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Natalie Berkman

Italian author Italo Calvino arrived in Paris in 1967 in the midst of a literary excitement for combinatorics, just two years after the publication of Russian formalist texts such as Tzvetan Todorov's *Théorie de la littérature* and the belated French translation of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* and at a time when French literary theorists such as Algirdas Julien Greimas and Claude Bremond were beginning to elaborate on this work, broadening its scope. Having already engaged with such theories and incorporated them into his own work earlier in his literary career,¹ during his time in Paris, Calvino sought to integrate himself into Parisian theoretical circles. He attended Roland Barthes's structuralism lectures at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), published an article in A.J. Greimas's *Actes sémiotiques*, and was coopted to the Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle (OuLiPo) in 1973.

Calvino notes in his essay "Cibernetica e fantasmi" that the world was increasingly understood as *discrete* rather than *continuous*: "Il processo in atto oggi è quello d'una rivincita della discontinuità, divisibilità, combinatorietà, su tutto ciò che è corso continuo, gamma di sfumature che stingono una sull'altra" ("The ongoing process today is the triumph of discontinuity, divisibility, and combinatoriality over all that is in flux, or a range of nuances following one after the other"; 210; my trans.). The emphasis on mathematics and more specifically

¹Upon his arrival, Calvino was already aware of such trends, having worked on the 1966 Italian edition of Propp's *Morphology* at Einaudi and having reviewed his *Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale* (1946) as early as 1949. Calvino's readings of Propp influenced his rewriting of Italian folktales in the 1956 collection *Fiabe italiane*, which the author indicates in his *Introduzione* of 1956 and in his *Nota dell'autore all'edizione 1971* (XI, L).

combinatorics is no coincidence, as both the Oulipo and theoretical schools such as structuralism had common origins in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Russian formalism. What distinguished the Oulipo, however, was its explicit use of mathematics as a tool for literary composition. Founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, the Oulipo directly applies mathematical concepts to literature through the notion of constraint — a rigorous, clearly defined rule for composition. However, the Oulipo devised an escape hatch from strict constraint known as the *clinamen*, defined by the group as follows: “For Oulipians, the clinamen is a deviation from the strict consequences of a restriction. It is often justified on aesthetic grounds: resorting to it improves the results . . . (A number of Oulipians, notably Italo Calvino,² have felt that the clinamen plays a crucial role in Oulipian theory and practice)” (*Oulipo Compendium* 126).

Within the Oulipo, Calvino attempted to apply notions of formal constraint and clinamen to his own work. The texts he produced under this Oulipian influence have clearly articulated, geometric structures, that, while not generative, are often thematized within the texts themselves, demonstrating what Calvino would later call his “predilection” for geometrical forms.³ In the *Atlas de littérature potentielle* (1981), Calvino classifies three texts—*Piccolo sillabario illustrato*⁴ (1978), *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1973), and *Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore* (1979)—as either rigorously or partly Oulipian. However, even *Le città invisibili* (1972) has Oulipian elements, notably a well-formed geometric structure that Calvino presented at an Oulipo meeting. Each of these texts is composed of fragmentary units that are arranged in a mathematical structure, illustrating Calvino’s particular

²While the definition of *clinamen* in the *Oulipo Compendium* signals Italo Calvino as the main proponent of the clinamen, Georges Perec seems a better example. Indeed, the most concrete example of clinamen provided in this text comes from Perec’s *La vie mode d’emploi*, in which the chapters are organized based on the knight’s tour problem in chess solved on a 10x10 chessboard, representing an apartment building of ten rooms by ten rooms with the façade removed. Whereas this structure should have produced a novel of 100 chapters, Perec’s only has 99, because what should have been the 66th room has been removed from the pattern, hiding the constraint and allowing a crucial element to remain unspoken. This is an excellent illustration of the clinamen, because nothing is left to chance—the location of the clinamen, the chapter number, and the significance of this gap are essential to the novel and to Perec’s aesthetics.

³“Volevo parlarvi dell’esattezza, non dell’infinito e del cosmo. Volevo parlarvi della mia predilezione per le forme geometriche, per le simmetrie, per le serie, per la combinatoria, per le proporzioni numeriche, spiegare le cose che ho scritto in chiave della mia fedeltà all’idea di limite, di misura . . .” (Calvino, *Lezioni* 67).

⁴Given that this text is inspired by Georges Perec’s *Petit abécédaire illustré* (1969), I will not be using it as an example of Calvino’s original clinamen.

understanding of Oulipian work as providing a rigorous structure for recombinations of basic elements.

Given Calvino's meager list of Oulipian works and the fact that he was already an established literary figure at the time he joined, his participation in the Oulipo is somewhat overlooked in scholarship.⁵ Italian scholarship often critiques Calvino's French period as an abrupt departure from his previous style and a blatant attempt at incorporating French theories and structural games (Botta 83). However, as the Oulipo notes that Calvino was an important proponent of the *clinamen*, this article proposes a comprehensive analysis of Calvino's theorization and application of this concept. Beginning with Calvino's own critical discussion of the *clinamen*, I will then discuss Calvino's three combinatorial novels: *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, *Le città invisibili*, and *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. In each of these texts, Calvino's *clinamen* consists of a destabilizing factor within an otherwise geometric structure, demonstrating an imaginative literary application of this tool, influenced by both Oulipian principles and French theories of the 1960's and 1970's, but never truly belonging to any one category.

I. Calvino and Clinamen

Long before Italo Calvino or the Oulipo, the term *clinamen* was first used by Lucretius, Epicurean philosopher and author of the first-century BCE poem, *De Rerum Natura*. The basic matter of Epicurean physics as described by Lucretius has two components: atoms (infinite in number but finite in shape and size) and void (within which the atoms combine). The atoms fall through the void and it is the swerve (*clinamen*) that allows for the creation of matter:

Here too is a point I'm eager to have you learn.
Though atoms fall straight downward through the void
By their own weight, yet at uncertain times
And at uncertain points, they swerve a bit —
Enough that one might say they changed direction.
And if they did not swerve, they all would fall
Downward like raindrops through the boundless void;
No clashes would occur, no blows befall
The atoms; nature would never have made a thing. (Lucretius, II v.
216–24)

⁵With the notable exceptions of Anna Botta (1997), Warren Motte (1999), Laura Chiesa (2006), Dennis Duncan (2012), and Michele Costagliola d'Abele (2014). (See bibliography)

For Epicurus, the clinamen is a distinctive factor: the atom that swerves does so of its own accord, not due to any external force, allowing for the concept of free will. Warren Motte explains the most original facet of Lucretius' clinamen:

In his account, the mechanism of the clinamen is unclear, because its intervention seems to be largely unmotivated: 'at uncertain times / and at uncertain points.' And yet this is necessarily so, it is a deliberate tactic, insofar as the Epicurean-Lucretian strategy depends precisely upon the injection of the aleatory into the motivated, upon the insertion of an element of chaos into a determinist symmetry. (264)

The term was adopted first by the Collège de 'Pataphysique before being inherited by the Oulipo, which was born as a subgroup of this peculiar movement. 'Pataphysicians considered their group to be a branch of philosophy or science that went beyond the metaphysical, exploring the science of imaginary solutions. The 'pataphysical clinamen is "the smallest possible aberration that can make the greatest possible difference" (Bök 43–5). The Oulipian definition of clinamen as a deviation from strict constraint on aesthetic grounds seems to combine Lucretius's original vocabulary with the 'pataphysical clinamen, adapting this proposal that atoms can be combined in an infinite number of ways to language and literature, understanding the latter as discrete and combinable.

Independently of his work in the Oulipo,⁶ Calvino speaks of Lucretius in the first of his *Lezioni americane* with respect to his concept of "lightness": "Al momento di stabilire le rigorose leggi meccaniche che determinano ogni evento, egli sente il bisogno di permettere agli atomi delle deviazioni imprevedibili dalla linea retta, tali da garantire la libertà tanto alla materia quanto agli esseri umani" ("At the moment of establishing the rigorous mechanical laws that determine each event, he feels the need to allow atoms to deviate unpredictably from the straight line, so as to guarantee freedom both for matter and for human beings"; 10; my trans.). He continues to relate the Lucretian understanding of the universe to the combinatorial potential of letters in the alphabet,⁷ defining his personal clinamen in opposi-

⁶According to Dennis Duncan, "We should also treat with caution the suggestion that Calvino's understanding of the concept was mediated by Jarry, the Oulipo, or indeed any of the others who have adopted it, since he writes explicitly and admiringly of Lucretius, both as a poet and as a philosopher. It is of course possible that Calvino did learn of the clinamen from the Oulipo and subsequently traced the concept to its source, where he found much else to admire" (105).

⁷"... già per Lucrezio le lettere erano atomi in continuo movimento che con le loro permutazioni creavano le parole e i suoni più diversi; idea che fu ripresa da una lunga

tion to strict rules and aligning it with freedom, intrinsically linked to language and its potentiality. For Paul Harris, “. . . Calvino’s use of the clinamen involves a literalizing of the metaphor whereby it is incorporated into his textual dynamics as an underlying principle . . . Calvino sees the clinamen as the moment in the text which breaks the repetitive or closed code and generates new narrative lines . . . ” (74–5). I propose to take this line of thought a step further when analyzing Calvino’s Paris corpus. As the author’s writing was explicitly influenced by the development and application of strict rules, we can understand these comments as reflective of the author’s attitude towards Oulipian constraint—while he is intrigued by both implicit and explicit rules of literature, he is nevertheless skeptical of an overly scientific approach, necessitating the use of a clinamen.

Le Cosmicomiche (1965) provides a final illustration that can serve as a lens for understanding Calvino’s clinamen. In “La forma dello spazio,” three characters fall parallel to each other in a void: the narrator, Qfwfq; the object of his romantic desire, Ursula H’x; and his romantic rival, Lieutenant Fenimore. While in a normal Euclidian space, their paths would never meet, these characters are in a curved, Einstein-inspired, non-Euclidean space, and what they perceive to be straight paths are actually bent. Qfwfq is not initially aware of this structure, but begins to understand that galaxies are bending the fabric of space and time, curving their trajectories. He attempts to try to force his path to meet Ursula’s, swerving into Lieutenant Fenimore. This literal clinamen displaces the predetermined fall from its initial Euclidean space and its evolved non-Euclidean space, to narrative space:

. . . e così ci inseguivano, io e il Tenente Fenimore, nascondendoci dietro gli occhielli delle ‘l’, specie le ‘l’ della parola ‘parallele’, per sparare e proteggerci dalle pallottole e fingerci morti e attendere che passi Fenimore per fargli lo sgambetto e trascinarlo per i piedi facendogli sbattere il mento contro il fondo delle ‘v’ e delle ‘u’ e delle ‘m’ e delle ‘n’ che scritte in corsivo tutte uguali diventano un sobbalzante susseguirsi di buche sul selciato per esempio nell’espressione ‘universo unidimensionale’ lasciandolo steso in un punto tutto calpestato dalle cancellature e di lì rialzarmi lordo d’inchiostro raggrumato e correre verso Ursula H’x . . . (Calvino, *Cosmicomiche* 191)

. . . and so we chased each other, myself and Lieutenant Fenimore, hiding behind the loops of the l’s, especially the l’s of the word ‘parallel’, to shoot and protect ourselves from bullets and pretend to be dead and wait for

tradizione di pensatori per cui i segreti del mondo erano contenuti nella combinatoria dei segni della scrittura . . . ” (27).

Fenimore to pass by to trip him and drag him by the feet making his chin beat against the bottom of the v's and u's and m's and n's which written in cursive all the same size become a jerky succession of holes on the pavement for example in the expression 'one-dimensional universe' leaving it stretched out in a spot all trampled by erasures and from there, I get up covered in a puddle of heavy ink and run towards Ursula H'x . . . (my trans.)

Qfwfq becomes the author, hoping to catch Ursula by drawing letters and words. However, this act of writing is insufficient because the parallel lines of the narrative, though a series of meaningful letters and words, bring the narrator back to the concept of parallel lines, never meeting just like Qfwfq, Lieutenant Fenimore, and Ursula H'x.

"La forma dello spazio" illustrates three key details that apply more generally to Calvino's theorization of the *clinamen*:

1. Calvino has a remarkably different understanding of space than Lucretius. The void is not "empty" as Lucretius posits in *De Rerum Natura*, but a structured, mathematical space. Furthermore, it is intrinsically linked to a literary space.
2. The potential for a swerve is not an anomaly, but rather programmed into the original. In other words, Calvino's *clinamen* occurs as a result of the conscious revisualization of space.
3. The *clinamen* is inextricably linked to the writing of the story. It creates a gap, a contradiction, a destabilization, leading the story into a new dimension. This is due to the interplay between narrator and author, a common element of Calvino's Paris period.

Since each of the texts in Calvino's Oulipian corpus exhibits variously structured, mathematical spaces and a destabilizing element that disrupts those spaces, these three criteria can help frame our reading of the *clinamen* and its use.

II. Il castello dei destini incrociati

Il castello dei destini incrociati is a fragmentary novel told in two independent parts that are further divided into short stories, which draw from great classics of the Western literary canon. While the individual elements that make up each half are distinct, the two parts have similar framing stories: a group of travelers, having lost their way in a forest and found shelter (in a castle for the first half, and tavern in the second), decide to kill time by telling their personal stories. However, they have lost the ability to speak and must use a deck of tarot cards to "tell" their tales. While Calvino's approach to producing a coher-

ent narrative made of shorter stories is reminiscent of a larger Italian tradition (such as Boccaccio's *Decamerone*), it is distinguished through two primary aspects: Calvino's individual tales are each accompanied by a series of tarot cards, through which the stories are told; and the complete set of tales recounted in each half form a corresponding structure of tarot cards, also reproduced in two full-page images within the text. Thinking back to "La forma dello spazio," it is important to note that Calvino arranges the cards in geometric patterns, signaling the use of a clinamen.

Inspired by Paolo Fabbri's presentation at a conference in Urbino (July 1968) on "*Il racconto della cartomanzia e il linguaggio degli emblemi*," Calvino had the idea to write a novel based on the combinatorial power of tarots. He began to experiment by writing stories based on various combinations of cards in a deck of Marseilles tarot cards,⁸ which later became the second part of the novel, "La taverna dei destini incrociati." While Calvino was only officially coopted in 1973, his interactions with the Oulipo had begun much earlier and were probably informing this first attempt at constrained literature. Unsatisfied with his progress, Calvino began a new project at an invitation from publisher Franco Maria Ricci, similar in scope but with the Visconti tarot deck.⁹ The resulting text, "Il castello dei destini incrociati," was published in part in 1969 as a contribution to the volume *Tarocchi, Il mazzo visconteo di Bergamo e New York*. Calvino eventually completed "La taverna" and published it alongside "Il castello" in the form that is most well-known today, the novel *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1973).

Calvino's explanatory note to this volume recounts this tortuous genesis and serves as a paratextual indication as to how to approach this unconventional volume: "This book is made first of pictures—the tarot playing cards—and secondly of written words. Through the sequence of the pictures stories are told, which the written word tries to reconstruct and interpret"¹⁰ (*The Castle of Crossed Destinies* 123). Because the number of cards at the characters' disposal is limited to the 78 of the Visconti deck and 56 of the Marseilles, these narrators

⁸The Marseilles tarot card deck, very popular in southern France, was most likely invented in northern Italy in the fifteenth century.

⁹The Visconti tarot card deck was originally commissioned in the fifteenth century by the influential Visconti family of Milan. The design of the cards is generally attributed to Bonifacio Bembo, an Italian fresco artist. (*Visconti Tarot* | *Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library*).

¹⁰The Italian-language note at the end of *Il castello dei destini incrociati* is slightly different and does not include this quote. That is why I cite it here in William Weaver's translation. Whenever I cite the note in English, it is because of these slight translation discrepancies.

must construct their tales in such a way as to intersect with the cards already played. The cards in “Il castello” are assembled in intersecting rows and columns, with each row or column representing two stories (depending on whether it is read forward or backward), while the design of “La taverna” is less regular with individual stories forming odd blocks. In both cases, the tarot cards serve as building blocks whose various combinations create stories. Within the greater design, individual cards do not have fixed meanings, but the meaning depends upon the current story being read, allowing Calvino to consider them the equivalent of Propp’s *functions* (basic elements of narrative).¹¹ While Calvino classified *Il castello dei destini incrociati* as Oulipian, it is clear from this paratextual commentary that he designed his tarot card structure with the end result in mind, making this far less strict than traditional Oulipian constraints, as Calvino explains: “. . . cambiavo continuamente le regole del gioco, la struttura generale, le soluzioni narrative” (“Nota” 1277).

Calvino’s hybrid narrative complicates the reading experience by introducing obstacles between the author and reader, who are separated by multiple surrogates: each part is recounted by a narrator who interprets the card-based storytelling of the other characters. In this hierarchy, each element simultaneously carries out the parallel tasks of recounting and interpreting. For instance, the narrator of an individual story always begins by choosing the card that most closely resembles him and placing it on the table while the other potential narrators observe and interpret. The narrative unfolds as the “player” lays down a sequence of cards, reproduced in the margin of the text. The interpretation of each sequence is never the true story being told by any individual narrator, but rather a “reading” of the cards by the narrator of the framing story. As Qfwfq became the author in “La forma dello spazio,” the narrators here are both readers and writers, trying to tell their own stories while simultaneously interpreting the tales of the others. At the end of *Il castello*, the narrator is unable to find his own story in the mess of cards; in *La taverna*, on the other hand, the narrator has a moment when he too tries to tell his tale. This link between author and narrator reaches an apex at the precise moment when the structures become apparent.

¹¹“Bisogna tenere presente che alle *carte* corrispondono le *funzioni* del racconto, le quali sono in maggioranza (controllare su Propp) nefaste (l’ostacolo, la mancanza, la trasgressione ecc.) solo che l’astuzia retorica del racconto popolare (e ciò che la contraddistingue p. es. dalla tragedia, dall’histoire larmoyante ecc.) è che le carte faste sono disposte alla fine, come in una divinazione truccata (propiziatoria) mentre invece nella tragedia, nel romanzo larmoyant ecc. è il contrario (per sconsigliato?)” (Fabbri).

Figure 1. Finished tarot card design of Part I of *Il Castello dei destini incrociati*, © 2020, Published with the permission of Einaudi.

Figure 2. Finished tarot card design of Part II of *Il Castello dei destini incrociati*, © 2020, Published with the permission of Einaudi.

Calvino's clinamen, which is programmed into the space itself, is best understood by taking each part individually. According to Calvino, *Il castello* was more successful than *La taverna*: "I succeeded with the Visconti tarots because I first constructed the stories of Roland and Astolpho, and for the other stories I was content to put them together as they came, with the cards laid down" (*Castle* 126). These two stories from Ariosto come just before the reader sees the completed design. In fact, immediately preceding the story of Orlando is the first narrative description of the (still incomplete) tarot card structure: "Adesso i tarocchi disposti sul tavolo formavano un quadrato tutto chiuso intorno, con una finestra ancora vuota al centro" (*Castello* 527). Orlando is the last of the characters to put cards into play, with his tale of being driven to insanity filling the previously empty center. The conclusion of his tale emphasizes the importance of combinatorics

and chance: “Era dunque l’immagine della Ragione quella bionda giustiziera con spada e bilancia con cui lui doveva in ogni caso finire per fare i conti? Era la Ragione del racconto che cova sotto il Caso combinatorio dei tarocchi sparpagliati?” (531). Orlando believes he has understood: “Ho fatto tutto il giro e ho capito. Il mondo si legge all’incontrario. Tutto è chiaro” (532). Naturally, the next story (that of Astolfo), is read backwards, from the bottom to the top.

The question of why Ariosto is central to this design draws from Calvino’s editorial work at the time. In 1967, Calvino retells this classic on the radio, which was published by Einaudi (without his participation) in a volume entitled *Orlando Furioso di Ludovico Ariosto raccontato da Italo Calvino* (1970). A few years later, he writes a critical essay entitled “La struttura dell’*Orlando Furioso*” (1974). In both the essay and rewriting of *Orlando*, Calvino lauds Ariosto on the ingenious open structure, with which the author leaves space in the poem to follow whichever character he wants rather than another. To speak of the structure of *Orlando Furioso* is impossible, Calvino writes, “. . . perché non siamo di fronte a una geometria rigida: potremmo ricorrere all’immagine d’un campo di forze, che continuamente genera al suo interno altri campi di forze. Il movimento è sempre centrifugo; all’inizio siamo già nel bel mezzo dell’azione, e questo vale per il poema come per ogni canto e ogni episodio” (“. . . because we are not faced with a rigid geometry: we could resort to the image of a force field, which continuously generates other force fields within it. The movement is always centrifugal; at the beginning we are already in the middle of the action, and this applies to the poem as well as to every canto and every episode”; *La struttura* 761; my trans.). Ironically, to rewrite this classic tale in his Oulipian-inspired text, Calvino must use it as a structural tool.

Kerstin Pilz argues that “. . . it is the chaos which is symbolically introduced into the order of the square: the empty centre of the square is completed by the story of ‘Orlando pazzo per amore,’ who descends into ‘il cuore caotico delle cose, al centro del quadrato dei tarocchi e del mondo, al punto d’intersezione di tutti gli ordini possibili’ . . .” (141–42). While the subject matter alone could justify Orlando’s position in the center of the structure, the use of Ariosto’s open structure to complete the empty center of his own can be understood an attempt at a clinamen: a way to destabilize his own geometrical structure with an unexpected chaotic element, Orlando’s madness.

Whereas Orlando's tale fills in the empty center in *Il castello*, *La taverna's* has an empty center.¹² The writing of *La taverna* is even more inferential than the first half, because the characters in *La taverna* tell their stories simultaneously, all reaching for the same cards. The young man who goes first must protect the cards he places down, complicating the reading of his story and the writing of new ones. The production of the final tarot arrangement is much less certain, almost chaotic, until halfway through when it is finally completed:

Gli avventori della taverna si dànno spintoni intorno al tavolo che s'è andato coprendo di carte, sforzandosi di tirar fuori le loro storie dalla mischia dei tarocchi, e quanto più le storie diventano confuse e sgangherate tanto più le carte sparpagiate vanno trovando il loro posto in un mosaico ordinato. È solo il risultato del caso, questo disegno, oppure qualcuno di noi lo sta pazientemente mettendo insieme? (Calvino, *Castello* 582)

The patrons of the tavern shove each other around the table that has been covered with cards, forcing themselves to get their stories out of the mess of tarot cards, and the more the stories become confused and disorganized, the more the scattered cards find their place in an orderly mosaic. Is this design just the result of chance, or is one of us patiently putting it together? (my trans.)

The question of chance necessitates a clinamen, and as with the central story of Orlando in *Il castello*, this has a tangible effect on the writing, as the narrator now questions who really assembles the cards.

At a certain point, Faust and Parsifal construct their stories simultaneously, using the same cards to discuss Alchemy and the search for the Grail. Unlike the clearly demarcated tales in *Il castello*, Faust begins laying cards at the bottom center while Parsifal begins at the center of the left-hand side. At the spot where they should meet, there is a gap. Faust is a pessimist about the combinations of cards: "Il mondo non esiste . . . non c'è un tutto dato tutto in una volta: c'è un numero finito d'elementi le cui combinazioni si moltiplicano a miliardi di miliardi, e di queste solo poche trovano una forma e un senso e s'impongono in mezzo a un pulviscolo senza senso e senza forma; come le settantotto carte del mazzo di tarocchi nei cui accostamenti appaiono sequenze di storie che subito si disfano" ("The world does not exist . . . there is not an all given all at once: there is a finite

¹²The lack of a center is reminiscent of Perec's missing 66th chapter in *La vie mode d'emploi*, where the location of this absence is essential. For Perec and Calvino, the clinamen is not just an absence, but one that is programmed into an otherwise geometric design. Carlo Ossola has also noted the importance of the center in Calvino's combinatorial structures (31–34).

number of elements whose combinations multiply into billions of billions, and of these only a few find a shape and a meaning and impose their presence in the midst of a senseless and formless dust cloud; like the seventy-eight cards of the tarot deck in whose combinations appear sequences of stories that immediately unravel"; 589; my trans.). Parsifal offers a different interpretation: "- Il nocciolo del mondo è vuoto,¹³ il principio di ciò che si muove nell'universo è lo spazio del niente, attorno all'assenza si costruisce ciò che c'è, in fondo al gral c'è il tao, - e indica il rettangolo vuoto circondato dai tarocchi" (589).

For Calvino, the fact that a destabilizing element is programmed into the center of the structure of both halves is telling. Whereas the center of *Il castello* was filled with a destabilizing force, in *La taverna*, it is precisely the refusal to fill this space—the insistence on leaving a void in the center of the pattern—that gives meaning to the chaotic text. Furthermore, the two halves of this text are elegant visual examples of the principle of clinamen. I would even argue that as Calvino's most explicit illustration of the clinamen in his only novel-length Oulipian text, *Il castello dei destini incrociati* was a pioneering force in the development of this aesthetic principle.

However, Calvino's use of constraint and clinamen is problematic if taken as exemplary of Oulipian techniques: first, Calvino's tarot card structure may be a narrative device, but it is not a generative constraint; second, his visually appealing spatial clinamen brought about by either literal or metaphorical destabilizations at the center of his structures cannot possibly be considered a deviation from a strict constraint, because the constraint itself was not strict; finally, his tarot card narrative device is in dialogue with various theoretical discourses outside of the Oulipo, potentially contaminating the group's legitimate intellectual inheritance of mathematical developments with formalist theories that only indirectly make use of mathematical thought. Regardless of the lack of a generative constraint, it is useful to consider *Il castello dei destini incrociati* as an imaginative visualization of the Oulipian conception of chance. In that sense, specific elements of Calvino's technique including a playful combination of basic ele-

¹³The language of this quote bears a strong resemblance to Calvino's preface to Cecchi's *Messico* in 1985: "Quando una donna Navajo sta per finire uno di questi tessuti, essa lascia nella trama e nel disegno una piccola frattura, una menda: 'affinché l'anima non le resti prigioniera dentro al lavoro.' Questa mi sembra una profonda lezione d'arte: vietarsi, deliberatamente, una perfezione troppo aritmetica e bloccata. Perché le linee dell'opera, saldandosi invisibilmente sopra se stesse, costituirebbero un labirinto senza via d'uscita; una cifra, un enigma di cui s'è persa la chiave. Per primo, s'irriterebbe nell'inganno lo spirito che ha creato l'inganno" ("Prefazione" xv-xvi).

ments, a strict mathematical structure, and a destabilizing factor in an intentional location contribute to a more general theorization of constraint and clinamen.

III. *Le città invisibili*

Another fragmentary text with an overarching geometric structure, *Le città invisibili* distinguishes itself in that it has no preface, introduction, or other paratextual elements that would help the reader interpret—or even recognize—this structure. The only possible indication of the book's structure lies in the table of contents, the *Indice* (which also means “clue” in Italian), which appears before the text, a position on which Calvino insisted, despite the typical placement of the table of contents at the end of Italian volumes. Calvino did not classify *Le città invisibili* as Oulipian in the *Atlas de littérature potentielle*, though he did speak about the structure in an Oulipo meeting on October 24, 1974: “ce qu’il y a d’oulipien d[an]s les Villes Invisibles: la table des matières; sur le plan sémantique, pas de rigueur oulipienne” (“that which is Oulipian in *Invisible Cities*: the table of contents; on the semantic level, no Oulipian rigor”; Costagliola d’Abele 102; my trans.).

The *Indice* is atypical, reflecting Calvino's unconventional division of his novel into nine numbered (but not titled) chapters, each of which begins and ends with a dialogue between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan (indicated in the table of contents by ellipses) and contains a selection of fragments (10 for the first and last, and 5 for the others) that are not titled, but rather divided into eleven categories (each followed by a number from 1 to 5). However, the relationship between the ellipses and category names in the *Indice* and the corresponding dialogues and city descriptions in the body of the narrative is never explicitly stated.

The numbers in the *Indice* seem to have been intentionally chosen, as eleven categories of five cities each total 55 cities, or one more than the number of cities in Thomas More's *Utopia*. Add that to the nine pairs of dialogues to get 64, the number of squares on a chessboard (towards the end of the novel, the protagonists engage in a game of chess) (Barenghi 1359–60). While within the text each city description is given a woman's name, they are nowhere to be found in the *Indice*, which lists only which category each fragment belongs in, preceded by a page number and followed by a second number indicating the iteration of the category. Arranging each category vertically, the pattern becomes a two-dimensional geometrical figure, a parallelogram, as pictured below:

I:	1
	21
	321
	4321
II:	54321
III:	54321
IV:	54321
V:	54321
VI:	54321
VII:	54321
VIII:	54321
IX:	5432
	543
	54
	5

Calvino's parallelogram is based on a regenerative pattern: the first numbered chapter introduces 4 of the 11 categories (1, 21, 321, 4321) and the last ends the series in the opposite order (5432, 543, 54, 5). The chapters in the middle are a simple regenerative sequence, each of which has the pattern (54321), terminating the first category in the sequence (the number 5 indicates the last appearance of a particular category) and introducing a new one (the number 1 indicates the first appearance of a category). Calvino's pattern, while hidden, is rather simple: "Le système selon lequel les séries alternent est le plus simple qui soit, même si certains ont beaucoup travaillé pour lui trouver une

explication" ("The system according to which the series alternate is as simple as can be, even if certain people have worked very hard to find an explanation"; Préface V-VI; my trans.).

While some critics have admired the symmetries of Calvino's *Indice*,¹⁴ the parallelogram exhibits a false symmetry given the numbers that compose it cannot be inverted without reversing the sequence. This avoidance of absolute perfection in art is a recurring theme in his critical writings, resulting in his choice of the crystal as a metaphor for the type of structure he seeks. Calvino first used the crystal as a metaphor for describing the fantastic: "Al centro della narrazione per me non è la spiegazione d'un fatto straordinario, bensì l'*ordine* che questo fatto straordinario sviluppa in sé e attorno a sé, il disegno, la simmetria, la rete d'immagini che si depositano intorno ad esso come nella formazione d'un cristallo" ("At the center of the narrative for me is not the explanation of an extraordinary fact, but rather the order that this extraordinary fact develops in and around itself, the design, the symmetry, the network of images that are deposited around it as in the formation of a crystal"; "Definizioni" 261; my trans.). This idea had evolved by the time he was drafting the *Lezioni americane*: "Il cristallo, con la sua esatta sfaccettatura e la sua capacità di rifrangere la luce, è il modello di perfezione che ho sempre tenuto come un emblema . . ." ("The crystal, with its exact faceting and its ability to refract light, is the model of perfection that I have always cherished as an emblem"; *Lezioni* 71; my trans.). Between these two definitions, Calvino's conception of the crystal and its properties had been influenced by its use in the linguistic debate between Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget, specifically in Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini's introduction,¹⁵ which refers to a biological debate on two opposing models of life: the crystal (invariance, regularity of specific structures, stable state,

¹⁴Laura Chiesa discusses *Le città invisibili* in quasi-mathematical terms, while Laura Marelli provides an interpretation of the constraint culminating in Hubble's theory of the universe. Carolyn Springer addresses the structure briefly before continuing her geographical reading of the novel, emphasizing the novel's "formidable symmetries." Paul Harris defines the table of contents as an "algorithm for running the *Invisible Cities* program, for it simulates a self-generative system looping back on itself . . ." (79). McLaughlin's biographical study also provides an explanation of the structure, as well as Claudio Milanini's *L'Utopia discontinua* which provides one of the most mathematical interpretations of the novel. Finally, *Le città e i nomi* begins with a brief explanation of the structure.

¹⁵Harris notes that: "While Calvino remarks that he appropriates these terms from Massimo Piattelli-Palmarini's introduction (1980) to the debate between Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget over models for language acquisition, it is clear from works like *Invisible Cities* (1972), that he had intuited the resonance of these images some years before the debate" (77).

static equilibrium—illustrated by the recently discovered DNA) and the flame (steady state, dynamic equilibrium—or statistical disorder, represented by Schroedinger’s notion that life feeds on both order and random atomic vibrations and collisions) (6).

This debate provided a necessary foil to Calvino’s original theorization of the crystal, which he elaborated on in the *Lezioni americane*.

... i modelli per il processo di formazione degli esseri viventi sono “da un lato il *cristallo* (immagine d’invarianza e di regolarità di strutture specifiche), dall’altro la *fiamma* (immagine di costanza d’una forma globale esteriore, malgrado l’incessante agitazione interna)” . . . Cristallo e fiamma, due forme di bellezza perfetta da cui lo sguardo non sa staccarsi, due modi di crescita nel tempo, di spesa della materia circostante, due simboli morali, due assoluti, due categorie per classificare fatti e idee e stili e sentimenti . . . Io mi sono sempre considerato un partigiano dei cristalli, ma la pagina che ho citato m’insegna a non dimenticare il valore che ha la fiamma come modo d’essere, come forma d’esistenza. (71–72)

... the models for the process of formation of living things are “on the one hand the *crystal* (image of invariance and regularity of specific structures), on the other the *flame* (image of regularity of an external global form, despite ceaseless internal agitation)” . . . Crystal and flame, two forms of perfect beauty from which the gaze cannot detach itself, two modes of growth over time, of expenditure of the matter surrounding them, two moral symbols, two absolutes, two categories to classify facts and ideas and styles and feelings . . . I have always considered myself a partisan of crystals, but the page I just cited teaches me not to forget the value of the flame as a way of being, as a form of existence. (my trans.)

While the crystal represents pure order and the flame dynamism, neither is sufficient for life, which grows between the two, where order emerges in chaos. In keeping with Calvino’s theorization of the clinamen, the crystal metaphor in *Le città invisibili* provides a geometrically structured space, and the flame represents the clinamen.

As with *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, the structure of the novel is not merely a compositional practice, but is also meant to influence the reader. Indeed, Kublai’s various discourses on crystals imply a mode of reading:

—Eppure io so, —diceva, —che il mio impero è fatto della materia dei cristalli, e aggrega le sue molecole secondo un disegno perfetto . . . Perché le tue impressioni di viaggio si fermano alle delusive apparenze e non colgono questo processo inarrestabile? Perché indugi in malinconie inessenziali? Perché nascondi all’imperatore la grandezza del suo destino? (Calvino, *Città* 405–6)

"Yet I know," he said, "that my empire is made of the stuff of crystals, and assembles its molecules according to a perfect pattern . . . Why do your travel impressions stop at disappointing appearances and not capture this unstoppable process? Why do you linger over inessential melancholies? Why are you hiding from the emperor the greatness of his destiny?" (my trans.)

Albert Sbragia has noted Calvino's use of *mise en abyme* as an " . . . attempt to transmit the order found in simple systems to the complex universe . . .," claiming that Calvino employs this strategy "to illustrate the generative lesson of the crystal" (297–99). He argues that Calvino uses synecdoche to counteract these mises-en-abymes and thereby combat the ungraspable notion of chaos. On a rhetorical level, it is true that the mises-en-abyme and synecdoche counteract one another; on a structural level, Calvino makes use of the clinamen to counteract the rigidity of his design. As with *Il castello dei destini incrociati*, the clinamen in *Le città invisibili* has the important distinction of being located near the center of this geometric, yet non-symmetrical structure. These opposing rhetorical and structural models allow Calvino to create a novel that exists between the crystal and the flame, providing a literary solution to a scientific debate.

Chapter V can be understood as a central bridge between the two halves of the novel, beginning with a discussion of the embedded city, Lalage, during the opening framing dialogue and ending with a discussion of a bridge. In the geographical center of the structure, *Le città e gli occhi* 3 describes the city of Bauci, built on stilts from which its residents simply observe the earth little by little from above using telescopes. The bridge metaphor that follows further underscores the importance of understanding the individual pieces composing a structure:

Marco Polo describe un ponte, pietra per pietra.

—Ma qual è la pietra che sostiene il ponte? —chiede Kublai Kan.

—Il ponte non è sostenuto da questa o quella pietra, —risponde Marco,

—ma dalla linea dell'arco che esse formano.

Kublai Kan rimane silenzioso, riflettendo. Poi soggiunge: —Perché mi parli delle pietre? È solo dell'arco che m'importa.

Polo risponde: —Senza pietre non c'è arco (Calvino, *Le città invisibili* 428).

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.

"But which is the stone that supports the bridge?" Kublai Khan asks.

"The bridge is not supported by one stone or another," Marco replies, "but by the line of the arch they form."

Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: "Why are you talking to me about the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me."

Polo replies: "Without stones there is no arch." (my trans.)

Following the bridge, Kublai Khan interrogates Marco Polo about his origins, and why he has never described the city where he was born, Venice. At this point, Polo reveals that "Ogni volta che descrivo una città dico qualcosa di Venezia" ("Every time that I describe a city, I am saying something about Venice"; 432; my trans.). The following fragment, Smeraldina,¹⁶ seems to be a description of Venice: "... città acquatica, un reticolo di canali e un reticolo di strade si sovrappongono e s'intersecano" ("... aquatic city, a network of canals and streets that overlap and intersect"; 433; my trans.).

The importance of the city of Venice could be attributed to the city's architectural significance, explained by Calvino in an essay: "La forza con cui Venezia agisce sulla immaginazione è quella d'un archetipo vivente che si affaccia sull'utopia" ("The force with which Venice acts on the imagination is that of a living archetype that overlooks utopia"; "Venezia" 2689; my trans.). The description of Smeraldina, however, implies an additional, mathematical interpretation through its insistence on the anti-Euclidean nature of the city, where "... la linea più breve tra due punti ... non è una retta ma uno zigzag che si ramifica in tortuose varianti ..." ("... the shortest distance between two points ... is not a straight line, but a zigzag that branches off in tortuous variations"; Calvino, *Città* 433; my trans.). Furthermore, the revelation that Polo has *only* been talking about Venice immediately after the central chapter's insistence on examining the individual components of a structure can be understood as Calvino's metaphorical clinamen. In this sense, every city in this otherwise Euclidean geometric pattern is a variant on the fundamentally non-Euclidean city of Venice, enforcing the irreconcilable nature of geometric patterns and the entropy of human life.

As Letizia Modena claims in her groundbreaking work on Calvino and architecture, "In this sense *Invisible Cities* constitutes an incentive to swerve from conventional literary and urban design. Inserted into a rigid, suffocating system (architectonic or literary), the clinamen shatters its immobility, dissolves its petrification" (36). Much like the flame is a necessary foil to the crystal, the entropy introduced by

¹⁶Note that the name Smeraldina is etymologically related to the Italian *smeraldo* or emerald (a type of crystal).

the Venice metaphor into the center of the text is what gives it life. The poetic confluence of the metaphors of the crystal and flame represented by an oscillation between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry in *Le città invisibili* is indicative of Calvino's conception of the clinamen. From this example, it is apparent that Calvino's notion of clinamen is equally influenced by his other scientific readings at the time, which complement Oulipian principles.

IV. *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*

As with *Le città invisibili*, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* has a complicated structure, with each chapter split into two parts: the story of the main character's quest to read a book; and then the *incipit* of the book he has at the moment, each imitating a particular genre or style. Within the framing story, Calvino complicates traditional notions of narratology and reader reception through his use of the second person to address not the reader of the book, but the reader *in* the book, who is also the protagonist. The reader's quest to finish his first reading leads him on a journey that ruminates on the book, dealing with the intricacies of publishing, the disorder of bookstores, the pretentious and often horrific modes of academic reading, a censorship plot, and more. Reflective of the reader's inability to finish any one reading, the titles of each book within the book all imply the possibility of a story, without following through, as evidenced by the title: *Se* (a first hypothetical element) *una notte d'inverno* (the time of the action) *un viaggiatore* (a character).

What further upsets an interpretation is an essay Calvino published twice, claiming to explain his compositional methods for the framing chapters, titled *Comment j'ai écrit un de mes livres*.¹⁷ The essay was first published in the *Bibliothèque Oulipienne* in 1982 and then again in Greimas' journal, *Actes sémiotiques* in 1984. The first publication in the *Bibliothèque Oulipienne* along with the title would indicate that Calvino is inserting his novel into a strictly Oulipian tradition, revealing the underlying constraint in a highly restricted publication that at the time was mostly internal, with only 150 copies printed. The subsequent publication in *Actes sémiotiques* emphasizes the central role of semiotics and more specifically, Algirdas Greimas' semiotic squares. While the two

¹⁷Caite Panzer's senior thesis at Princeton University is the only complete study on the document besides my own French-language article, published in *Genesis* 45 (available online at <https://journals.openedition.org/genesis/2993>).

are not totally incompatible—both the Oulipo and Greimas attempt various reductions of literature to its fundamental elements—the Oulipo’s methods are often strictly mathematical, whereas Greimas’ methods can be best described as pseudo-scientific.

The title, *Comment j’ai écrit un de mes livres* is a reference to Raymond Roussel’s posthumous *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935),¹⁸ in which the author explains the constraints that he used to write a few of his novels, beginning with two words that are identical save for one letter, using both in almost identical sentences whose semantic meanings change based on the final word (*Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard* . . . and *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux pillard* . . .), and then writing the entire novel as an attempt to pass from the first sentence to the second (11). One can see why this text would appeal to the Oulipo, whose members attempt to invent similar procedures to produce texts. The desire to reveal the constraints, however, has often been a point of contention among members. Calvino’s essay thus falls within a history of Oulipians revealing the methods¹⁹ by which they composed their texts, as well as within his own tradition of explaining his compositional method.²⁰

Comment j’ai écrit un de mes livres draws from both the Oulipo and semiotic studies. The article deals only with the framing chapters²¹ that tell the story of the reader within the book, and the multifaceted structure Calvino proposes in this essay demonstrates an Oulipian-inspired “snowball”²² structure, which, as we have seen with Calvino’s other novels from his Paris period, would appear to indicate a potential clinamen:

¹⁸The Oulipo often plays with variations on this title, the most elaborate example being Marcel Bénabou’s novel *Pourquoi je n’ai écrit aucun de mes livres* (1986).

¹⁹Another prominent example is Georges Perec’s *Quatre figures pour La vie mode d’emploi*, which, in the spirit of Roussel’s text, explains a few of the constraints with which Perec composed *La vie mode d’emploi*. This essay can be found in the *Atlas de littérature potentielle* (pp. 387–95).

²⁰Calvino speaks regularly about his compositional method. The first such occasion was an essay about his first novel, *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*; there is a complementary note following *Il castello dei destini incrociati* explaining its genesis and the frustration Calvino experienced while writing it; Calvino explained the structure of *Le città invisibili* to the Oulipo in a meeting as well as in a conference on creative writing in New York.

²¹In *Note e notizie sui testi*, Bruno Falcetto details Calvino’s manuscripts that demonstrate the genesis of the various *incipit* (1390–97).

²²The Oulipian snowball is a poem with n verses of n characters each (e.g. the first verse would be one character, the second two, etc.). Calvino’s snowball is a variation on the traditional constraint in that the “verses” (chapter structures) increase in length until a certain point, after which they decrease. It is thus a traditional snowball combined with what the Oulipo terms a “melting snowball.”

Sommaire	
Chap. I	
Chap. II	
Chap. III	
Chap. IV	
Chap. V	
Chap. VI	
Chap. VII	
Chap. VIII	
Chap. IX	
Chap. X	
Chap. XI	
Chap. XII	

Figure 3. Table of Contents of “Comment j’ai écrit un de mes livres”, ©, 2020, Published with the permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k33246873/f56.image>

The individual elements of this symmetric, geometric “Sommaire”²³ come from Greimas, inspired by *Du Sens*, in which the semiologist develops (“The elementary structure of meaning”; Greimas 136). Greimas’ squares consist of what he terms “semes” or the basic units of meaning that are defined with respect to one another and only

²³It is interesting that the overall structure would become apparent in a table of contents as with the structure of *Le città invisibili*.

ever in contraries, contradiction, or implication. However, Calvino's squares seem less consistent, often using the same abbreviations for several elements, and never implying the same structure as any other one. Below is the first of Calvino's squares, which supposedly was used to write the first chapter:

Figure 4. First square of “Comment j’ai écrit un de mes livres”, ©, 2020, Published with the permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k33246873/f57.image>

Furthermore, the relationships Calvino defines between his “semes” are not static, as in Greimas, but always active verbs:

le lecteur qui est là (L) lit le livre qui est là (l)
 le livre qui est là conte l’histoire du lecteur qui est dans le livre (L)
 le lecteur qui est dans le livre n’arrive pas à lire le livre qui est dans le livre (l’)
 le livre qui est dans le livre ne conte pas l’histoire du lecteur qui est là
 le lecteur qui est dans le livre prétend être le lecteur qui est là
 le livre qui est là voudrait être le livre qui est dans le livre. (9)

the reader who is there (L) reads the book that is there (l)
 the book that is there tells the story of the reader who is in the book (L)
 the reader who is in the book is unable to read the book that is in the book (l’)
 the book that is in the book does not tell the story of the reader who is there
 the reader who is in the book pretends to be the reader who is there
 the book that is there would like to be the book that is in the book. (my trans.)

While it is tempting to take Calvino at face value and interpret this square as a semiotic reduction of his first chapter taken as a part of an overall Oulipian snowball structure, as a constraint, this series of squares does not appear generative. As Greimas’ squares were a method

for analyzing preexisting texts, Calvino's *Comment j'ai écrit un de mes livres* seems rather an interpretation of the novel *a posteriori*. Greimas himself, in his introductory note, is not sure how to interpret what Calvino says he has done: "Et voilà que dans cette quiétude s'introduit . . . un auteur très peu sécurisant, Italo Calvino, qui présente, dans une écriture oulipo-greimassienne, un nouveau traité de sémiotique littéraire" ("And here in this tranquility, a very disconcerting author, Italo Calvino, enters the scene, who presents, in an Oulipo-Greimassian style of writing, a new treatise on literary semiotics"; 3; my trans.). His description of the text is even less clear:

Aussi rien ne serait-il plus faux que de chercher à homologuer, par exemple, la présentation carréiforme de son texte avec quelque théorie — standard ou post-standard — du carré sémiotique. Mais il serait non moins faux de ne pas y reconnaître la conviction implicite de l'auteur selon laquelle le seul langage fournissant l'alphabet pour une lecture intelligible du monde est celui de l'étendue nombrée et mesurée. (3)

Additionally, nothing would be more wrong than to try to equate, for example, the square presentation of his text with some theory—standard or post-standard—of the semiotic square. But it would be no less false not to recognize in this presentation the implicit conviction of the author that the only language providing the alphabet for an intelligible reading of the world is that of the numbered and measured expanse. (my trans.)

The language Greimas uses oscillates between theoretical descriptions of Calvino's accomplishments and a hesitance to align Calvino's article precisely with his own brand of semiology. Unbeknownst to Greimas, Calvino described this article as a joke in a 1984 letter: "Perché quell'opuscolo che ti ho mandato è solo un divertimento, ispirato dai quadrati di Greimas, ma credo non abbia nulla a che fare con la semiologia (l'ho mandato a Greimas solo perché Paolo Fabbri m'ha incoraggiato) e intendo che rimanga 'clandestino' almeno in Italia" ("Because that booklet I sent you is just for fun, inspired by Greimas' squares, but I think it has nothing to do with semiology (I sent it to Greimas only because Paolo Fabbri encouraged me to) and I intend it to remain 'clandestine' at least in Italy"; *Lettere* 1516; my trans.).

Given what we have seen throughout Calvino's Oulipian corpus, the perfect symmetry of *Comment j'ai écrit un de mes livres* and the lack of any identifiable destabilization factor at the center (or indeed any recognizable form of a clinamen-esque breaking of the supposedly strict constraint), it is highly unlikely that *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* is a properly Oulipian text, despite what the author claimed. Neither is it properly semiotic, as Greimas so hesitantly admitted. Indeed,

Calvino's reluctance to have this essay circulate in Italy demonstrates that it does not accurately reflect his compositional methods. In an attempt to situate his novel within the Oulipian and French theoretical discourses, Calvino allowed himself to reinterpret his framing sections using these models, but was wary that this exercise would be taken too seriously by Italian critics of the time, obsessed as they were with structuralism and semiotics.

While a facetious act of scholarship could appear at first glance to mock both the work of Greimas and of the Oulipo, I would argue that Calvino's adherence to mathematical structures during his Paris period as well as his practical development of the notion of clinamen demonstrates that he did indeed admire the work of the Oulipo. Looking at his designs more closely, it is easy to see that none are properly Oulipian—the formal structure of *Il castello dei destini incrociati* was developed and continually modified during the writing of the book, the table of contents in *Le città invisibili* is not enough to classify it as an Oulipian text, and *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* is something else entirely—but in adhering to at least the basic tenets of Oulipian thought, Calvino adapts them to his needs. Given the importance accorded to combinatorics in France at this time (in theoretical developments such as structuralism, experimental groups such as the Oulipo, and even in biological debates as we have seen), it is unsurprising that Calvino would attempt to find a literary equivalent. In this sense, the Oulipo was a particularly promising outlet for Calvino to synthesize these intellectual trends through writing, experimenting with structural literature.

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