



REVIEWS

Best of 2012: Daniel Birnbaum chooses *The Number and the Siren*
ArtForum, Dec 2012



Daniel Birnbaum



Daniel Birnbaum is director of Moderna Museet, Stockholm, for which he cocurated "Picasso/Duchamp 'He Was Wrong,'" on view through March 3, 2013.

Photo: Wolfgang Tillmans

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QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX, *THE NUMBER AND THE SIREN* (URBANOMIC) Stéphane Mallarmé is not a hermetic author, he is a difficult author, says Jacques Rancière, echoing many others on the French Symbolist. What they imply is that we should once and for all renounce the idea of a secret key that can unveil the ultimate meaning of his most legendary and intensely studied book-length poem, *Un Coup de dés* (A Throw of the Dice; i.e., casting out order for chance). And yet Meillassoux's recent study tries to provide exactly this cipher in numerological terms. The secret number is 707; there are 707 or so words in the poem, and the two units, 7 and 0, are the symbolic poles of the throw of the dice. It sounds absurd, but I think Meillassoux is right, and that he has added a crucial dimension nobody ever noticed despite innumerable "close readings." Rumor has it he is now working on Duchamp.