

## A SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

### ***"Alea iacta est. On the Role of Chance in the Art of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Century"***.

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Chance

Introduction

In the introduction to my dissertation I refer to the meaning of chance, which may be understood as a result of a throw of dice, conditioned by an infinite amount of baseline data and the calculation of probabilities could take a lifetime. I observe that the human mind perceives reality in a way that does not accept chance, replacing it with calculation, thereby displacing everything unpredictable from human experience.

To confirm my thesis, I recall Odo Marquard's position from his book *The Apology of the Accidental*. He quotes there Hegel, who believed that the goal of almost all philosophy was to remove the accidental from human life. In his book *The Philosophy of Chance* Stanislaw Lem cites the words of Albert Einstein who, objecting to the principles of quantum theory, says that God does not play dice with the world. With the current state of knowledge, both positions have proved wrong.

In reference to the above statements, which show a critical approach to chance, it may seem that it is precisely chance that is the worst enemy of freedom and dignity. However, the removal of chance would mean the removal of what is essentially human, or a removal of the humanity of the human being. The remainder of the first chapter attempts to draw the perception of forms of randomness through rituals and procedures, ranging from shamanic practices that were understood without the need for interpretation. Synchronic thinking was a natural way of understanding what we are experiencing. Proceeding further, I have recalled a more sophisticated example of this kind of thinking: the Chinese social and philosophical system called I-Ching.

The Chinese asked themselves what might happen simultaneously at the same time. Next I describe the basic scheme of *The Book of Changes* and the natural matrices used during the I-Ching procedures. In the next part of my text I recall the research carried out by Galileo, who about 1620 examined the likelihood of a throw of three dice. The importance of this study can be likened to the Newtonian revolution as it made obvious the complexity of the properties of probability. I describe a phenomenon called the paradox of a gambler, who believes that the chance to obtain heads or tails in a toss of a coin is  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

Automatism as a random process - Dada and Surrealism

The second chapter is devoted to recalling artistic attitudes emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century, the first period in which artists deliberately used random procedures in their own artistic practices. Starting with Kandinsky, Picasso, Andre Breton's *Manifesto*, Arp, Ernst, Tzara through to Marcel Duchamp and his experience of *Three Standard Stoppages*, which became a prelude to several years of work on *The Large Glass*. In this chapter I write about the importance of relationships with and inspiration on the then art of figures such as Henri Poincare, the founder of new mathematics, Alfred Jarry and his

physics full of the irony of the stalemate, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and the theoretical works by E. Schrödinger, the founder of quantum physics. I present examples of procedures and techniques used by artists, who aimed to reject consciousness and becoming open to the unconscious aspects of art. The procedures I describe are the following: the "decalcomania of chance", the technique of composing poems by Tzara, involving the pulling from a hat of words cut out of daily newspapers, the technique of frottage, and the game of *cadaver exquis*.

#### Jackson Pollock

In the third chapter I focus on the importance of the process and its random aspects in the artistic practice of Jackson Pollock. At the beginning of his creative path, the artist was engaged in dialogue with European Surrealism and adapted to the field of art Jung's concept of "individualization". The technique called "dripping", introduced by Pollock into the language of painting, involved the splashing or pouring out on a piece of canvas stretched on the floor of liquid paint with a wooden stick.

The painter introduced himself in a kind of trance, which dance became a kind of "stream of unconsciousness", engaging the whole body in the physical act of creation. The artist himself said that during the act of painting he is not aware of his own moves and only after a time comes a reflection on the meaning of the resulting work. Following Alice Kępińska, I highlight the importance of the process of painting, its temporary aspect, a total involvement of the author in the process itself as well as the attendant status of the work that through the process shares a common space-time. The author of *The Element and The Myth* stresses the fundamental importance of the unconscious as a common space – uniting in the common myths.

#### Dicing with chance

In the fourth chapter I focus on the problem of the perception of chance in the field of musical expression. Charles Ives and Henry Cowell are considered the founders of aleatoric methods of composition, involving the introduction of unspecified elements into a piece of music. In the following part of the chapter I recall John Cage, who has been known as the creator of the aforementioned technique, while the artist himself never used this concept. The American composer used instead the technique of "chance operations". It was inspired by I-Ching, or *The Book of Changes*.

The chapter further cites the context of the novel by Philip K. Dick titled *The Man in the High Castle*, a literary fiction in which the Chinese oracle decides the fate of the heroes of the book. Expanding the role of chance for Cage, I indicate cooperation with Rauschenberg, sublimating his concept of the white image and transferring it to the world of sound. *4'3"* became a white music score whose goal was to withdraw intentionality for the sake of unpredictable creative procedures. An important issue raised in this chapter is the term "event" - a type of intermedia activities which took place at one time and place.

In his book *Profanations*, in the "Author as Gesture" chapter, Giorgio Agamben quotes Michel Foucault's text from 1969 entitled *What is an Author*. He considers the author's place in the creative process by the author's absence. In this context, of particular interest was the gesture of Rauschenberg of erasing W. de Koonig's drawing (1953).

#### Gutai, a fleeting playground

In the fifth chapter I focus on the phenomenon of Gutai group - "Concreteness", created in 1954 in Osaka. The creators of the group were Jiro Yoshihara, Akira Kanayama, Murikami Saburo, Shiragata Kazuo, and Shozo Shimamoto. Gutai emerged from the vacuum created following the trauma of totalitarianism and war.

Despite the radical anarchism of the group, the artists' festivals attracted many thousands of spectators. In the chapter I recall the wording of the group's founding manifesto.

The gesture of destruction was understood by the Japanese artists on a par with the gesture of creation. I quote the text of Agamben's book *Profanations* in which the philosopher compares destruction to the child's need to be invisible or, as Walter Benjamin wrote, to the need to be unknown. In the text, I pay attention to the special place which the Japanese artists reserved for physical engagement of the recipient in the artistic act. For the purposes of my dissertation, I divide the 18 years of the group's existence into two periods: 1955-1965 and 1962-1977. The first one was a radical manifesto of individual freedom against the trauma of national and totalitarian unity. The second period was a reflection on the dehumanization of the nascent consumer society and on the interpersonal relationships in the capitalist reality.

I familiarize the reader with the techniques and creative approaches of the group members, describing their artistic processes. This chapter concludes with the notion of profanation taken from the book by Giorgio Agamben under the same title, a gesture to return objects of the realm of the sacred to the zone of the profane. The Italian philosopher understands the realm of the sacred as a space subordinated to rigid rules and rituals. This prevents the free play with the subject in this space. Museums and Galleries isolate artefacts from the recipient. Gutai recreates the opportunity to participate directly in the experience of the work.

Amelia Jones equates the achievements of the group with the most important artistic movements of the twentieth century. The Japanese artists became the inspiration for such art groups as Nul, Azimut, Grappa T, and Zero.

Manual / Event

George Brecht

The sixth chapter is dedicated to the American artist George Brecht whose creative approach was characterized by a remarkable consistency in implementation of the adopted principles and objectives. Brecht is also the author of the publication *Chance-Imagery*, which has become an important point of reference of my doctoral dissertation. The key experience for the American artist was meeting John Cage and his participation in classes conducted by this American composer at the New School for Social Research in New York. In the text of the chapter, I pay attention to the radicalization of Brecht's artistic language, a result of collaboration with Cage

and the appearance of the structure of vocality, which has found its materialization and development in the concept of "practical events." The role of case in Brecht's event is the orchestration of simple activities that have been predefined by the artist. Polyphony, the chords and discords of the activities initiated by the artist resemble the form of a fabric whose form is constantly changed by the chance element.

"Attempting a visual representation of statistical distributions"

Ryszard Winiarski

In the seventh chapter I draw attention to Ryszard Winiarski's striving to create a new form of a visual description of reality by means of the language of mathematics. In his early realizations the artist dramatically narrows the use of colour, explaining the gesture by the need to be free from all mystification. The painter would like to look at the image plane with a new look, treating it as an area between a purely artistic action and a mental one. Winiarski refers to chance to enlarge his area of pursuits from quantifiable to the infinite. The artist also resigns from the interpretation screens, posting a text explaining clearly his artistic intention. He

uses the term "area" in reference to the resultant work, abandoning the traditional understanding of the image. Of significance for Winiarski's art is to combine the element of chance with pre-programmed elements: the size of the square, the area of operation, the corner from which the artist realized a given "area".

Dicing with chance was used by the artist in the process of describing the world around him. As he himself said: "the structure of the world is made up of random elements and the reality is full of chance events". The artist has repeatedly stressed that he is not interested in the recording of the aleatoric process, but in the process aspect of his actions.

*Words* by Jarosław Kozłowski

The next chapter is devoted to the work by Jarosław Kozłowski called *Words*, in which the artist conducted a series of operations involving the toss of four dice marked one of the twenty-four letters of the Latin alphabet. The artist received words, which do not have their counterparts in any known language. The absurdity of the resulting words and their lack of functionality enabled Kozłowski to cross the imaginary barriers of his own language. In the text I quote the words of Walter Benjamin's book *The Author as Producer*. Benjamin puts forth a claim that every manifestation of human spirituality is a form of language. Benjamin draws attention to the spiritual context and the basic function of language as a gesture of communication. It is communication in language rather than through language. If a spiritual being is equatable with the linguistic one, then language becomes the spiritual essence of things.

#### *SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS*

##### *Sensitising to Colour*

In the last chapter I attempt a critical reflection on random procedures in the process of painting, based on the experience of my own work entitled *Sensitising to Colour*. The kind of experiment used by me in the process of painting is for me the release of the meanings of an artistic gesture and the broadening of the playing field. At the same time I pose questions about the identity of the work, about the relations between the idea and its representation in objects, about the role of the artist in the creative process, and about the importance of the relationship between the work and its author. I conclude the above text with a manifesto opting for the need to learn a different kind of perception, listening and empathy.

