

freedom to fail

Freedom | Constraints | Chance | Failure



on not knowing

(how artists think)

On the Value of Not Knowing

Tactics for not Knowing

Pedagogy of the Not known

Ahead of Yes and No
Heidegger on not knowing and Art



the **abyss** of freedom



“I experience a sort of terror when, at the moment of setting to work and finding myself before the infinitude of possibilities that present themselves, I have the feeling that everything is permissible to me... Will I then have to lose myself in this abyss of freedom?”

Igor Stravinsky, *the Poetics of Music*

constraints

(and limits)



the paralysis of infinite choice can stop us from getting started.

The Rite of Spring (1913)

The Rite of Spring
Le Sacre du Printemps
First Part
ADORATION OF THE EARTH
Première Partie
L'ADORATION DE LA TERRE

INTRODUCTION
Lento $\text{♩} = 50$ tempo rubato

Clarinetto 1 in La
Clarinetto basso 2 in Sib
Fagotto 1
Corno 2 in Fa

colla parte
Solo ad lib.
colla parte

IGOR STRAVINSKY
Revised 1947
New edition 1967

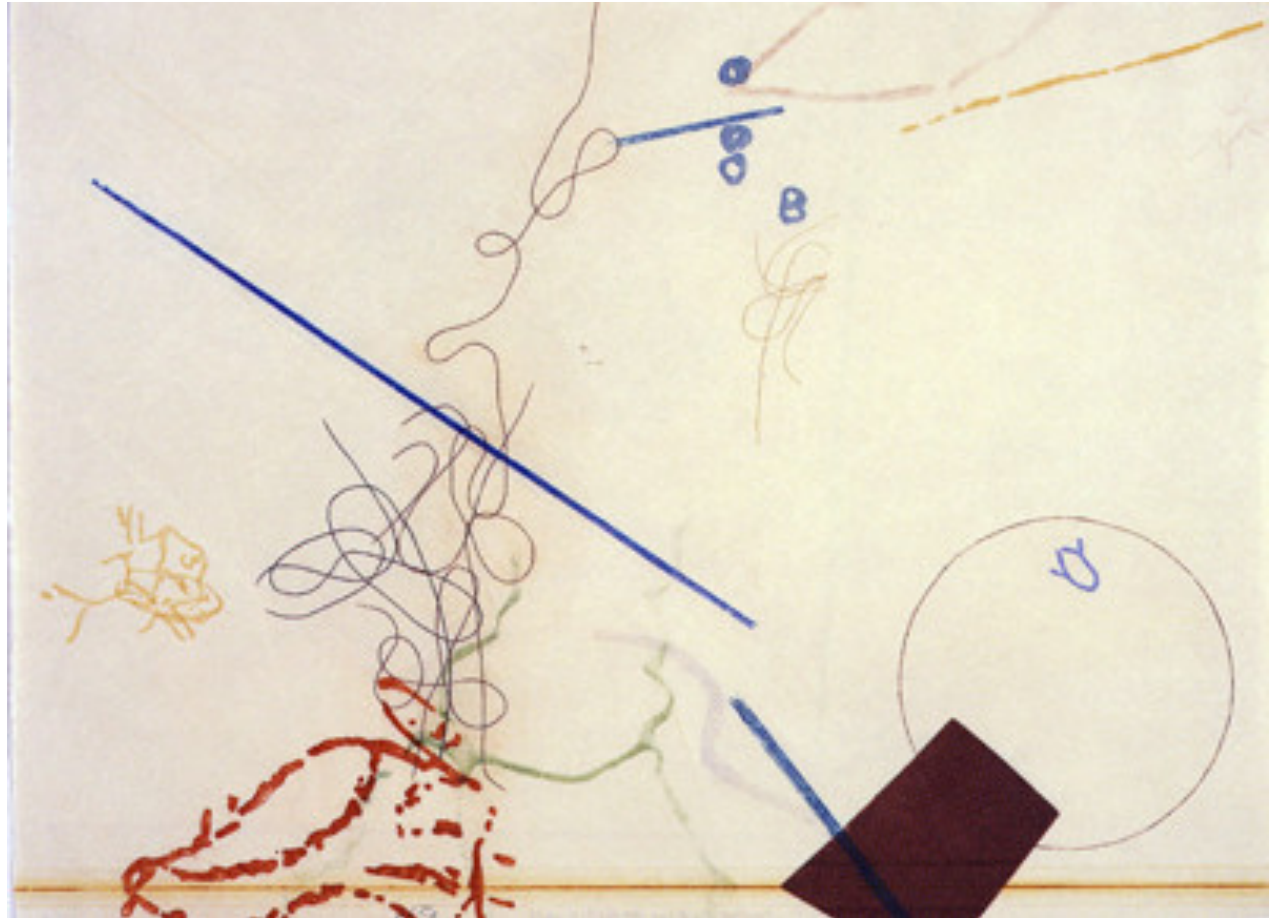
A musical score for the introduction of 'The Rite of Spring'. It features four staves for Clarinetto 1 in La, Clarinetto basso 2 in Sib, Fagotto 1, and Corno 2 in Fa. The tempo is Lento, marked with a quarter note equal to 50 beats per minute, and the style is tempo rubato. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'colla parte' and 'Solo ad lib.'. A rehearsal mark '1' is present at the end of the first measure.

Stravinsky's views on constraints were in line with the idea of "creative constraints," which holds that limitations and boundaries can be a powerful force for creativity and innovation. By embracing constraints and working within them, Stravinsky was able to push the boundaries of musical composition and create works that were both innovative and unique.

- "The Rite of Spring" (1913) - This landmark work, which was composed for the Ballets Russes, was created within **strict constraints in terms of form, rhythm, and harmony**. The ballet was divided into two parts, each with its own set of musical constraints. In the first part, **Stravinsky used a system of interlocking rhythmic patterns to create a complex and constantly shifting musical landscape**. In the second part, he used a series of **repetitive and angular melodic fragments** to create a sense of primitive and tribal energy.
- **The constraints imposed on the composition** of "The Rite of Spring" helped to shape the unique and innovative musical language that Stravinsky developed for this work. The piece is characterized by its use of irregular rhythms, shifting meter, and unconventional harmonic progressions, all of which were shaped by the constraints that Stravinsky imposed on the composition process.
- This example demonstrates Stravinsky's belief that **constraints can be a powerful force for creative inspiration**, and his ability to use these constraints to create innovative and unique works of music.



chance
(or random?)

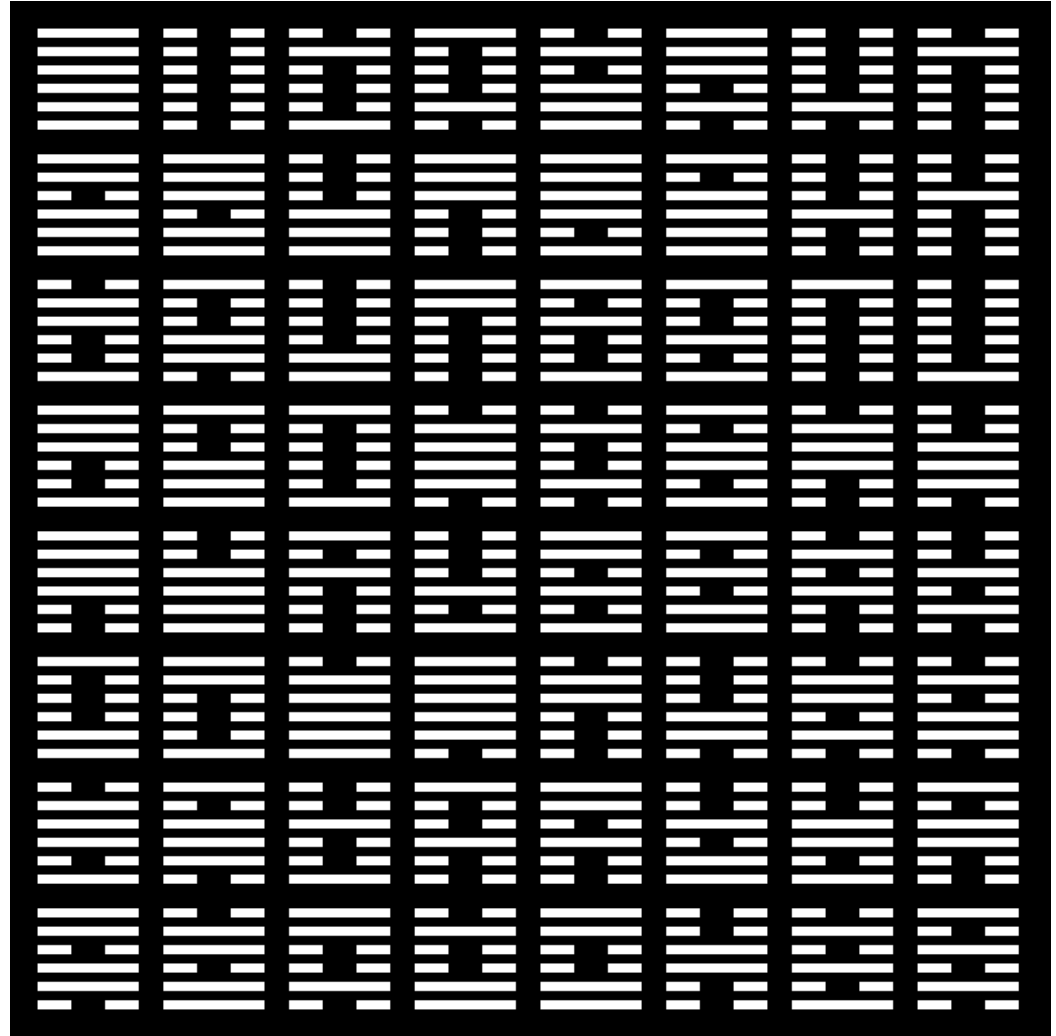


the
aesthetics of
chance



Dieter Roth, Big Cloud, 1971 Felt pen and mayonnaise on white paper, 29 1/2 x 39 13/16"

**performance,
process,
possibility**



i-Ching patch

Georges Bataille

Chance 1944

The human mind is set up to take no account of chance, except insofar as the calculations that eliminate chance allow you to forget it: that is, not take it into account. But going as far as possible, reflection on chance strips the world bare of the entirety of predictions in which reason encloses it. Like human nakedness, the nakedness of chance - which in the last resort is definitive - is obscene and disgusting: in short, divine. Since the course of the things of the world hangs on chance, this course is as depressing for us as a king's absolute power.

George Brecht

Chance Imagery 1957

It is sometimes possible to specify only the universe of possible characteristics which a chance event may have. For example, a toss of a normal die will be expected to give a number from one to six. Any particular face will be expected to turn up in about one-sixth of a great many throws. But the outcome of any one toss remains unknown until the throw has been made. It is often useful to keep in mind this “universe of possible results,” even when that universe is hypothetical, for this clarifies for us the nature of our chance event as a selection from a limited universe. We should note here that events are defined as due to chance in a relative way. There is no absolute chance or random event, for chance and randomness are aspects of the way in which we structure our universe.

John Cage
Experimental
Music
1958



chance operations

indeterminacy and **aleatory** techniques

aleatory techniques involve introducing elements of chance or indeterminacy into the creative process, allowing the composer to relinquish control over the outcome of the work.



Imaginary Landscape No. 4 (1951) - This is a piece for 12 radios, in which the performers are instructed to tune the radios to different stations and adjust the volume, creating a complex soundscape through the combination of the various broadcasts.

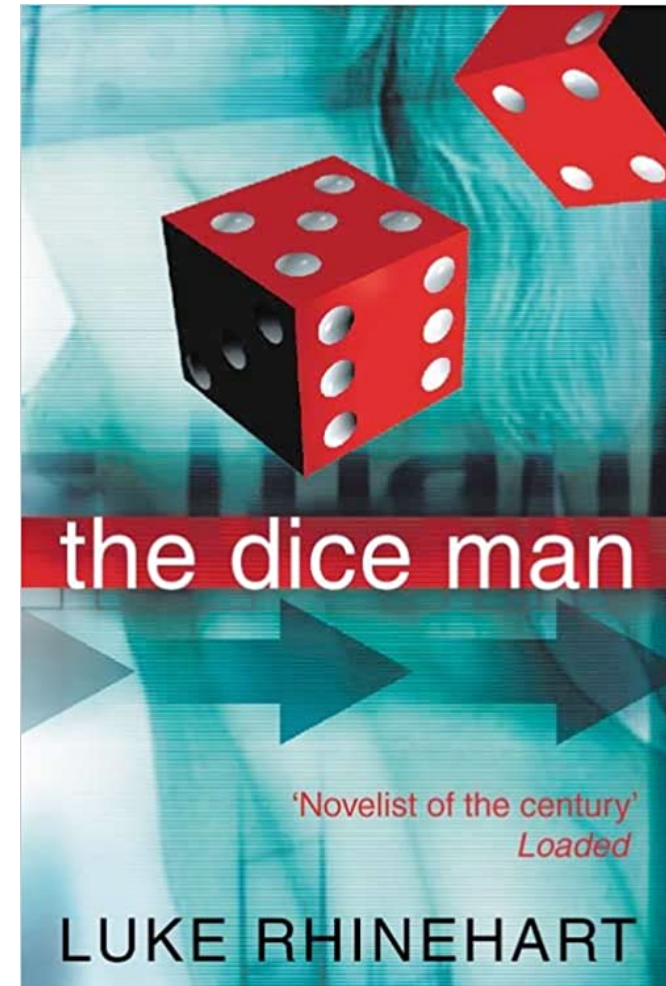
Controlled Chance: Aleatory Techniques

Yes, the term "aleatory" can be applied outside of music. The word "aleatory" comes from the Latin word "alea," which means "dice." It refers to elements of chance or randomness that are introduced into a system or process.

In music, aleatory techniques involve the use of chance operations to determine the structure or content of a composition. However, the concept of aleatory can be applied to other forms of artistic expression, as well as to other areas of life.

For example, the field of architecture has seen the development of aleatory design methods, in which elements of chance are introduced into the design process to create unpredictable and unique forms. In literature, the use of chance operations has been used as a means of generating creative writing prompts and exercises. In science, the use of **randomized controlled** trials is a form of aleatory experimentation.

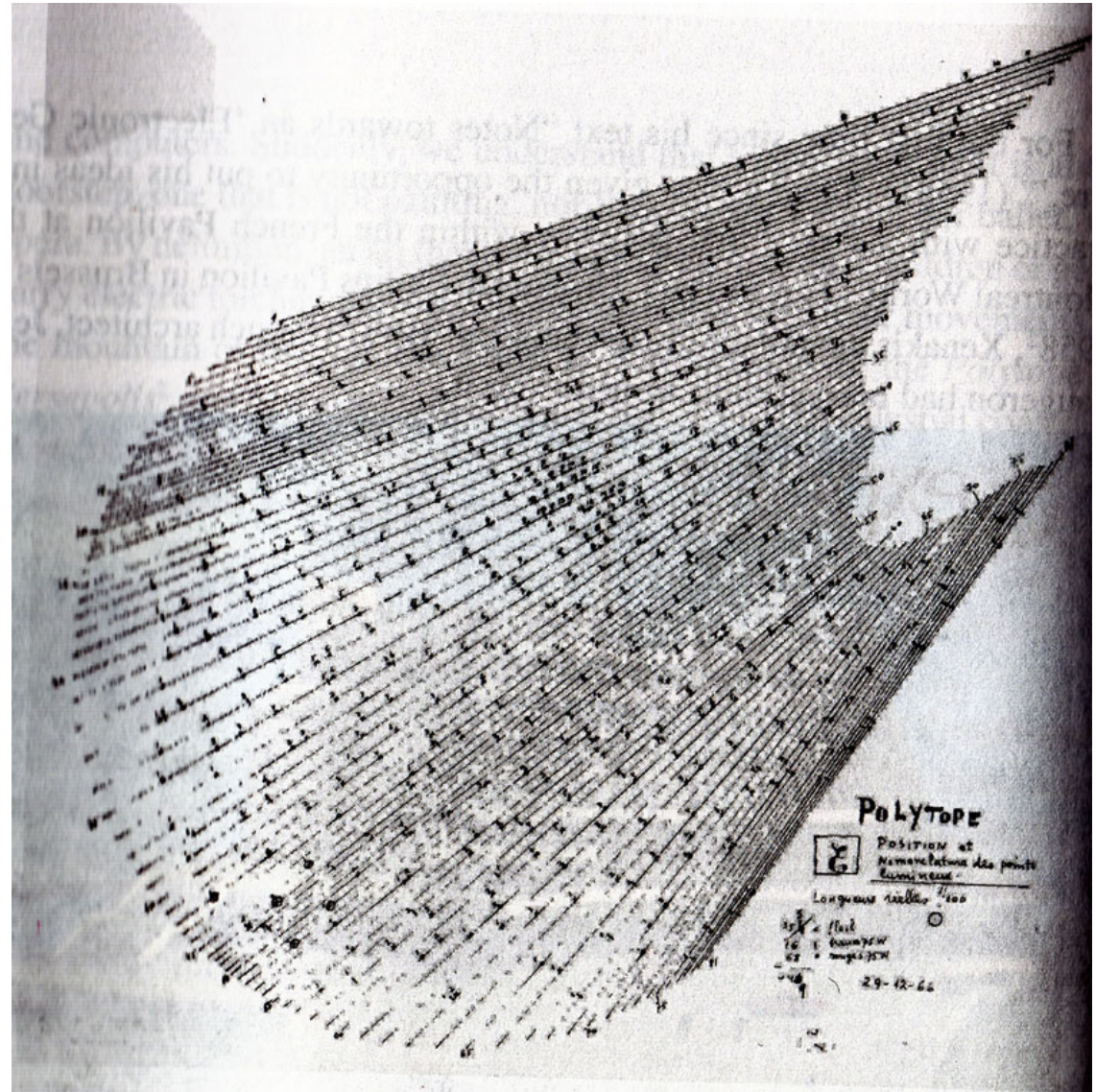
In each of these cases, the use of aleatory techniques introduces elements of unpredictability and chance into the process, allowing for the creation of unique and innovative outcomes. The term "aleatory" can therefore be applied to a wide range of areas and disciplines beyond music.



Stochastic Processes

random. specifically : **involving a random variable**. a stochastic process. : involving chance or probability : probabilistic

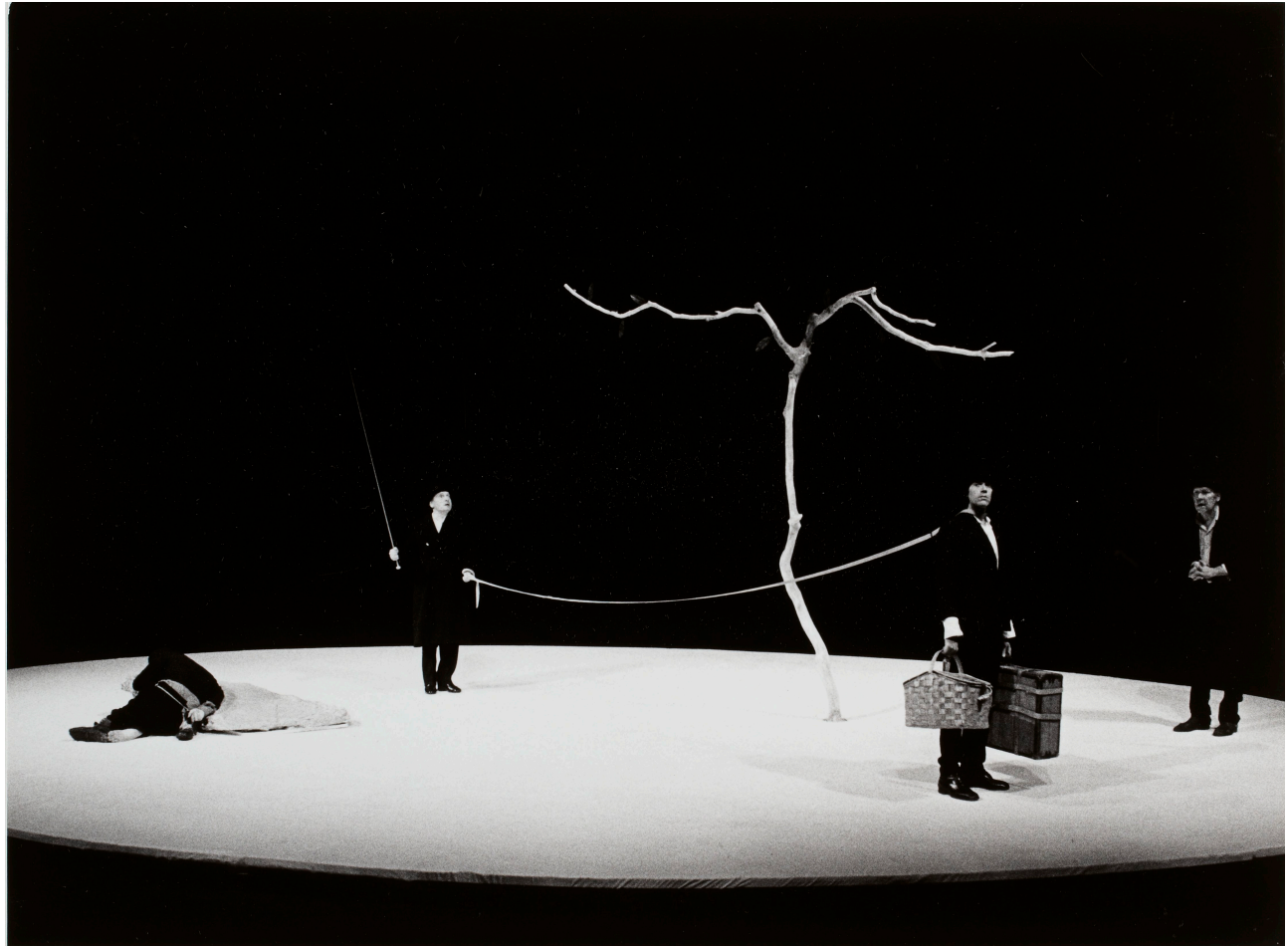
Yannis Xenakis' **Polytopes:** Cosmogonies in Sound and Architecture



chance and choice

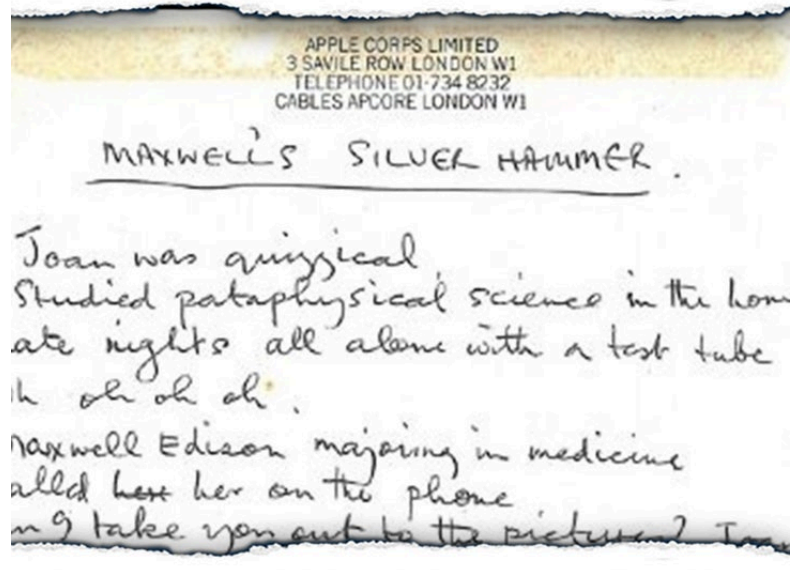


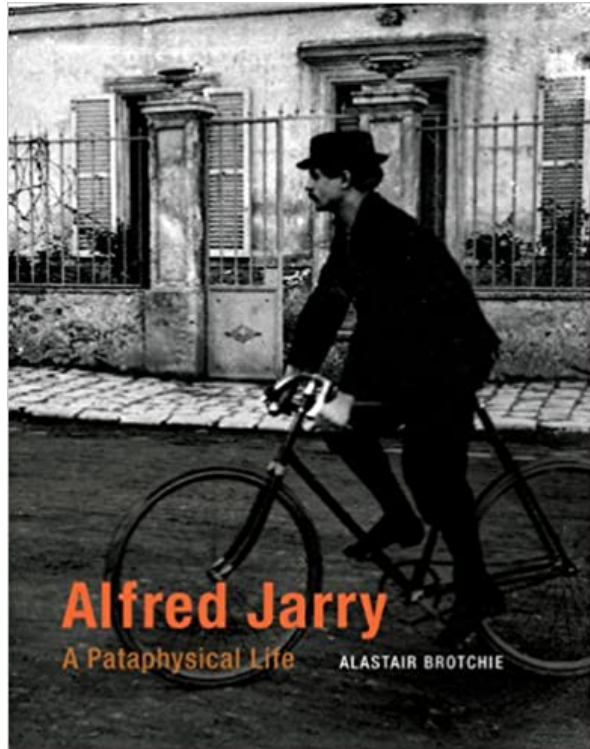
from the **abyss** to
the **absurd**



The **Theatre of the Absurd** is a theatrical embodiment and manifestation of **existentialism**. It is part reality and part nightmare. (Martin Esslin)

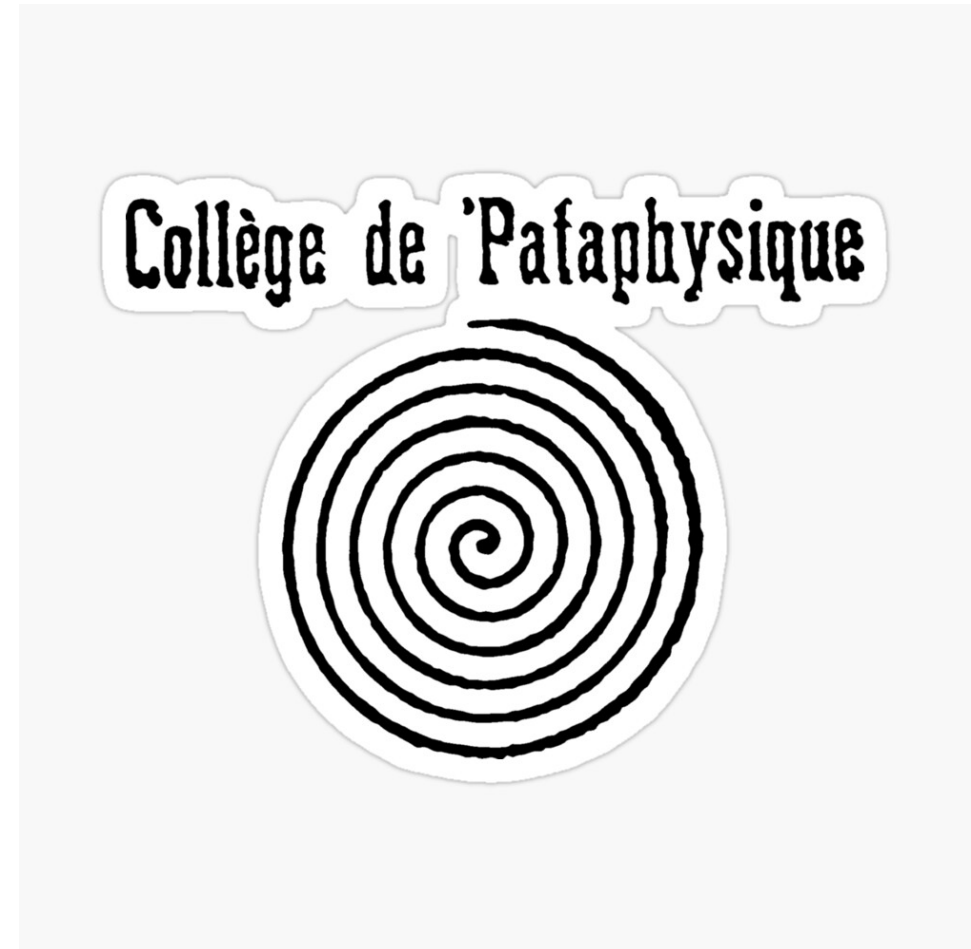
pataphyics





The **College of 'Pataphysics** was founded on May 11, 1948 (“22 Palotin 75 of the pataphysical era which opens on the day of the birth of Alfred Jarry, September 8, 1873”).

It constitutes a “society of scholarly and useless research” which “administers pataphysics, defined by Alfred Jarry as “ **the science of imaginary solutions which symbolically grants lineaments the properties of objects described by their virtuality”**.



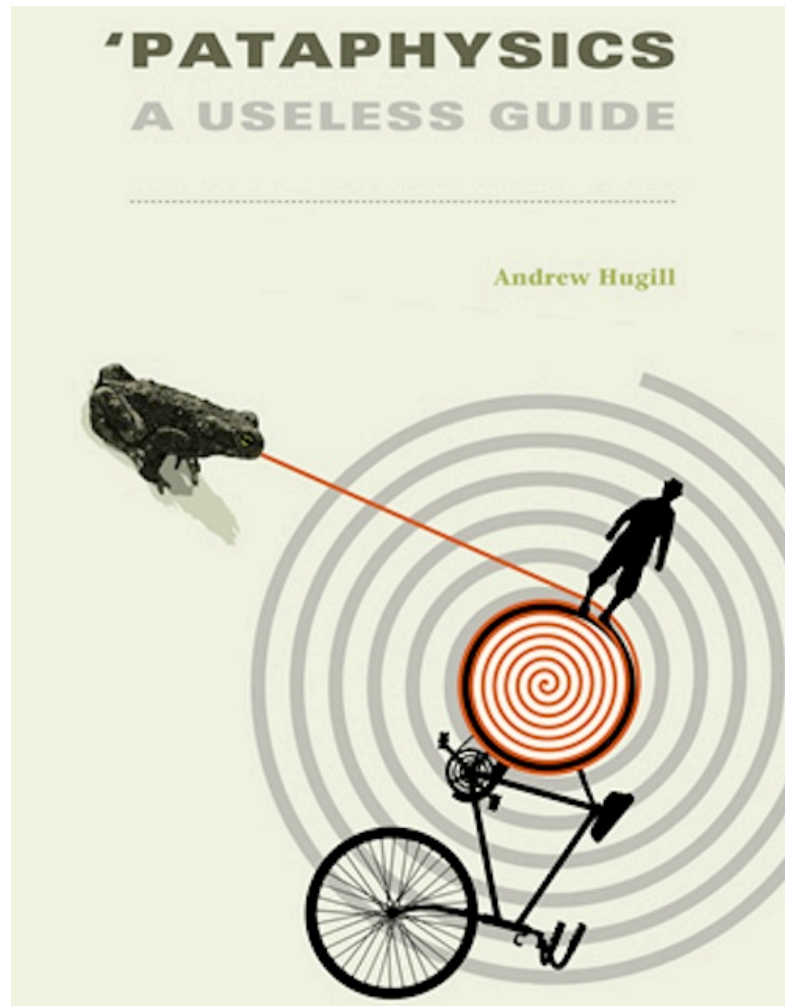
The Science of the Irrational

what's is pataphysics?

pataphysics is that it's "a branch of philosophy or science that examines imaginary phenomena that exist in a world beyond **metaphysics**; it is the science of imaginary solutions.

'Pataphysics is the science of that which is superinduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter's limitations, extending as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics. ... 'Pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. 'Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one

...as metaphysics is to physics...pataphysics is to metaphysics



Clinamen: A clinamen is the unpredictable swerve of atoms that poet Christian Bök calls "... the smallest possible aberration that can make the greatest possible difference". An example is Jarry's *merdre*, a swerve of French: *merde* ("shit").

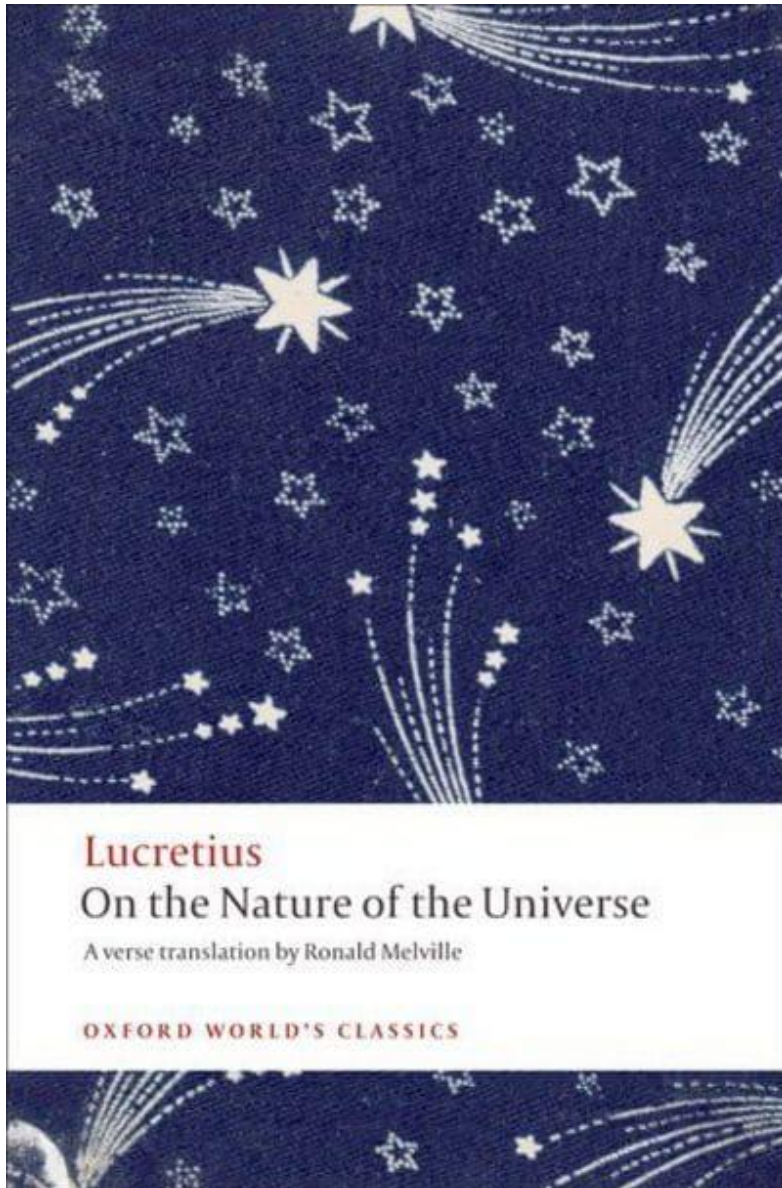
Antinomy: An antinomy is the mutually incompatible. It represents the duality of things, the echo or symmetry, the good and the evil at the same time. Hugill mentions various examples including the plus minus, the faust-troll, the haldern-ablouw, the yes-but, the ha-ha and the paradox.

Syzygy The syzygy originally comes from astronomy and denotes the alignment of three celestial bodies in a straight line. In a pataphysical context it is the pun. It usually describes a conjunction of things, something unexpected and surprising. Serendipity is a simple chance encounter but the syzygy has a more scientific purpose. Bök mentions Jarry suggesting that the fall of a body towards a centre might not be preferable to the ascension of a vacuum towards a periphery

Absolute The absolute is the idea of a transcended reality.

Anomaly An anomaly represents the exception. Jarry said that, "Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one."^[5] Bök calls it "... the repressed part of a rule which ensures that the rule does not work".

Pataphor A pataphor is an unusually extended metaphor based on 'pataphysics. As Jarry claimed that 'pataphysics exists "... as far from metaphysics as metaphysics extends from regular reality", a pataphor attempts to create a figure of speech that exists as far from metaphor as metaphor exists from non-figurative language



Lucretius and the Clinamen

Clinamen is the Latin name Lucretius gave to the unpredictable swerve of atoms, in order to defend the atomistic doctrine of Epicurus. In modern English it has come more generally to mean an inclination or a bias.

In ***Difference and Repetition***, Gilles Deleuze employs the term in his description of "multiplicities".

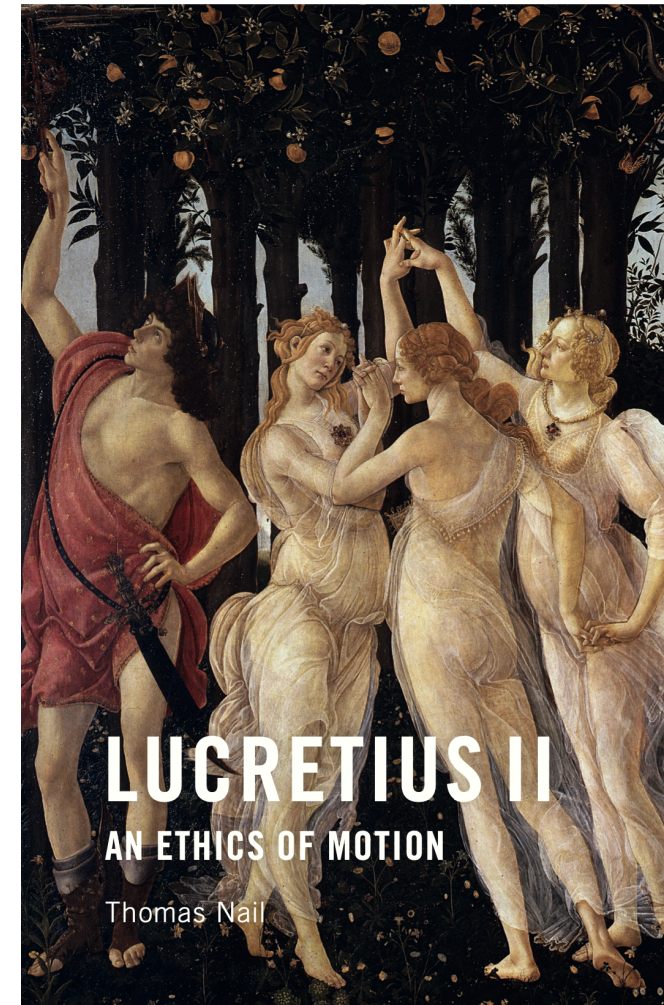
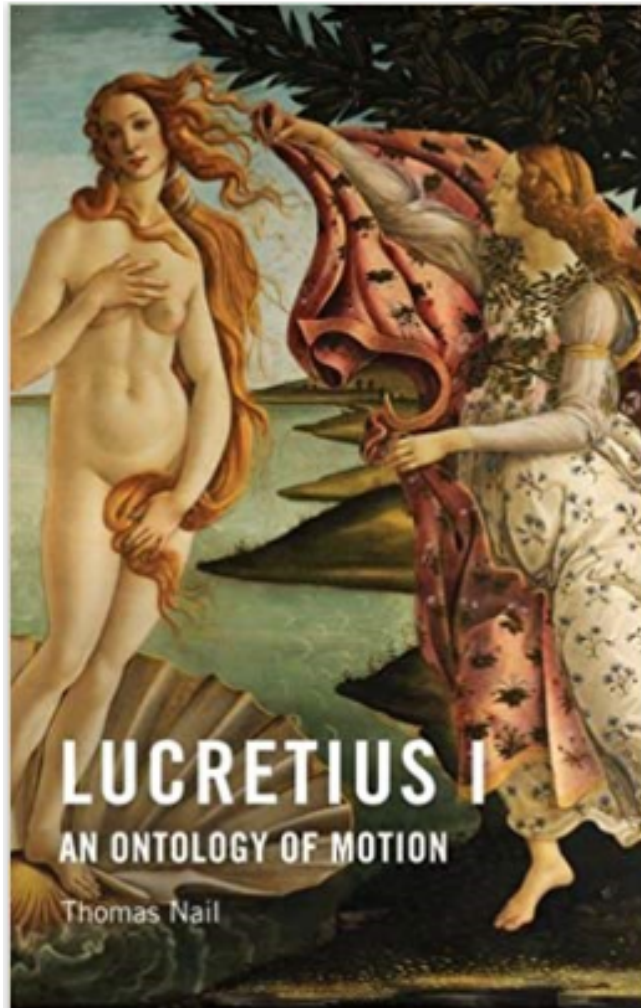
Lucretius' concept is central to the book ***The Swerve: How the World Became Modern***, written by Stephen Greenblatt.

"Clinamen" is defined by Alfred Jarry in Chapter 33 of his ***Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician***. The notion later figured in the imaginary science of the Jarry-inspired College of Pataphysics, notably in the pataphysical calendar and the experimental literature of OuLiPo.

The clinamen figures as a motif in the artistic practice of Rodney Graham – who has said it informs his work in general.

Clinamen is also a term used in systems theory applied to biology.

Why read
Lucretius when
you can read
Epicurus and
Homer?
Here's why.



what's a pataphor?

Like 'pataphysics itself, pataphors essentially describe two degrees of separation from reality (rather than merely one degree of separation, which is the world of **metaphors and metaphysics**). The pataphor may also be said to function as a critical tool, describing the world of "**assumptions based on assumptions**" – such as belief systems or rhetoric run amok.

Non-figurative: Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line.

Metaphor: Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line, two pieces positioned on a chessboard.

Pataphor: Tom took a step closer to Alice and made a date for Friday night, checkmating. Rudy was furious at losing to Margaret so easily and dumped the board on the rose-colored quilt, stomping downstairs.

Thus, the pataphor has created a world where the chessboard exists, including the characters who live in that world, entirely abandoning the original context.

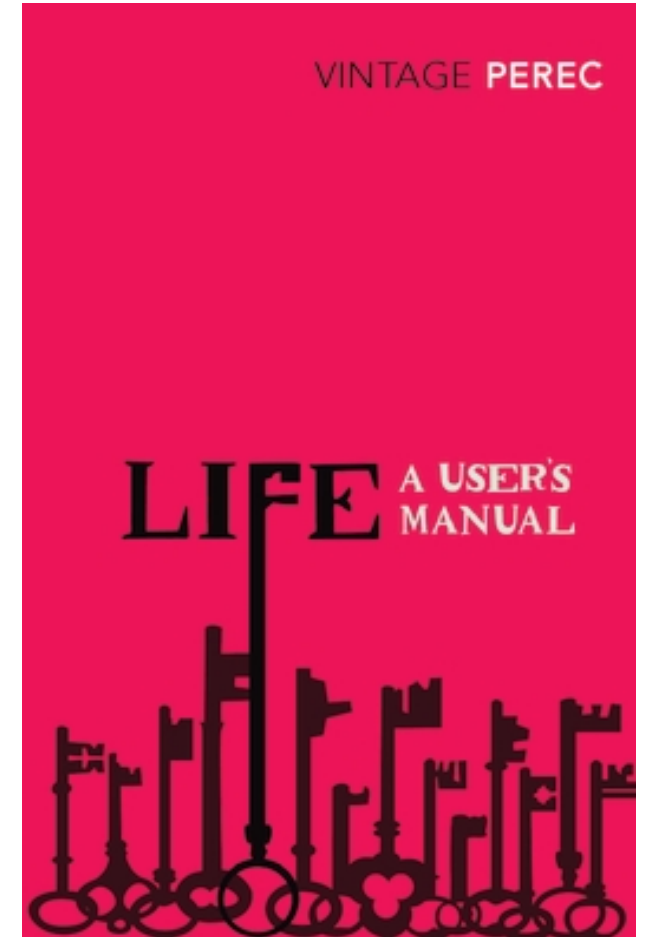
In *The Disappearance of Literature: Blanchot, Agamben, and the Writers of the No*, Aaron Hillyer writes:

While metaphysics and metaphors attain one degree of separation from reality, **pataphors and pataphysics move beyond by two degrees**. This allows an idea to assume its own life, a sort of plasticity freed from the harness of rigid representation. In other words, metaphors operate on the level of the same. They juxtapose apparently unrelated material in order to draw out subtle identities. **Pataphors** unsettle this mechanism; they use the facade of metaphorical similarity as a basis for establishing an entirely new range of references and outlandish articulations: a new world in the midst of the old, the novel taking to the streets. Just as **Kafka** sought to forge a new form of life on the basis of absolute separation from historical progress, on **cultural 'intransmissibility'**, and just as **Blanchot** pursued the 'pure novel' that exists in a relationship of absolute refusal of the established world, so the **pataphysician** seeks to initiate a new world on the grounds of a tenuous unreality.

Oulipo

Ouvroir de littérature potentielle; roughly translated: "*workshop of potential literature*", stylized *OuLiPo*) is a loose gathering of (mainly) French-speaking writers and mathematicians who seek to create works using constrained writing techniques. It was founded in 1960 by **Raymond Queneau** and François Le Lionnais. Other notable members have included novelists **Georges Perec** and **Italo Calvino**, poets **Oskar Pastior** and **Jean Lescure**, and poet/mathematician **Jacques Roubaud**.

Oulipo was founded on November 24, 1960, as a subcommittee of the **Collège de 'Pataphysique** and titled *Séminaire de littérature expérimentale*.



how Jarry's **Pataphysics** Opened the Way to **Phenomenology** (Deleuze, 1964)

Gilles Deleuze, "How Jarry's Pataphysics Opened the Way for Phenomenology," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953-1974)* (Semiotext[e] 2003).

- Major modern authors often surprise us with a thought that seems both a remark and a prophecy: ***metaphysics is and must be surpassed***. In so far as its fate is conceived as metaphysics, philosophy makes room and must make room for other forms of thought, other forms of thinking. This modern idea is seized on in various contexts, which dramatize it:
- **1.) *God is dead*** (it would be interesting to do an anthology of all the versions of the dead God, all the dramatizations of this death [defrag]) For example, Jarry's bicycle race. In Nietzsche alone, we could find a dozen versions, the first of which is not at all found in ***The Gay Science***, but in the ***The Wanderer and His Shadow***, in the admirable text on the death of the prison-guard. But whatever the case, the death of God for philosophy means the abolition of the cosmological distinction between two worlds, the metaphysical distinction between essence and appearance, the logical distinction between the true and the false. The death of God thus demands a new form of thought, a transmutation of values.
- **2.) *The Human dies also*** (finished is the belief in the substitution of humanity for God, the belief in the Human-God who would replace God-the Human. For in changing places, nothing is changed, the old values remain in place. Nihilism must go all the way, to the end of itself, in the human being who wants to perish, the last human, the men and women of the atomic age foretold by Nietzsche.
- **3.) This something "other"** is conceived as a force already at work in human subjectivity, but hiding in it, and also destroying it (Rimbaud's "Something thinks me.") The action of this force follows two paths: the path of actual history and the development of technology, and the path of poetry and the poetic creation of fantastic imaginary machines. This conception demands a new thinker (a new subject of thought, "death to the Cogito"), new concepts (a new object to be thought), and new forms of thought (which integrate to the old poetic unconscious and today's powerful machines, e.g. Heraclitus and cybernetics).
- **In a certain way, this attempt to surpass metaphysics is already well known. We find it in different degrees in Nietzsche, Marx, and Heidegger. The only general name that befits it was coined by Jarry: *pataphysics*.**

failure
(is an option)

A rectangular graphic with a light gray border. Inside, a white square contains a quote in black, all-caps, sans-serif font. The quote is: "TRY AGAIN. FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER." followed by the name SAMUEL BECKETT on a new line.

"TRY AGAIN.
FAIL AGAIN.
FAIL BETTER."
SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Beckett, the maestro of failure

“ ... you must go on. I can't go
on. I'll go on”



All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn. Light heat white floor one sure yard never seen. White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle. Light heat white planes shining white bare white body fixed ping elsewhere.

if at first you don't succeed, celebrate



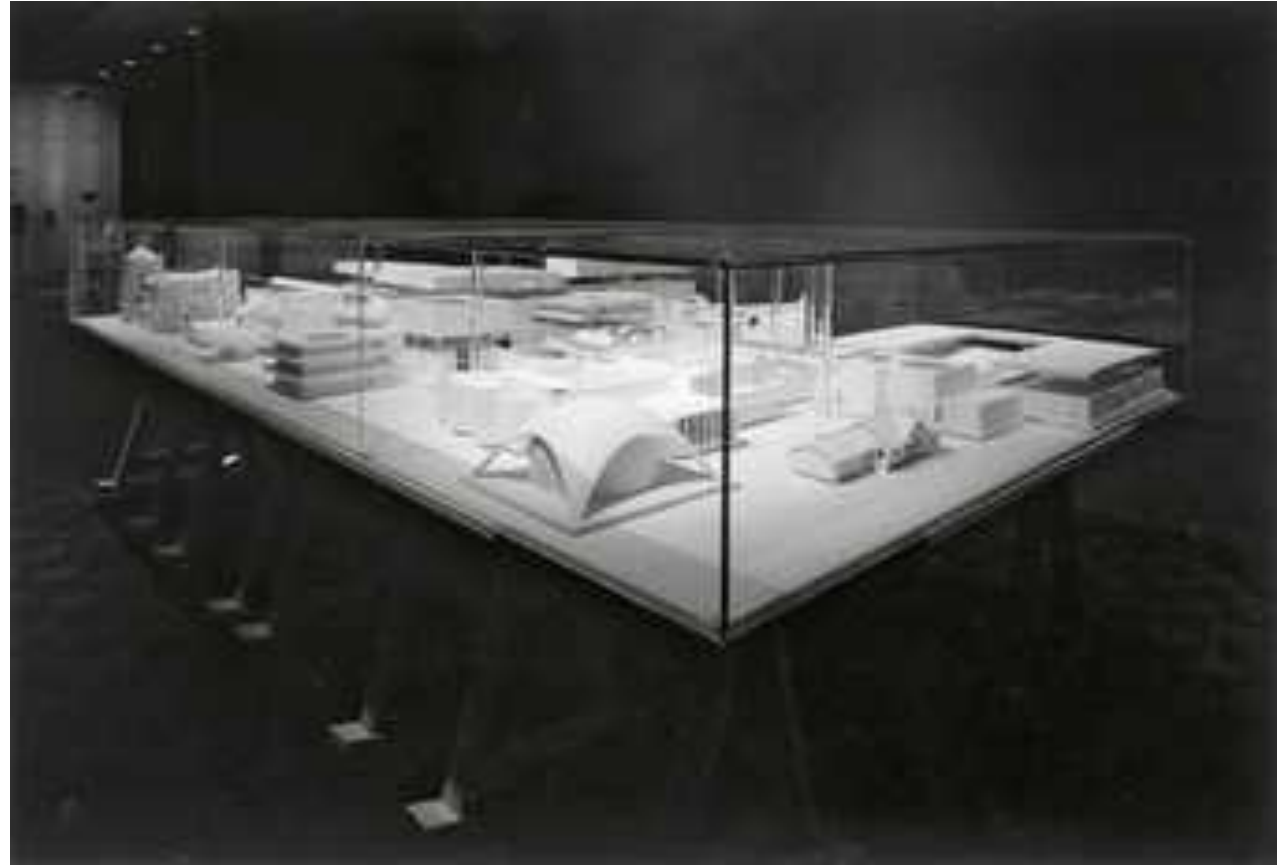
Roman Signer, *Engpass at Aussendienst* 2000, Installation, Hamburg, Dimensions variable

Uncertainty and instability characterise contemporary times. In spite of this, success and progress seem to endure as a condition to strive for, even though there is little faith in either. All individuals know failure better than we might care to admit – failed romance, failed careers, failed politics, failed society, failed humanity, failed failures. **What happens, though, when artists use failure to propose a resistant view of the world, when failure is released from being a judgmental term, and success deemed overrated?**

dissatisfaction and **rejection**



idealism and **doubt**



**error and
incompetence**



Glitch Art on Data Disruption and **Error** as Aesthetic

You might see glitch art as a sort of exploration of technological error, or a reclamation of control over human-made technology, in a sense. It is the artistic practice of using technological error, both intentional and unintentional, as a means of creative expression.



An image from the Melting Ice Cream series by Mathieu St-Pierre.

Photograph: Mathieu St-Pierre

“Glitch art is about perverting digital workflows through the use of unlikely tools and methods. One doesn’t simply open up Photoshop and whip up glitches with layers and filters” – Sabato Visconti, glitch art artist

experiment
and progress

