoscope* finding repose in an archive whose name recalls an undisputed comic genius of modern film in its silent era. Silence and comedy are as quintessential to Brennan's readings of Stéphane Mallarmé as they are to The Tramp, whose fleeting arrival into voice by way of an entirely collaged, improvised song in *Modern Times* (1936) presaged the absolute sound horizon of post-talkies cinema. 'Holding / in silence' lucid gaze / the viewless code / clear-written or conceal'd', writes Brennan in *Musicopoematographoscope* (14), in a graphic echo of the formal antecedent for his new manuscript—Mallarmé's 'Un Coup De Dés': 'AS IF / A simple / in the silence / / into an approaching hovers / / / innuendo / / encoiled with irony / or / the mystery / hurled' (Mallarmé 64-65). Brennan identified with Mallarmé as a serious intellectual whose writings were undertaken literally *avant-garde*, in advance of public watch on the limits of ontology and meaning. In the same year that Brennan's *Musicopoematographoscope* finally appeared in print, Jacques Derrida published in *Dissemination* an extensive reading of Mallarmé's short prose work 'Mimique'. Reading

through Mallarmé's mime, the silent *comedie noir* icon of French theatre, Derrida argues for a diacritical philosophy of language in which the 'blanks' of a page give meaning to the letters inscribed upon it, since they delineate the borders of every sign and confer 'a certain inexhaustibility' (Derrida, *Dissemination* 250) or excess of potential energy to the glyphs and morphemes of written language. In 'The Pit and the Pyramid', Derrida describes these silences a different way:

> The alphabetic system, such as we practice it, is not and cannot be purely phonetic. Writing can never be totally inhabited by the voice. The non-phonetic functions, if you will, the operative silences of alphabetic writing, are not factual accidents or waste products one might hope to reduce (punctuation, figure, spacing). (*Margins* 95-96)

How can these 'operative silences' or sites of 'non-sense' (Derrida, *Dissemination* 252) be encoded upon a page—irreducibly other than writing and yet critical to its meaning? Or in Mallarmé's words, how to navigate the 'Abyss' that 'fuses with infinity', the unquiet 'mystery' (Mallarmé 58, 75 and 65) differentiating written from spoken language, symbol from thing? Derrida offers a series of formal devices in which the potential energies of alphabets might be seen in moments of kinetic and diacritical transformation: *punctuation, figure, spacing*. Here are a poet's tools of observation and fathoming. Here are points of inscription where language and philosophy are at work in a dual mime, Chaplin and Pierrot. Language in the hands of the mime ceases to bear a transparent relation to a world of things and becomes slippery, manifold and visual, something Christopher Brennan seems to have understood: 'Holding / in silence' lucid gaze / the viewless code / clear-written or conceal'd' (Brennan 14). Punctuation, figure, spacing.[4]

To Derrida's list we could add a string of wordplays including pun, malapropism, mistranslation, metonymy and fluke. One thing becoming another, many ideas embodied in one word. Or as Mallarmé writes, 'innuendo / / encoiled with irony' (Mallarmé 65). These are the base metals for an alchemy of comedy. The best collagists and parodists mine the spaces between materials—words, ideas, things, diacritics – in order to render them anew, estranged and humming with kinesis. Here I recall a junior John Ashbery fossicking through 'scraps of material' in an attic box, the proto-collagist at work seventy odd years before his first exhibition of visual collages was held in New York City in 2008: 'I was fascinated by them and used to pore over them with the zeal of an Egyptologist. There was a language there.' (Ashbery cited in Cotter n.pag.) Stéphane Mallarmé gestures towards the impossibility of erasing the 'non-phonetic' excesses of language (Derrida, *Margins* 96) – what cannot be inhabited by voice or human agency—in the riddling title of his *livre composé* 'Un Coup De Dés': *a throw of the dice will never abolish chance*.

Over a century after Christopher Brennan generated his own 'algebraic-symbolico-riddle' to celebrate the formal innovations of 'Un Coup De Dés', the Australian poet Chris Edwards published a new ventriloquy of Mallarmé entitled *A Fluke: A Mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Un Coup De Dés...' With Parallel French Pretext* (2005). Edwards' title bristles with double entendre. What is a 'mistranslation' of a 'pretext', a text that already bears lying resemblance to an ancestor? And why should the results of such a *coup* be called a fluke? With Mallarmé's shipwreck on every horizon and ghosted perhaps by the guiding tail of Moby Dick (that great signifier for hapless cultural enterprises), *A Fluke* sets sail under the compass of Georges Bataille's 'The Solar Anus', a typically scatological work that effects a turn away from the transcendent-speak of symbolism and towards a theory of base

materialism as an abject and absolute indice of earthly matter (Bataille 5-9). Edwards' epigraph from Bataille reads: 'It is clear that the world is purely parodic—in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form.' (Edwards, *Fluke* n.pag.) In an exemplary queering of his own text, Edwards performs a drama of progenitorship by robbing *A Fluke* of stable lines ('pure parody') while reinstating its 'sameness' as a fair copy. Edwards' mistranslation of Mallarmé's 'Préface' is effected via absurdist homophonic and homological puns and improvised associations sprinkled with occasional literal translations. It refers to 'the periodical dancing-about of the valiant mime' (enter Chaplin) and offers this gem:

> For today, without presumption, I say to you: *run*—past the queue along the avenue, past the assorted dissertations on the ruined preciosities of art, past the results of this reconnaissance (same old tentative and impassive particularisations, vacuous and impromptu) in pursuit of the cherished, temporary Note, extemporising *vers libre* and the prose poem. (Edwards, *Fluke* n.pag.)

> The 'equivalent' lines from Mallarmé rendered into English read: 'Today, or at least without presuming anything about the future *which will follow from this, nothing or almost an art*, let us openly acknowledge that the attempt shares, unexpectedly, in the particular pursuits dear to our time, free verse and the prose poem.' (Mallarmé 54) After 'translation' by Edwards, the line 'qui sortira d'ici, rien ou presque un art' (italicised in the lines above) yields the brilliant rhyming parody 'assorted dissertations on the ruined preciosities of art', which answers Mallarmé's question of his own poem's new 'art'—what will follow from this in future? —with a wicked answer that places Edwards' reading of Mallarmé at one remove from more mundane efforts: 'assorted dissertations on … ruined preciosities'. *A Fluke* appropriates Mallarmé's finishing phrase 'coup de dés' to conclude: 'I guess you'll want the *code word eh*?' (Edwards, *Fluke* n.pag.) When you set about reading Edwards, you'd best go in with your wits sharpened and your ears open. This is poetry of precision and meticulous care for the immersive act of reading, as Edwards suggests in the poem hm : 'an awful lot of reading / goes unnoticed / / does it matter' (Edwards, *People* 176). Every linguistic meme *matters* and *means* in a Chris Edwards poem, while being liberated from the constraints of singularity. This is the technique of the satirist, the knowing fool who can deliver a great punch-line (*un coup*) regardless of whether the audience knows the context or code for the folly.

Christopher Brennan also makes use of bilingual, homophonic punning in his homage to Mallarmé. The frontispiece to *Musicopoematographoscope* reads:

> direct from Paree
> Invented
> by the well-known
> Hieratico-byzantaegyptic-Obscurantist
> MALAHRRMAY (9)

Brennan's crude phonetic versions of Australian pronunciations (Paree, Malahrrmay) effect a kind of satirical distance from anxious Anglo-colonial readings that might relegate Australian literature to a second rung after transplanted European models. John Hawke has argued

persuasively that in the late nineteenth century 'there was a stronger interest in Mallarmé's poetic philosophy in Australia than virtually anywhere else in the English-speaking world' (Hawke 6). Brennan's surrealistic description of Mallarmé as a 'Hieratico-byzantaegyptic-Obscurantist' hints at a specialised reading of Mallarmé's centrality to the emergence of poetic Symbolism, while its maverick flamboyance—or perhaps its feral nature—suggests a deeper unease about the legitimacy of antipodean takes on cultural internationalism. There is a finely nuanced critique to unwrap here about late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial Australia on the cusp of modernism, and the larger-than-life or monstrous artistic objects generated over subsequent decades by that tension—including for example the poems of Ern Malley, and more perversely, the Jindyworobak Movement.[5] For now, I simply want to propose that 'innovation' in non-Indigenous Australian poetry is marked historically by strong international identifications and sporadic refusals, and to observe that the twentieth century manifestations of these dialogues are strikingly evident in the avant-garde (or post^n-avant-garde) alignments of Chris Edwards' poetry.

The hieratic writing to which Christopher Brennan refers is a parallel alphabet that evolved alongside Egyptian hieroglyphics. It was a kind of cursive 'crib' or shorthand that enabled writing without the protracted labour of hieroglyphic carving. Following Edwards, we might understand hieratics as a (mis)translation of symbol into grapheme for which hieroglyphics are the pretext. By tagging Mallarmé and implicitly his own manuscript as 'Hieratico-byzantaegyptic', Brennan enters stage right alongside some of the key poets associated with Symbolism including W. B. Yeats ('Sailing to Byzantium') and T. S. Eliot ('The Waste Land'), from whom we can subtend a trajectory to the American modernisms of H. D. ('Helen in Egypt') and Ezra Pound.[6] In his rather hectoring *ABC of Reading*, Pound proposes an 'ideogrammic method' for reading poetry that claims Chinese characters as its exemplar (Pound 20-27). Pound differentiates between Egyptian pictorial alphabets that include phonetic components, i.e., graphics that represent part of a word rather than the word as such,[7] and Chinese ideograms that are 'the picture of a thing … in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things' (21). An ideogrammic scheme of reading is grounded in comparison and metonymy – or put differently, the gauging of one word (or work) at every juncture by its relationship to others. Perhaps the calligrapher is a kind of collagist who assembles complex figures from the attributes of base characters; Pound's example, borrowed from the French modernist sculptor Gaudier-Brzeska, is the ideogram for 'East', which is a compilation of the characters for sun, tree and person—a person observing a tree with the sun behind it, meaning sunrise, meaning the Eastern horizon (21). There are dangers associated with dipping into Pound in such superficial fashion, including likely replication of Orientalisms that make a fetish of 'exotic' alphabets and seek numinous traits in ancient languages, positioning them as somehow closer to an archetypal sublime of human ontology. These of course are key tropes of the symbolic modernisms advanced by Mallarmé, Yeats, Eliot, Brennan and to a different extent, Pound—although Brennan's antipodean situation partially inverts the core-periphery dynamics we might associate with Edward Said's foundational theory of Orientalism, understood 'as an episteme or discursive grammar [that] produces diverse constructions of otherness' (Fagan and Minter n.pag.).

Charles Olson's prototypical post-modern concept of 'logography' evolved from Pound's 'ideogrammic method' while seeming to recognise its constraints. Olson studied the pictographs of Mesoamerican Mayan and Aztec cultures alongside Sumerian cuneiform in formulating his theories of writing and compositional natality:

> Word writing. Instead of 'idea writing' (ideogram etc). That would seem to be

it.

> Leading to phonetization – as though we didn't know identity of sounds, meaning two things, any longer did mean. The proposition wld seem to be that we don't.

> About the only way the character of the pun—and rhyme (which has struck me now for some time as a most interesting crazy business of writing right now)— makes sense. (Olson, *Additional Prose* 20)

I read this passage with excitement for what it might illuminate in the poetry of Chris Edwards, whose volume of new and selected poems entitled *People of Earth* (2011) can be seen as a twenty-first century form of 'word writing' and a grand parody of countless twentieth century avant-garde and orientalising quests for a kind of symbolic Ur-language. Republished in the volume, 'A Fluke' shows punning and phonetic metonymy to be critical to Edwards' style, and those techniques are bolstered throughout *People of Earth* by successive experiments in the poetics of sampling, collage, quotation and finally,

hieroglyphics. The concluding poem in Edwards' collection is entitled *ḥm*, a double title built from the Egyptian compound hieroglyphic denoting 'incarnation' and its phonetic translation, *.hm* (181). Over a dozen Egyptian hieroglyphs are cut and pasted into the book's denouement, whose title might be pronounced 'hem hem' or 'hum hum' if we vocalise both the pictographic and written components in concert with Edwards' 'glyph dictionary' which is printed after the poem (180-181). Edwards explains that the club glyph in *.hm* 'does all the phonetic work' while the falcon 'mutely indicates divinity' (181). So the hieroglyphic for 'incarnation' includes an alphabetical silence—an element with no phonetic equivalent, or something that *means without sounding*. This perhaps could stand as a base definition of the image. It suggests a form of writing that recalls Derrida's 'operative silences' (*Margins* 96), and his reading of Mallarméan silence as a poetic record of a primary disjunction between *langue* and *parole*, or between the written and vocalised.[8] Mallarmé characterised 'Un Coup de Dés' as writing under the 'odd' influence of 'Music … heard at a concert'. The poem was a score whose musical form approximated Mallarmé's preferred means of dealing with 'subjects of pure and complex imagination or intellect' (Mallarmé 54). Pound's advice in *ABC of Reading* echoes Mallarmé: 'Poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music' (61).

Edwards' poem *ḥm* follows *A Fluke* in adapting formal elements of 'Un Coup de Dés' and doubles the stakes by using words that have referents but no spoken corollaries— unspeakable signs, or conceivably musical notations, that Edwards subjects to a dazzling array of puns. Even the title encodes a pun or two: 'hem hem' calls to mind a preemptive clearing of the throat before something is spoken aloud while 'hum hum' makes the poem into a kind of nonsense song. A more serious nod is being given to the *za-um* or 'beyond sense' poetry of the Russian futurists, whose incantatory, syllabic poems owe much to Mallarmé's compositional experiments. The joke is continued in the title of the subsection of

People of Earth in which *ḥm* appears: 'Aha!' (Edwards, *People* 163). This is the mock exclamation of a sleuth crossing the Rubicon or a hacker breaking the code. The fact that Edwards appends it to the most visually demanding and potentially opaque poems in his collection should signal a warning about simple solutions to textual enigmas. Did the Rosetta Stone *really* unveil the secret of Egyptian cuneiform? Edwards' humour works to parry and

satirise any attempt to misread the hieroglyphics in 𓇌𓅓 *ḥm* as displaying a neo-Platonic or neo-Symbolist interest in divine essences embodied in fragments of matter and accessed via acts of writing. Edwards may be an avid materialist but his ethic is suspicious of 'truth' claims for any writing system, even while his aesthetic is enamoured of graphic codes and their very human design. Where Mallarmé, Yeats and Pound appear somewhat enthralled by the dream of a shamanistic super-Poet clutching an Orphic lyre in one arm and a few ancient tablets in the other, Edwards on the surface is having none of it, as the split sonnets of 'Some notes (or not) on Orpheus' tell us:

> Eric clunks by, in a Daschund this time. Lachrymose
> and jabbering over the lost works of Gertrude Einstein,
> Orpheus squats in his den. Since morphing into damned
> bones again, he thinks the swollen moonlight might
> have other names. Like Norman? (Edwards, *People* 155)

Edwards' use of hieroglyphics makes no claim for them as windows onto cultural alterity, omens of recovered otherness or traces of language in divine unification before its 'fall' into an estranged binary, written and spoken. Rather, Edwards respectfully samples the signs as a collagist whose attic box is full of scraps of human matter. The glyphs are a *techne* of *logos*, a sign of companionship between *graphic* and *grapheme*, and an economical design system with which Edwards has considerable empathy as a poet and graphic designer.[9] His explorations of imagistic phonetics in 𓇌𓅓 *ḥm* suggest not a grammar but a mode of visual sonority, a music of form.

In my imperfect readings of Derrida as he reads Mallarmé, this is what I understand to be Derrida's point about the formal encoding of 'silences' within Mallarmé's poetry – not a divine music, but something irreducibly and always-already human. It seems John Cage knew this. Recall Chris Edwards' title, *People of Earth*, which parodies utopian projections of futuristic, other-worldly arrival while being entirely earthbound. Charles Olson read Mayan hieroglyphics as traces of 'the most elementary human acts' and claimed them as forerunners to his poetics of 'Objectism' (Olson, *Collected Prose* 247 and 159). By his reckoning, even while they expressed a human universe, hieroglyphics allowed the energies of material, worldly *things* to resonate without dominating and limiting their *thingness* via projections of human ego: 'the signs were so clearly and densely chosen that, cut in stone, they retain the power of the objects of which they were the images' (Olson, *Collected Prose* 159). Olson saw this as 'verse … on its very face' (159). I think Chris Edwards' poems have considerable sympathy for this view, while swerving astutely to avoid the pitfalls of claiming in one breath to de-centre the human ego and in the next, giving voice to a new Leviathan entitled *Maximus* (Norman will do nicely, thanks). Maybe this is too cheeky. But if we are to take seriously Edwards' skill as a collagist who wields hieroglyphics as utensils made new in a linguistic landscape, then it is important to acknowledge the avant-garde trajectories that sing loudest within *People of Earth*—post-symbolist, post-futurist, language-smart, calligraphic, demystifying and unflinchingly material—while addressing how he updates those coordinates. The volume's opening sequence 'Utensils in a landscape' lists among its sources the texts of William Burroughs, John Ashbery, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes alongside biblical verses, *The Book of Common Prayer*, an array of science fiction and again, Mallarmé's 'Un Coup De Dés' (Edwards, *People* 182-183). Edwards' intention to trawl through histories of human *technologia* is clear in the teasingly titled first poem, '(…)':

>   I could set up my typewriter, unpredictable
>   spontaneous factor with a pair of scissors,
>   headset wired to the sequence of events
>   keep happening.
>   Meanwhile
>   might continue these festivities for
>   example we could b …
>   *'plunder? what gambit is that?'*
>   for the whirled four
>   twenty-first century
>   loomed. (11)

Poiesis itself is a key subject for this poem, legible in its many ellipses, plunders and cuts. Inseparable from Edwards' gambit, however, are phenomenal or worldly things and their appearance in language: 'the sequence of events' that 'keep[s] happening'. Edwards is asking how these worldly relationships might be scrutinised, repeated and performed anew in the twenty-first century.

Before giving a fleeting appraisal of Edwards' piecework methods, I want to revisit his cut-ups of Mallarmé, if we can describe them that way. Both Edwards and Derrida recuperate Mallarmé as an absolute materialist. Where Brennan read Mallarmé as a mystic who believed in a poet's ability to reunify the 'complete, perfect, eternal self' through worldly acts of imagination (Brennan cited in Hawke 25), Edwards reads him as a secular scrap-booker, a joker with a pair of dice 'approaching / turbulence hilarity and horror', hanging 'vertiginous / over the gap / sans jonquils' and 'giv[ing] it the finger' (Edwards, *Fluke* n.pag.). Here again is critic John Hawke:

> Mallarmé defines the poetic act in terms of alchemy and Orphism: the poet is an alchemist of language who seeks 'the orphic explanation of the earth'. The neoplatonic idea of multiplicity abiding in one can be read in Mallarmé's concept of the *livre compose*: 'all books contain the amalgamation of a certain number of age-old truths … there is only one book on earth, that is the law of the earth, the earth's true bible' (14).

In order to undercut the machismo of the Orphic story, Edwards repeatedly employs a kind of textual drag to deliver a camp rendition of 'multiplicity abiding in one'. He dresses up as Mallarmé, Orpheus, Isis (in full make-up) and Eurydice: 'Unfasten my chain, Madam, I'm going to heave / us damsels into a little Gluck ditty … What a futile Male / that Orpheus is' (Edwards, *People* 152 and 155). He also has a laugh at Plato's expense in *A Fluke* when he translates Mallarmé's 'folie // N'ABOLIRA' as 'fool // NOBLE LIAR' (Edwards, *Fluke* n.pag.). Plato's thesis of the noble lie was outlined in the *Republic* and concerns political untruths or allegories that are accepted as true for the sake of maintaining social cohesion (Plato 181-182). Here is Edwards' 'complete' mistranslation of Mallarmé's title:

> *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard*
> A Fluke? Never[!] Noble Liar, Bio-Hazard[10]

Seeking the verity of Mallarmé's riddle is a grave folly undertaken by outsiders and textual pirates, and a pursuit that threatens to undercut the magnificent myth of the *polis* when taken to extremes. Edwards' queer rewrite of Mallarmé poses the question: is this poem a fluke, a

merely random exercise? The answer of course is *never*. *A Fluke* is a scrupulous visual, linguistic and ontological collage, a noble jest that generates hazardous outcomes, or more explicitly, bio-hazards—disruptive versions of human subjectivity that are dangerously prankish (*le blague*) while effecting a serious ontological investigation. Origins themselves including divine sources are scrutinised via the 'noble lie' of Chris Edwards' improper readings. The resulting art object shakes up unified social and aesthetic orders based on orthodox heredities and proper names. When reprinting 'A Fluke' in *People of Earth*, Edwards added a question mark to his title page ('A Fluke?') to stress the guiding force of his inquiry. His noble liar is a fool, a mimic, a collagist and a philosopher.

With scissors in hand, Edwards goes hunting for Derrida's 'non-phonetic functions' and 'operative silences of alphabetic writing', those score-marks ('punctuation, figure, spacing') that are neither 'factual accident [nor] waste' (Derrida, *Margins* 95-96) but rather, endlessly renewable resources. An appendix to *People of Earth* (182-186) compiles hundreds of texts that are sources for Edwards' poems. They are a gentle invitation to detective work, but mostly, a museum of tools tended by a fastidious drafter. The collagist is a recycler and composter, and also a compositor—a filmic sculptor who tricks visual fragments into new entities. Edwards deftly plies his craft to produce poems that are grammatically seamless, and whose motion from scene to scene is subtle and kaleidoscopic. He rarely deploys the self conscious jump-cuts of some of his precursors, including quite a few poems written under the mantle of Language Poetry—which in turn composted the innovations and procedural experiments of the New York School, Oulipo, Russian and Italian futurisms, and concrete and conceptual art. Each of these twentieth century clusters is audible as a subsonic hum in *People of Earth*, with the wisecracking, art-savvy parodists of the New York School emitting the strongest radio signals. Following their lead, early Language poetry (especially that published in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine) sought to short-circuit the capital accrual of literary 'names' and objects by rejecting smooth-surface narrative logics, and by embracing chance procedures and limits such as those also mapped by the Oulipo group. In their more utopian manifestations, such formal choices were intended to radically upstage the controlling ego of a writer by requiring readers to participate in the act of inventing meanings for poems. While Edwards' poems certainly resist what Charles Bernstein calls 'the artifice of absorption' (Bernstein 9), they are perhaps more modest about a play between intention and chance, or between the design-control of an artist and techniques of formal randomness calculated to undermine that authority. In the early twenty-first century, it turns out the author is still in the building. Not only that, she or he has become a curator, gleaning from a trove of recyclables to build experiments in which aesthetic and ethical values can be tested anew.

Collage in poetry is thousands of years old; but to state the obvious, it is given new political force when repeated at different historical junctures and made to perform different work. Inter-web reading habitats have encouraged a surge in digital collaging techniques such as those in the past decade of FLARF and conceptual poetry.[11] They have also inflamed debates about originality, authorship, copyright and piracy—many of which seem driven by the profit margins of corporate giants who use as their stalking horses the cultural value of human imagination and artists' 'rights'. The long history of avant-garde tussles with such themes is worn lightly in *People of Earth* as though the book is stepping in low gravity. In 'The Book to Come', Jacques Derrida reads through Maurice Blanchot's interpretations of Mallarmé's 'Un Coup De Dés' to state that Mallarmé challenges the horizons of 'the book' by working simultaneously to gather and disperse its elements, rather than modelling an encyclopedic totality of form and matter (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 12-16). Derrida argues

that by anticipating 'the beginning of the question of the future' (*Paper Machine* 13), 'Un Coup De Dés' generates a kind of teleological impasse, or ever-becoming, in which future possibilities for newness are always restructurings of older forms and fragments: '[t]here is, there will therefore be, as always, the coexistence and structural survival of past models at the moment when genesis gives rise to new possibilities' (*Paper Machine* 16). Derrida is writing about the transfiguration of the book in a climate of electronic and virtual circulation and storage. But he could equally be describing the effects of the collaging and metamorphic logics that underwrite Chris Edwards' poetry, and the philosophical stakes of a poetics that simultaneously—or perhaps co-spatially—gathers as it disperses. In this short paper I can barely begin to address Edwards' incisive engagement with seismic changes in technologies of writing and reading, and their impact upon our relationship to worldly things. For now I will simply promise future mis-readings and give the last word to *People of Earth*. Edwards' poem ''©'' is an exemplary riff upon calibrations of word and thing, inscription and speech, ownership and creative commons, and a serious parody of the subjectivities that come and go as the matter of language is repeatedly sampled, re-pressurised, scrutinised and loved in an earthly laboratory:

> Albeit my god-given property rights
> extend no further than the offices of Lord Fogg,
> dispenser of paralysis gas, who owns everything I have to say
> the way Canada owns the muskrat, I'm nonetheless prone
> to purveying things, ideas you might call them if you'd
> care to be polite, without much fear of reclamation.
> Who'd want them? …
>
> Good riddance, I say to the winds that whip
> about me. And if you too should come stumbling forward,
> and if you too should come tumbling by through space,
> get ready, extinction is upon us. (Edwards, *People* 20-21)

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[1] 'A Fluke? [N]ever!' is cited from Chris Edwards' 'mistranslation' of 'Un Coup de Dés' by Stephane Mallarmé (Edwards, *People* 41 and 43).

[2] Edwards, *People* 176.

[3] John Ashbery wrote these words in an article about the New York collage artist Ann Ryan. Holland Cotter cites them in 'The Poetry of Scissors and Glue' when reviewing Ashbery's debut in 2008 as a solo exhibiting visual artist at New York's Tibor de Nagy Gallery. Ashbery was showing several dozen postcard-sized collages.

[4] Derrida puns in *Dissemination* upon *blank* and *blanc* to bring into conceptual alignment his notion of aporias or gaps and the 'white' spaces of a printed page (Derrida, *Dissemination* 250). In his 1974 essay 'Mallarmé', Derrida similarly notes the 'huge reservoir of meaning' associated with *blanc* as it operates within Mallarmé's writings, while investigating the resonance of 'spacing' as a term both of absentia and excessive meaning – it is abstract noun *and/or* verb, name *and/or* action (Derrida, *Acts* 115). Derrida nuances the 'and/or' potentialities of Mallarmé's syntax as signifying a crisis in rhetoric and criticism; they suggest 'neither a metaphorical relation… nor one of metonymy' (Derrida, *Acts* 125), since the 'or' does not subtend metaphorically similar terms while the 'and' is not stable enough to guarantee meaningful relations between part and whole. Such readings of inexhaustibility could apply equally to the gaps in Chris Edwards' collaging poems – such as those between spliced fragments, and in the poems' spacing on the page.

[5] Various routes in this thinking have been pursued by the Australian scholars Philip Mead, Ivor Indyk, Peter Minter and Michael Farrell among a host of others.

[6] It is worth noting here the discovery in 1922 of Tutankhamun's almost intact tomb by the English archaeologist and Egyptologist Howard Carter, an event that became an international sensation.

[7] I have (mis-)taken the phrase 'the word as such' from the Russian Futurist Aleksei Kruchenykh, whose graphic and *zaum* poems owe something to Mallarmé's formal revolutions. See Rothenberg and Joris, *Poems for the Millennium* 231-237.

[8] *Langue* (language) and *parole* (speech) are Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic terms for the written and spoken elements of communication. De Saussure used *langue* to refer to an underlying system or structure of reference and *parole* to mean personalised acts of utterance (de Saussure 7).

[9] Edwards also works as a graphic designer, and as a designer and editor of other poets' books.

[10] True to Mallarmé's compositional methods Edwards never allows this sentence to appear whole in his 'mistranslation'. Mallarmé's poem is commonly known as 'Un Coup de Dés' and Edwards follows suit in giving his poem the short title 'A Fluke'.

[11] For a brief introduction to these fascinating early twenty-first century poetry movements in a North American context see Kenneth Goldsmith's article 'FLARF is Dionysus. Conceptual poetry is Apollo.' (Goldsmith n.pag.)